



Cross Party Group for North Wales Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Gogledd Cymru

Note of the Meeting of the Cross-Party Group for North Wales in the Welsh Senedd Friday 3rd July 2020

Present

Mark Isherwood MS (in the Chair), Darren Millar MS, Rhun ap Iorwerth MS (part), Janet Finch Saunders MS (Part), Ken Skates MS (Part), Frances Ifan (Office of Rhun ap Iorwerth), Marc Jones (Office of Llyr Gryffudd)

Rob Roberts MP, Mark Tami MP, Councillor Sam Rowlands (Part).

Stephen Jones (WLGA) Secretary and Sponsor Representative, in attendance.

Speakers:

Arfon Jones PCC, Carl Foulkes, Chief Constable, Stephen Hughes, CEO Office of the PCC.

Alwen Williams (Programme Director, NWEAB), Ashley Rogers (Commercial Director, NWMD Business Council)

Michael Bewick, (Chair of the North Wales Tourism Forum), Jane Richardson (Strategic Director, Conwy Council and NWEAB lead officer for tourism), Jason Thomas (Director, WG Department for Culture, Sport and Tourism)

1. Chair's Welcome

The Chair opened the first online meeting of the Group.

2. Policing Priorities

a) Covid 19 Response Plan

The link to the PCC's Covid-19 response documents is attached below: -

<https://t.co/hp7rC7Y7PT?amp=1>

The PCC, Arfon Jones gave a short presentation:

The response plan has been prepared at an unprecedented time, not only for those in the policing service but for all. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of normal life in almost every country in the world, including Wales. I wish to pay tribute to all officers, staff, specials and volunteers of North Wales Police who have responded so positively to these extraordinary circumstances.

One of the many consequences of the pandemic is the postponement of the 2020 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections to 6 May 2021.

I have already determined that the priorities within my Police and Crime Plan will remain until May 2021. Now is not the time to set new priorities for the Chief Constable and North Wales Police who quite rightly need to focus all their efforts on responding to the current crisis.

My priorities are reducing the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people through: -

- Domestic Violence
 - Sexual Abuse
 - Modern Slavery
 - Serious and Organised Crime
- and
- Delivering Safer Neighbourhoods

However, the emergency created by COVID-19 means that business cannot be as usual. To respond to the emergency and fulfil my statutory responsibilities, my focus as PCC and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) will, therefore, be on: -

1. Ensuring the Chief Constable has sufficient resources to respond to the emergency
2. Ensuring, on behalf of our communities, that the police respond in ways that are necessary, sufficient, proportionate and ethical (holding to account)
3. Facilitating effective partnership working among agencies and groups working in community safety and criminal justice
4. Commissioning services, particularly for victims of crime, and providing grants for policing and harm reduction purposes
5. Ensuring that the long-term health of North Wales Police is protected by monitoring the organisation's recovery planning and activity beyond the Covid-19 emergency

The key issue has been ensuring that the force has the resources to respond. For example, all non-essential training has been cancelled and the special constables have been mobilised to increase the human resources available.

To ensure safety, staff are working from home wherever possible.

There is a budgetary impact from Covid-19 with an overspend on the 2020/21 budget certain to occur. However, despite that the Force's finances are healthy.

The Force has remained capable of pro-active policing and has met the challenge of the Covid-19 Pandemic effectively.

The Chief Constable, Carl Foulkes gave a short presentation:

The Covid-19 crisis has presented an opportunity to speed up the adoption of digital technology by N Wales Police. More 2 in 1 devices and laptops have been issued along with the deployment of bodycams.

A well-being team has been set up to support home working.

Work continues on the PCC's priorities with operations to combat organised crime (County Lines and other drug dealing) being undertaken in partnership with other forces (recently Merseyside) and the National Crime Agency.

Covid-19 has led to fewer calls into the call centre about physical crime but calls seeking information and re-assurance regarding the pandemic soared.

Tribute was paid to the support received from the Welsh Government throughout the crisis with close relationships being developed with WG officials (Reg Kilpatrick who oversees emergency response and Karin Philips in Community Safety).

