

Message

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Sent: 05/05/2020 13:37:29
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Subject: Whitehall update

Had a call from Alex Aiken UKG director of comms – brief readout below. Nothing too revelatory and the word is that PM stuff may be pushed later than Sunday even now – depending on some SAGE data today or tomorrow.

The issue of messaging is still very live in Whitehall – they are experiencing the same complexity as us in terms of how you start to nuance away from the stay home, save lives message, give people more confidence and permission to return to work and restart economic activity (EBRIG paper), while still maintaining compliance with social distancing and bear down on the R rate.

Not expecting Thursday to be an ‘event’ – confirmed that the Sunday evening point is where the PM will set out the UKG way forward. There may be the normal political pre-briefing ahead of that, as is already underway.

I rehearsed the potential choreography of a mid-May opening up under current regulations, early June, further easing and so on. Not far off but he erred towards a more compressed timetable. May be some early moves on parks and garden centres too.

It is pretty clear that after Thursday / Sunday that from the UKG side ‘stay home, save lives’ has gone, all marketing collateral will be removed – the question is what it is replaced with. Could be something as simple as ‘Stay Safe’ as a strapline, with a series of sub-headings around the measures that people and businesses can take (not verbatim but an indication):

- *Observing social distancing in public and work
- *Handwashing
- *Downloading the NHSX app / participating in contact tracing
- *Business compliance with BEIS safer working guidance (published over the weekend)
- *Safe use of public transport, with face coverings up to the individual
- *Common sense interactions with friends and family to minimise risk of infection

A big question for us now is whether our overall ‘posture’ on the restrictions and public behaviours is changing, and if so, our messaging. With the R rate in Wales so high (potentially 0.8 or 0.9) then there is little room for manoeuvre, and the position of the Welsh Government on the kind of looser social interactions above will be crucial.

In any case, the campaign material from the UK Government will be visible in Wales. It may be that we decide to mirror the policy decisions in England, but adopt a more cautious tone. But if we diverge, then it will be important that the messaging is distinctive as part of communicating the rationale for this. With a few exceptions, we have re-purposed much of the UKG marketing materials on the stay home save lives campaign. If we aren’t for the next phase, then that will mean a lot of rapid work will need to be undertaken to create new Wales-only material with distinctive messages. Health and Economy comms colleagues are due to meet tomorrow afternoon to discuss.

Separately, Ministers have asked for more material from the TAG to be published on our website, including the R rate on a weekly basis (came up at VG presser earlier). We need to work up what a weekly product from the TAG looks like in a public facing way and how we can support Rob and Fliss on that. Some of the material, particularly around current and future risks and projections, may work counter to the reassurance messaging of course.

In terms of timings this week, we need to discuss the scope and timing of a statement from the FM on Thursday in terms of the 21 day review, and based on how much awareness we have of the UKG plans.

For awareness, this is an action from yesterday's GPS MIG which may have prompted the AA call:

HOME OFFICE and their counterparts in DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS to ensure there is clear public communication of potential differences in social distancing and enforcement measures between regions, following Thursday's review. At the end of the meeting, Michael Gove committed to providing the DA's opportunity to feed in comments before Thursday's announcement on the review of lockdown requirements. He said the UK Government was still keen to have joined up approach across UK is possible. (This may be the 6pm call with the FMs this evening?)

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