



Media Release

embargo until time/date **13.15 Friday 10 July 2020**

Date: 10 July 2020

Business tunnels will enable essential on-island business meetings

Guernsey's economy is set to benefit from special measures permitting on-island business meetings to be held, subject to strict Public Health guidance, in situations where the physical presence of off-island representatives is necessary.

Arrangements for the initiative have been approved, in principle, by the Civil Contingencies Authority (CCA) following engagement and subsequent collaboration between States of Guernsey representatives, business leaders and private aviation firms. It means that business visits and transactions that are required to be carried out in person can now recommence whilst the wider public health travel restrictions remain in place. The CCA will consider the exact requirements that visitors and businesses will need to adhere to, under Law, during next week. A date for commencement of the Business Tunnels initiative will be announced shortly.

Initially, travel in a business tunnel will be strictly limited to same day return travel only.

Business tunnel travel will be facilitated without the need for mandatory self-isolation provided it is carried out in a controlled environment. Travel to and from the airport or harbour must not be on public transport. Social distancing of one metre should be implemented and contacts must be recorded for tracing purposes and should be minimised. Passengers must wear facemasks for their journey to and from the ports. Business meetings must be held in well ventilated offices and not in public places such as restaurants or bars.

Talks have commenced with Aurigny to introduce flight rotations to facilitate day return trips on two days a week initially. Whilst further liaison with Aurigny is required, it is hoped that these flights can be introduced as early as possible.

An alternative will be to host a face to face socially distanced meeting at the airport or harbour site. This would mean the recording of meeting attendants, together with the observation of social distancing of one metre and the implementation of hygiene precautions.

Guernsey Airport and Public Health Guernsey have been working with the two main Fixed Base Operators, Aiglle Flight Support and ASG-Pula Aviation Services, to provide such a solution.

The arrangement with these operators is based on the use of charter aircraft and the use of meeting facilities within the ASG and Aiglle hangars, thereby removing the requirement for passengers to transit through the Airport terminal building. The operators will ensure that flights operate only when weather and visibility are forecast to be good enough to arrive and return on the same day, and that they have robust backup plans in case of the charter aircraft suffering from technical problems. Passenger details must be submitted in advance to the Guernsey Border Agency.

All businesses looking to benefit from the business tunnels initiative will need to complete an application form against a set of criteria, similar to the critical workers exemption programme. Further details on the form and criteria will be published when the commencement date of the initiative is announced.

Deputy Gavin St. Pier, Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Authority, said:

“We know there is a lot that Guernsey businesses can do, and are doing, to minimise the need for physical meetings on the island given our overall public health strategy. But we are also aware that certain limited situations do require a meeting to be convened here, owing to the specific nature of the transactions or engagement. If we don’t allow these critical parts of conducting business to happen we put up a potential big barrier to industry. This is about taking further steps to conduct business safely with key clients or businesses from outside the Bailiwick.

“It’s excellent we’ve been able to find a way to allow these kinds of meetings to continue, albeit only where there is absolutely no viable alternative and with strict public health protocols being followed. It is just as important that we protect the position we have reached in our efforts to manage COVID-19 and don’t give up the gains we’ve made. That too has a big potential impact on our Bailiwick economy.”

Businesses should continue with video conferencing wherever possible and hold on-island meetings only where they are genuinely necessary.

Dr Nicola Brink, Director of Public Health Services said:

“We’ve put together guidance to make these meetings possible while minimising the risk to our community. We will be asking businesses to be very clear with all attendees for these meetings that it’s incredibly important they follow the guidance carefully. Provided they do that, we’re confident this presents a very low risk of new cases in

the Bailiwick. We've come a long way in reintroducing 'normal' life since we locked down but some things clearly are still affected. Where we can find workable solutions to remove barriers and make things happen we will do so provided we can be confident they really are safe."

Chair of the Guernsey International Business Association, Tony Mancini, added:

"In Guernsey we have been fortunate that, as a community and as businesses, we have been able to adapt to the challenges of combatting COVID-19. This service is another example of how we have come together to provide an innovative solution to enable business to carry on. To have this capability in the exceptional circumstances when a physical meeting on-island cannot be avoided, demonstrates how Guernsey really is the premier international finance centre."

Chief Commercial and Infrastructure Officer – Ports Ben Le Huray said:

"We thank our Fixed Based Operators for working with us to make these arrangements at short notice under challenging circumstances. This will enable continuity for sectors of the economy where there is an essential requirement to meet in person. It is encouraging to see solutions being found through multi-sector collaboration."

Ends

Notes to Media

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