The Force has focussed on the most egregious behaviour on the roads. There have been 10-15k vehicle checks with 580plus PCNs issued. The overall number of PCNs has gone down because of lockdown. Of the PCNs issued 70% were to people from outside the region, the 3rd highest external rate in the UK.

Special Constables have been used as full-time officers where they are furloughed and available. This has helped police rural areas, reported crimes and the Covid-19 response.

Vulnerability is likely to be a key issue as we come out of lockdown as victims of DV and other “vulnerability” crimes will be able to report their situation in a way they are unable to in lockdown.

The Force is preparing to police the re-opening of the visitor economy including bars and restaurants. The Force is preparing for the risk of potential large gatherings on beaches.

The Force can recruit 78poicers next year but may have issues in being able to finance them. The Pandemic and the lockdown are having profound effects on the economy e.g. Airbus.

There is much change in crime with a higher level of online harassment and stalking along with fraudulent cybercrime. NWP will be changing its operating model to respond to the change in crime. This will include not bringing all staff back into the office post-Covid.

The Force will also need to take account of issues like Black Lives Matter which raises the question of how-to police public protests.

The summer will be very busy as North Wales comes out of lockdown.

The North Wales Police aims for North Wales to be the safest place in the UK and to be: -

- A Force that polices by consent
- Representative of the communities it serves

Questions and Discussion

Darren Millar asked for policing that will give re-assurance to the local community as visitors return to the 50,000 bed spaces in Towyn and Kimnel Bay, relative to a local population of 8,000 with some concerns about the return of visitors. This challenge justifies the deployment of additional resources, especially as there are elderly and deprived populations in the Pensarn and neighbouring areas.

The CC responded positively. He will: -

- Deploy the Force to give re-assurance to communities. He is seeing similar tensions in other parts of North Wales such as Anglesey and Gwynedd.
- Prioritise the prevention of large, uncontrolled gatherings of young people (on the beach).

Normal family visitors sitting in beer gardens are likely to be relatively easy to police. There is learning from the Dorset Police on managing beach gatherings which will be useful in North Wales.

Rob Roberts MP asked: -

- Does the North Wales Police experience any challenges from Policing being non-devolved?
- Does the NWP have any “asks” of MPs in North Wales?
- What happened in the NCA joint operation yesterday?

The PCC responded: -

The PCCs meet regularly with the Policing Minister in the Home Office (Kit Malthouse MP) and with Jane Hutt in Wales (regarding partnership and broader community safety issues (in contrast to the non-devolved policing functions) and relationships are very good.

The ask of MPs is to help secure a three-year funding settlement from a UKG CSR process. Currently Force(s) are being funded by the Home Office on a rolling, 12-month budget.

The CC reported that he would supply a written briefing to elected representatives on the: -

- Financial asks of Kit Malthouse
- NCA operation.

Mark Tami MP asked about the arrangements for the relaxation of lockdown regarding the opening of accommodation, bars and restaurants and permission to travel more widely. Will there be learning from England on how to avoid large crowds?

The CC outlined the local approaches that will be taken and gave assurances that there will be the application of learning from England “opening up” on the 4th July.

Mark Isherwood MS asked if, due to the Covid 19 Lockdown, the Force was aware of increases in: -

- Abuse of elders (suggested by voluntary groups to Mark Isherwood)
- Rural Crime
- Modern Slavery

Carl Foulkes and Stephen Hughes responded: -

- There is no detectable increase in abuse of elders at this time
- There have been some high-profile cases of sheep rustling but no increase in the rate of rural crime
- Modern Slavery remains a priority as part of the commitment to improved safeguarding.

An increase in the reporting of domestic violence and modern slavery is expected post lockdown.

