

Tuesday 6th October 2020

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP  
Lord Chancellor's Private Office  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1 9AH

Dear Robert,

**RE: IMPACT OF THE WINTER ECONOMY PLAN ON THE WEDDING SECTOR**

Further to our telephone conversation on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, we discussed in detail how the wedding sector is suffering beyond measure, and how the recently announced Winter Economy Plan has failed the majority of businesses within it. As you know, the wedding sector is worth £14.7bn annually and supports approximately 400,000 jobs.

The businesses that form the wedding sector are hugely diverse and they vary from the multi-million-pound hotel group employing hundreds, through to sole trader and 'one director' limited companies employing none and working from home. However, regardless of their size, they each play an integral role in the sector's success.

**THE CURRENT POSITION AND OUR VIABILITY**

The main focus of The Winter Economy Plan was the word 'viable'.

It is vitally important to note that the wedding sector is viable. The business is still in place. Clients have not been lost, they have simply postponed their weddings, thereby delaying payments to suppliers. Business is deferred, not deleted. However, with wedding dates pushed into 2021, income has moved to a future date. We still have and are actively working with our clients but payment cannot be taken until the wedding day takes place.

The argument can therefore be made that the wedding sector is indeed one of the most viable – as soon as we are allowed to operate fully, the money will pour in. There is also significant pent-up demand and therefore incomes are likely to increase hugely as couples are allowed to proceed with their wedding plans.

**THE WINTER ECONOMY PLAN**

By the end of July, just 4 months after lockdown was announced, there was an average of 83.12% loss of turnover for businesses within the wedding sector for 2020 already. This turnover was largely deferred as per our previous statement, and therefore the emphasis on saving employees is largely irrelevant to our sector as the damage had already been done.

There are three main reasons for this - firstly, those that had employees have mostly made all but a few redundant. Those that have full or part-time employees are now considering making significant redundancies as furlough comes to end, as they are unable to operate at normal levels and therefore

do not have the income which they need to make the employer contributions to the Job Security Scheme (JSS). Finally, many within this sector are small or single director limited companies and have not benefited from Government assistance to date – many of these businesses employ freelancers, and these contracts have been paused or cancelled.

Similarly, a 20% grant for someone who is self-employed in this sector cannot possibly keep their business afloat and provide them with an income into Q2 2021.

There is a huge disparity in support between sectors that are able to work and those that can't. For example, a self-employed builder has been able to work throughout and can still make a claim for support. A similar self-employed worker in the wedding sector whose business has been deferred to next year and has either no or very little income receives no additional help. Additionally, JSS actively supports sectors that can work and therefore excludes sectors facing heavy restrictions such as weddings and events.

Whilst we appreciate increased access to and delayed repayments on government-backed loans, in the absence of an exit strategy or roadmap many are reluctant to take on more debt, having already supported themselves for 6 months with no or extremely limited business income.

### **RETRAINING & PIVOTING**

The investment in new training opportunities for the country as a whole is welcome. However, the sector has two very definite issues with this.

The first being that the vast majority of us are highly trained and highly skilled already and are eager to bounce back into our roles as soon as we are able. The UK wedding industry is world-renowned – businesses within it draw people to this country every year which generates additional revenue for the country on its own.

The second being that we simply cannot mothball our businesses. Despite weddings being unable to happen as they previously would, we are still very busy within them dealing with day-to-day operations and client management and working to retain the business we have.

For us, pivoting away from our clients is a legal, and moral, impossibility. It's all very well being told to 'find something else', but we are legally obligated to deliver our services to our existing clients, and part of that service is the planning period in addition to the wedding day. Therefore, the majority of that service is delivered before payment is made.

For us, being able to 'go and get another job' would require us to refund all the clients that we currently have contracts with, and the money and the desire to do this simply isn't there.

### **WHAT WE NEED & WHY**

We understand that it's difficult, yet the fact that sector-specific support has recently been delivered proves that it's not impossible. Our clients want us to succeed and be there for them in 2021 and beyond, and this proves our viability. With support and a safe and sensible plan for reopening, consumer confidence will continue to exist, and the entire sector will bounce back.

We require engagement on a phased re-opening so that we can stimulate confidence in our sector. The Christmas & New Year period is historically a brilliant time for people to get engaged, and we need

them to feel confident to plan their wedding knowing there is a plan, an exit strategy, or a way forward in place, to further fuel the sector's speedy recovery.

Please let it be known that we are not agitating for a wedding re-opening on any large scale at this time. However, we, our clients and the entire country need to be presented with an exit strategy from the current restrictions – this should be relatively simple to put together for weddings given everything that we know about making our events safe and taking learnings from our friends in hospitality.

We are ready to work with you to develop a sensible strategy. There is a groundswell of support for a sensible and phased re-opening plan and, given the number of similar comments made by Conservative MPs last week, you should expect to receive a lot of support for this from your colleagues in the House.

We understand that the wedding industry is a diverse and surprisingly complex sector and a one size fits all approach will not work. Therefore, due to the depth of experience and expertise we offer, we are ready and willing to engage with you and help provide positive solutions to move forward. Just a few of the ideas that would assist the sector now and over the coming months could include a deposit-protected scheme, a tiered delivery of support to ensure those holding deposits are protected, and an industry safety standard to allow suppliers back to work. There is also scope for pilot events to further prove the safety of the sector and this could all be discussed as we move forward.

The Chancellor himself has said this week that “even if it feels like there is no hope, I’m telling you there is, and that the overwhelming might of the British state will be placed at your service.” We thank him for that commitment.

There is no doubt that this pandemic has fundamentally disrupted life in this country. We are all having to embrace new ideas and new ways forward and the wedding sector absolutely supports this. However, we cannot support the idea that we are not viable and not worthy of additional support. Weddings are one of life's lynchpin moments and the desire of couples to get married and restart their lives is unquestionable. The wedding sector, and its contribution to the economic and social life of this country should not be written off, and with support, we are ready and willing to work, to contribute, and to ensure that the UK wedding sector is, once again, world-leading.

We hope that this letter has not only outlined the current issues facing the wedding sector but also given food for thought regarding a way forward. Above all, please understand that we want the opportunity to provide any assistance and advice that might be required.

As ever, I thank you for your interest and remain at your service,

*Natalie Lovett*

*Love To Plan Ltd & The White Wed Directory*

**SIGNATORIES: Please find below, signatures from wedding businesses, venues and professionals who support the content of this letter.**