

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 7 May 2024 at Crieff Hydro and via video conference (Teams)

Present: Stephen Leckie (Chair)
Barbara Smith
Cara Aitchison
Caroline Roxburgh
Keith Nicholson
Lindsey Paterson
Paul Easto
Shona Marsh
Steven Walker

In attendance: Malcolm Roughead (Chief Executive)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Paul Bush (Director of Events)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Destination Development)
Vicki Miller (Director of Marketing and Digital)
Leanne Mallon (Head of Performance Marketing)

Minutes: Freja Fischer-Møller

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed the attendees to the hybrid meeting and noted that Paul Easto would join the meeting at 10.20am. He advised that the first item on the agenda was by Board member attendance only.

RATIFICATION OF VISITSCOTLAND'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

2. The Chair advised that the recruitment process was now completed and thanked the recruitment panel for their valuable contributions.
3. The Board extended a special acknowledgement to the Head of HR for her helpful guidance in the recruitment process.
4. It was noted that the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer was for the Board of VisitScotland to approve, and that Scottish Government would be informed immediately after the contract has been signed.
5. It was noted that internal and external communications have been prepared and would be published on 9 May 2024. As a result of this, the Board agreed not to speak publicly about the appointment of the new Chief Executive Officer before the official announcement

The appointment of Vicki Miller as Chief Executive Officer per 1 October 2024 was approved by the Board.

6. It was further noted that Malcolm Roughead would stay in his role until 30 September to allow a handover period.
7. There was a discussion on additional organisational restructure and director replacements, and it was noted that the Board would like to have sight of the planning process.

Action: Management to present a plan for senior management level structure as part of the Change Programme update at a later meeting.

MARKETING AND DIGITAL – FUTURE FOCUS

8. The Chief Executive briefly updated the Board on the different strands of the Strategic Change Programme, noting that one of the projects is to examine VisitScotland's marketing and digital content targeted at consumers. He invited the Head of Performance Marketing to present the insights and trends, and to outline what opportunities and future focus VisitScotland could explore within marketing and digital.
9. It was noted that Generative Artificial Intelligence would change consumers' access to information, and the risk of misinformation needs to be considered in the way VisitScotland works.
10. The modern customer journey, the sources of inspiration for trips, and pre-arrival trip-planning were outlined. It was emphasised how VisitScotland could capitalise and benefit from the opportunities that have come from these consumer behavioural changes. And it was noted that there would be big opportunities to influence visitors by creating more tailored content.
11. The growth potential for VisitScotland in creating and curating more social media and multimedia content was discussed, and it was advised that a close link between marketing priorities, insights and academia is crucial to learn about future trends. It was noted that management was looking to prioritise more research to validate this new marketing and digital approach.

Action: Management to horizon scan / examine case studies from other countries / sectors on better connectivity between marketing and insights.

12. It was further discussed that although VisitScotland cannot compete on media spend in other markets, the organisation is in a very competitive position when it comes to owned and earned channels. It was outlined that one of the objectives is to be more efficient and to collaborate closely with partners to support their deliveries, and it was noted that local communities will continue to play a crucial part in the visitor experience.
13. The Board discussed the audience profile on the various digital platforms, how VisitScotland could strengthen the promotion of the Thistle Awards winners on platforms like Instagram, and how the effect of the new marketing and digital approach could be measured.

Action: Audience profile on the different platforms along with the slide deck for this presentation to be shared with the Board.

The Board supported the direction of travel for the future approach on marketing and digital content.

VERBAL UPDATE ON QA RETIRAL AND ICENTRE WORKSTREAMS

14. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on engagement with businesses and other stakeholders since announcing the retiral of the Quality Assurance Scheme.
15. It was noted that concern has been raised with VisitScotland about the impact of the decision on a business ability to apply for an obtain a brown sign. However, management advised that conversations were taking place with Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to resolve.
16. Progression with iCentre closure was outlined, and it was noted that conversations with landlords were taking place. It was further noted that VisitScotland owns six properties, and various opportunities are currently being explored.
17. The Board was advised that management supports staff in the time of change by providing information on pension and voluntary redundancy opportunities as well as assisting with any external placement opportunity, CV training and internal redeployment.
18. The Board was further advised that the roundtable discussions with the stakeholders hosted by Scottish Government had been very successful and had brought the communities together.
19. It was noted that the media coverage had mainly been factual with a very limited number of complaints received.

The Board noted the Change Programme update.

PLANNING PROCESS AND TIMELINES

20. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on the planning process highlighting the current changes in Scottish Government as a new First Minister was to take office this week.
21. There was a discussion about the political environment and how external factors impact Scottish tourism i.e. US presidential election as a decline in North American visitors is expected immediately after a presidential election.
22. Regulatory issues such as Visitor Levy and Short-term Let Scheme also impact especially the bigger cities. It was further noted that VisitScotland had advocated to link the Visitor Levy with the regional economic strategies.
23. The Board was advised that interest rate and labour shortages impact the sector negatively. Compliance with Net Zero commitment. Sustainability Development Goals, and Fair Work Scheme remain a challenge. It was noted that compliance to the Fair Work Scheme is a mandatory requirement to receive public grants.
24. There was further discussion on what Public Services Reform was expected to change for public sector bodies, and how the working culture would evolve in the future.
25. The Board was asked to give feedback to management if anything should be added to the process planning.
26. The Director of Corporate Services then presented the planning process until April 2025.

27. It was noted that Board would have four opportunities to input and discuss the 3-year corporate plan.
28. It was further noted that the Activity Business Case process for the Financial Year 2024/25 has been finalised and the budget is in place in the system.

Action: A full review of the Financial and Business Performance Report and spend activity to be carried out at a later Board meeting.

The Board agreed to have a strategy session at the Board meeting on 12 September 2024 instead of the Strategy Awayday.

AOB

29. Nothing to report.

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.