Senedd Members asked that: -

- It should be a post-Covid priority to establish the scale of elder abuse
- Ministers ensure that resources are available to deal with an increase in DV reporting post lockdown

3. The Economic Consequences of Covid-19 in North Wales

Gwenllian Roberts and Alwen Williams presented on regional working to establish the impact of Covid 19 on the North Wales economy: -

- They are working closely together and bringing Welsh government and local government resources together to plan interventions for economic recovery based on evidence gathered through survey work, feedback to WG and local authority monitoring.
- The joint business survey has suggested that tourism, advanced manufacturing, town centres and public procurement (a circular economy) should be the focus of recovery planning and the WG's regional economic framework.
- Councils have been very effective at delivering WG grant schemes
- Joint working will maximise the opportunities presented by the growth deal.
- The work on regional economic recovery planning is reporting to a Recovery Co-ordination Board set up under the Civil Contingencies legislation and the NWEAB

Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy and Transport and North Wales gave an update: -

- Prior to Covid-19 the North Wales economy was doing well. The area is now facing the loss of jobs at Airbus (1400 plus) with the likelihood of lots of other small cuts to employment in towns and industrial estates across the region.
- The WG DET is moving from a centralised approach to a more regional approach that seeks to empower the local authority led economic boards like the NWEAB. This is enabling more effective collaboration between groups of Councils and WG.
- Wales has achieved greater levels of distribution of Covid-19 economic support to Welsh Businesses than achieved elsewhere in the UK
- WG is seeking further economic support for businesses from UKG (e.g. an aviation sector package). Good working relationships have been achieved with BEIS and the Wales Office.

The Minister outlined ideas to "Build Back Better" from Covid 19 by: -

- Place based investment
- Investing in people and their skills, particularly those furthest from the jobs market
- A green and digital recovery, that reduces travel and use of carbon (shared remote working centres in small town, active travel, public transport and new technology for vehicles (Hydrogen and Electric).

- Focussing on young people. Under 25s are 12% of the workforce but 25% of the tourism sector workforce which is going to take a big hit from Covid-19. The WG will support all young people over 16 who need it.
- Landing the proposed Advanced Technology Research Centre (Avionics and advanced electronics) at the DECA site on Deeside as part of a programme of research centres to support the industries of tomorrow (building on the AMRC 1 at Airbus and the nuclear facility at M-Sparc)
- Investing more in rural businesses (Conwy and Denbighshire)
- Investing more in Green Businesses e.g. tidal lagoons
- Taking advantage of the UKG levelling up agenda for rail (North Wales Mainline, HS2 procurement and Wrexham Bidston line as the core of a NE Wales Metro) and New (re-opened) stations at Amlwch and Greenfield/Holywell
- Digital investments (e.g. to enable 5G)

There is an opportunity to respond to the great challenge posed by Covid-19's effect on the economy by aiming for a fairer, greener and more respectful society in recovery.

Ashley Rogers, Commercial Director of the NWMD Business Council gave a presentation: -

Covid-19 is having a huge economic impact with 100,000 people in N Wales on furlough or self-employed support. As furlough begins tapering down there will inevitably be job losses.

The worst affected sectors are: -

- Tourism
- Retail and office working where is possible to see a future where a substantial proportion of people do not return to office working or town centre retail (both retail employment and shopping). This will have a big impact on commercial property and rents.
- Advanced Manufacturing, as demonstrated by Airbus.

The creative and digital sector, including events (supported by “creatives”) is also badly affected. The sector (including events) has 14% of N Wales employment with 40% of those self-employed as “free-lancers”.

Logistics and professional services have fared better.

Responses need to be based on sectoral analysis. Examples of interventions include: -

- Marketing of safe tourism in North Wales
- Buy Local campaigns
- Repurposing town centre retail buildings to residential or offices (if private sector demand for office space picks up).

The Ignition Fund is targeted at SME businesses and freelancers.

It will be a “long way back” from the economic effect of Covid-19.

Discussion

Mark Tami MP reported that there is a need for Sector specific support for the UK Aviation Industry (including airlines, airports, maintenance providers and manufacturers like Airbus. The Department BEIS is in favour of such a package as implemented by the French and German Governments but the Treasury is not yet supportive. Elected Representatives in North Wales should work together to seek to change the mind of the Treasury.

The JRS (Furlough) is only good for enterprises that can trade semi-normally from September. He suggested support for several sectoral packages e.g. Aviation and Tourism.

Darren Millar MS highlighted the risk of lots of smaller job losses in the relatively small market and seaside towns in North Wales having a big cumulative impact and adding to the pain of big numbers lost from the larger employers.

The country needs the aviation sector despite climate change.

For the visitor economy, which includes the hospitality sector, being able to operate at 1m social distancing with mitigation would make a huge difference to commercial viability.

