

Cairngorms Tourism Emergency Response Group

Monday 28th September 2020, 11am

1) Welcome & apologies

Present: Janet Hunter (Chair), Heather Trench, Murray Ferguson, Grant Moir, Pete Crane, Chris Taylor, Mark Tate, Chris Foy, Deirdre Falconer, Alistair Reid, Geva Blackett, Françoise van Buuren, Rhona Fraser, Colin Simpson.

Apologies: None

2) Implications of new restrictions and guidance

Last week's announcement of new household and hospitality restrictions has had several serious impacts on the tourism and hospitality sector:

- After some initial confusion and mixed messaging, it has been confirmed that self-catering properties must now adhere to the 6 adults / one household social distancing advice. This has had a significant impact on existing and new bookings particularly, but not exclusively, to larger self-catering properties.
- The increase in restrictions after a period of easing, has dampened consumer confidence more widely with other accommodation sectors also reporting cancellations and reducing numbers of new bookings.
- The new 10pm curfew will seriously affect profitability for some hospitality businesses, removing the opportunity for 2 sittings per evening.
- A lack of confidence in future bookings actually going ahead is leading to cash-flow issues for some businesses.

There are several surveys underway or planned to assess the likely impacts:

- VisitAberdeenshire ran a business survey over the weekend which showed that 67% of participating businesses had seen cancellations for bookings over the next 3 weeks.
- CBP will be running their usual monthly occupancy survey from Thursday and will ask about cancellations as well as bookings.
- ASSC are also running a national survey of self-catering providers.

There was a discussion about potential measures to mitigate the impacts of the new restrictions and raise consumer confidence:

- Hotel accommodation rules are unaffected by the changes and could potentially absorb some of the business from larger self-catering properties. Whether larger self-catering businesses are happy to refer some guests to local hotels would be a commercial decision and would have to be carefully costed for both business and consumer.
- Day visitors to countryside sites remain about 30% up on the previous year, but may not be spending money. There remains an opportunity to encourage them into towns and villages to visit local businesses as part of their trip.
- There was a feeling that many cancellations were a knee-jerk reaction to the fear of further restrictions, for example on travel. Consumer demand was previously high, with a lack of available properties for the October holidays in particular. There will be an audience who previously failed to find suitable accommodation, and may

respond well to a 'look again' message, and potentially a Facebook group or webpage showing all late-availability accommodation.

- With a strong message from the Scottish government to avoid overseas holidays, there may also be a market for replacement domestic breaks.
- Many of these opportunities will need to be led by the business community, and CBP have re-convened the #CairngormsTogether collaborative group for another meeting next week.
- The priority for DMOs and public sector partners is to stimulate demand by putting out clear and consistent positive messages about the many remaining options for accommodation, attractions and activities still available, and 'Good to Go' with Covid precautions in place.

Actions agreed:

- CBP and CNPA to pull together joint press statement about the Cairngorms being open for business and opportunities for visiting, particularly for the October holiday period, to be backed up with appropriate social media activity.
- All involved in meetings with Scottish Government ministers to lobby for more positive messaging about the visitor economy to provide reassurance to consumers.
- All to continue to use the #CairngormsTogether messaging – Know the Guidelines, Plan Ahead, Be Flexible, Be Kind.

3) Any other relevant updates

A national Visitor Management Strategy steering group has been set up, led by Malcolm Roughhead of VisitScotland and including National Park Authorities, Forestry & Land Scotland, NatureScot and Police Scotland. There will also be a range of subgroups looking at different issues. Planning is underway for visitor management next Spring / Summer.

CNPA are submitting 2 applications to the 3rd round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. The planned application with Dinnet Estates will not be going forward. Highland Council are lobbying for increased investment in the fund.

4) AOB

None

5) Date of next meeting

The next meeting is likely to be in 2 weeks' time on the 12th October. TBC.