Rob Roberts MP reported that Airbus has meetings with Ministers including the Treasury within the week. BEIS are supportive of a sector deal with Airbus including a four-day week and a wage subsidy to enable employees to enhance their skills. It will be cheaper to support the sector than putting many employees on welfare.

The Minister responded: -

- Airbus is working on the “wings of the future” and hybrid engine technology to reduce carbon emission. Supporting this and an air scrappage scheme as components of an aviation sector scheme would support both production, jobs and carbon emissions.
- The WG is undertaking a rapid review of the evidence regarding 1m (with mitigations) v 2m social distancing in hospitality and transport. In both instances the government would like to move to 1m with mitigations to boost operating capacity and revenues.

There was a discussion of introducing shared workspace for remote working in town centres. The Minister advocated dispersing public sector office jobs to smaller towns via such remote working centres. The WG Town Squares Initiative (commenced in Wrexham) is seeking to show the way.

Cllr. Sam Rowlands reported that the WLGA will be submitting a list of “shovel ready” schemes which could aid a fiscal stimulus package in Wales. He also asked about progress in financing work on tidal lagoons in Wales.

The Minister praised the submission of schemes for investment and referenced the success of the Local Authorities Borrowing Initiative (for Highways) as a successful precedent.

Work is ongoing on the Tidal Energy Challenge Fund where tidal lagoon developers can bid for funds to develop their business cases and enable a preferred bidder for each scheme to emerge. The Fund must be consistent with UKG objectives before it can be launched.

4. Renewing Tourism in North Wales

Michael Bewick, the Managing Director of Llechwedd introduced the item. The Llechwedd business is based on two slate mines, a hotel, a Glamping site, a cycling centre, zip wires and “show” caves. The business has 200,000 plus visitors per annum and is represented on the North Wales Tourism Forum and at National Level on an industry group established by the Welsh Government to enable dialogue and advice on the regulation of the Visitor Economy in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The mood of the last meeting of industry representatives with Welsh Government officials and the Deputy Minister (for Tourism) was highly charged. The closure of businesses in lockdown and an easement in Wales that is several weeks behind the other nations of the UK (particularly England) has many tourism businesses fearing for their survival in the longer term as this season will be very short and may not generate sufficient revenue to maintain businesses through to next spring (2021). The current position on financial support for tourism by the UKG is being driven by the decisions taken for England which has provided for an additional month to this year’s season. This does not bode well for Welsh businesses.

Tourism is crucial to the North Wales economy with 12% of businesses in North Wales in the tourism sector. Gwynedd has the highest concentration of tourism business in the region at 15% of the total number of businesses in the county.

It is estimated that the tourism spend in North Wales is £823m for day visitors and £700m for overnight visitors (£1,523bn combined). There are 30,000+ jobs in the region’s tourism sector, equivalent to 11% of the total workforce. Regrettably 10,000 of these could be laid off (or not recruited for this season) due to the Covid-19 lockdown and safety controls on the re-opening of the sector.

The communities of North West Wales, being relatively isolated, and with sparse, rural populations have not seen the incidence of Covid-19 of some urban areas. They are therefore understandably anxious about the return of visitors. This attitude is partially rooted in the tourism industry not having communicated its value and economic contribution in the past.

Llechwedd has invited local communities into Llechwedd to demonstrate the safety of the workforce.

Due to the shortness of the season many businesses will not re-open.

The Welsh Tourist Industry will be hit harder than in other areas of the UK due to later re-opening and support, like Furlough, being geared to the wider UK industry.

Work to extend the season, through relaxation of planning restrictions on caravan and camping sites should also be supported.

Much financial aid has been via loans and some businesses will not be able to carry or repay the debt in the future. Some have closed rather than take on debt.

The sector in Wales will need additional support through the winter of 2020/21 to keep businesses viable for next spring and to save jobs in local communities.

As of now the sector will sell good days out and fine meals for as long as they are able.

Jane Richardson gave a presentation focussing on longer term issues of recovery and future growth.

Visit Wales is doing great work to try and get the Welsh Tourism Sector through the Covid-19 crisis. There will be job losses because of Covid-19, and this will require good planning for the future to recover what will be lost.

The North Wales Tourism Sector faced challenges prior to Covid-19: -

- A skills shortage
- Some local communities (in particularly popular areas) feeling overwhelmed by the number of visitors, evidencing an uneven distribution of growth and volumes of visitors.

Post Covid-19 there is an opportunity to reset the offer from the N. Wales Tourism Sector in a way that will regain the confidence of communities, raise skill levels and generate higher value.

The key themes are to adapt, innovate and work to the principle of sustainability, including the idea of a circular economy where more money spent in North Wales is retained in North Wales. New technology could improve marketing, productivity and product offers.

The natural beauty of North Wales could be supplemented by making North Wales the greenest holiday destination by way of access and mobility within the region. Public transport could be made the default mode of travel within the high-volume visitor areas with rail hubs serving bus routes to attractions. The North Wales Metro concept supports this aspiration.

Local culture, language and history should also be a distinctive feature of the North Wales offer.

Overnight stays add much greater value to the visitor spend and are more likely to excite the host communities with visitors from all over the UK and indeed the world!

The NWEAB has commissioned research from Bangor University to consider: -

- The industry's strengths and weaknesses in North Wales prior to Covid-19
- The Impact of Covid-19
- A Vision for the industry post-Covid
- Projects that could enable the industry to move forward to a new, sustainable "green" model with the support of communities in line with the proposed new Vision

The work will include focus group work with residents in the Snowdonia NPA.

The recommendations of the research could attract funding from the Growth Deal which has capital funding for tourism within it. Realistically this needs to be supplemented by revenue funding to enable projects to proceed e.g. green transport services

The Asks of North Wales Tourism Forum for Cross Party support are: -

- A sector specific economic support package for tourism through the winter both at UK and WG levels
- Support for extension of the season through easing of planning and licensing restrictions on opening times for holiday parks, caravan and camping sites
- Supporting flex for tourism projects within the North Wales Growth Deal
- Some revenue funding to take forward projects from the tourism research and the Vision or green/sustainable tourism

Discussion

Rhun ap Iorwerth supported the suggested re-invention of tourism in North Wales to improve its relationship with the community and the value it delivers. There should be more local ownership of tourism companies along with the offer, value and benefits.

Many local people feel they have lost control of where they live and are hostile to incomers as a result. Second homes are an example of this, where they price local people out of the market. It would be good if communities could take back control of local housing markets.

A strategy to reset the industry is an opportunity to see tourism become a force for good.

Mark Isherwood observed that many owners of tourism businesses are based in North Wales but do not always live locally to their business.

Darren Miller reported that support for the tourism sector is critical to get it through the Covid-19 crisis. In his constituency there is less anxiety about incomers. The concern locally is that some places in the region are publicly expressing anti – English views on social media which will damage the whole tourism sector in the region.

Traditional seaside, “bucket and spade, kiss me quick” holidays still have a role to play and should be part of the industry’s future in North Wales.

He supported the idea of higher value, longer staying visitors.

Rhun ap Iorwerth responded that it must be recognised that some places in North Wales are experiencing “over-tourism” along with parts of Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion. This is generating real community concerns that need to be taken account of.

There needs to be a positive approach to dealing with tensions between communities and visitors to secure the longer-term survival of the industry.

There was a consensus that it is best to look forward.

Jason Thomas reported on Welsh Government plans to encourage joint working between the industry, Councils and Visit Wales to make tourism better for all in Wales.

The new plan for the Visitor Economy was published in January 2020. It seeks to align the interests of visitors and local communities. The plan will need to be revised post-Covid, but the principle of community engagement will remain as a basic principle.

Soon Wales will be moving from Visit Wales “Later” to Visit Wales “Safely”. The re-opening of the Visitor Economy will be undertaken with caution and backed up by guidance, the “Good to Go” standard developed by the industry with advice from experts in public health.

There will be a Visitor Pledge to guide visitors coming to Wales.

The Visitor Pledge was welcomed by the meeting.

Darren Millar MS asked for greater clarity on the re-opening of funfairs, theme parks and amusements; outdoor attractions (including theme parks) can open but funfairs can’t, why is that?

Jason Thomas gave assurance that WG regulations will give clarity.

5. Any Other Business

There was no other business.