Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 26 January 2023 in Ocean Point and via video conference (Teams)

Present:	John Thurso (Chairman)
	Anne Anderson
	Caroline Roxburgh
	Keith Nicholson
	Paul Easto
	Shona Marsh
	Steven Walker
	Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Agenda items 4 & 5)
	Colin Cook, Director for Economic Development, Scottish Government (Agenda items 4 & 5)
In attendance:	Malcom 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)
	Jenny McMahon (Senior Events Manager – for item 4 only)
	Marie Christie (Head of Development – Events Industry – for item 4 only)
	Mike Slack (Head of IT – for item 5 only)
	Ed Mitchell (Cyber Security Specialist – for item 5 only)
	Andy Cheung (IT Infrastructure Engineer - for item 5 only)
	Joy Adeyemo (IT Security graduate - for item 5 only)
Minutes:	Freja Fischer-Møller and Sarah Iversen
Apologies:	Rebecca Brooks

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chairman welcomed the attendees to the hybrid meeting. He advised that Minister Ivan McKee MSP would attend between 10-11am, and that the order of the agenda items had been amended, so the first presentation would be on marketing activities.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD 13 DECEMBER 2022

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 13 December 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised. The Chairman noted that he, as of 1ᵗ January 2023, had been appointed President of the Institute of Hospitality for a 5-year period. Anne Anderson noted that as of 1 January, she had been elected Chair of the UK national Commission for UNESCO Board of Directors.

Action: Interest register to be updated and shared with the Board.

MATTERS ARISING

4. It was noted that all matters arising were covered during today's meeting.

MINISTER IVAN MCKEE

5. The Chairman welcomed Minister Ivan McKee to the Board meeting, noting that all Board members have been updated on the Letter of Guidance and the importance of supporting NSET and delivering value for money. He updated the Minister on VisitScotland's two strategic anchor points: People strategy and digital capabilities, and how initiatives in promoting Responsible Tourism are now embedded in all work across the organisation.
6. The Minister expressed his gratitude and satisfaction with the collaboration and recognised that VisitScotland plays an important part not only to the visitor economy but also as a window to the world in terms of attracting international investments, with positive spill-over to other sectors.

MARKETING, DIGITAL AND BRAND SCOTLAND REPORT

7. The Director of Marketing and Digital gave an annual review of marketing activities and highlighted some of the successes and learnings in 2022. She explained how that could be brought forward to continue VisitScotland's core mission to brand and promote Scotland, increase visitor numbers and improve the visitor economy. She updated the Board on the organisational restructures that took place during the last months of 2022 and how they align with the shift from seasonal campaigns to making Scotland discoverable 365 days of the year as well as supporting industry.
8. It was noted that the marketing activities carried out were data-driven and based on insights on travellers and booking behaviour etc. The Board expressed its appreciation on the digitisation of industry that VisitScotland has driven, the marketing automation and the development of VisitScotland's consumer website.
9. It was noted that demand in 2022 was strong despite competition from other destinations, and the spend is coming back faster than expected after the pandemic. However, 2023 is expected to be slower due to the rise in the cost of living.
10. New platforms and channels emerge for travel inspiration, especially TikTok and similar apps, so it is important that VisitScotland and the industry are present there. Another development is

that a higher number of travellers use travel intermediaries, and for long haul it was noted that one-third book package travel. The Board was advised that VisitScotland continues to develop partnerships with intermediaries and industry. Campaigns like promoting the major cities have been very successful for improving the customer journey and adding value.

11. It was noted that there is a potential to grow online bookable sustainable visitor experiences like farm trips, food and drink experiences.

12. The Director advised that measuring success should not only include regional and seasonal spread but also sustainability and visitor satisfaction.

13. It was discussed how the role of marketing could support the multi-agency task of making sure that the product lives up to the brand promise, and how the communities can become more engaged in product development.

CYBER RESILIENCE

14. The Chairman introduced the Board to the Cyber Resilience Team. After a presentation on cyber resilience activities at an Audit and Risk Committee meeting in 2022, it was agreed that the same presentation should be given to the VisitScotland Board.

15. The Head of IT advised the Board that over the years the team had developed activities and services to build a strong resilience against cyber-attacks, which include incident responses, daily checks, anti-virus, firewalls and staff awareness and training, structure around meetings and actions. The team also updated the Board on completed and current projects to enhance protection.

16. The Board expressed its appreciation for the team's work, not only for the high technical level but also for the openness to users and the cooperative approach.

17. It was noted that VisitScotland is one of the highest performers in terms of developing and adopting good practice in cyber security.

18. The Board was further advised that the Cyber Resilience Team benefits from the shared learnings across public and private organisations.

SCOTTISH THISTLES AWARDS

19. The Director of Industry and Destination Development opened the presentation on the Scottish Thistle Awards to give the Board an update on the development and future direction prior to the Awards Finals on 9 February 2023.

20. A 5-year plan was presented with the changes made since pre-pandemic. It was noted that VisitScotland seeks widespread, regional ownership of the awards, as it will increase the engagement and quality as well as reduce the resource requirement and financial risk to VisitScotland. The winners of the five regional awards will compete in the National Finals, which will continue to be owned by VisitScotland.

21. It was further noted that a strategic partnership with the industry panel in terms of structure, membership and the cohesion between the regional and national awards is in place. Extensive work has been carried out to refresh the categories, making sure that they are relevant and that the criteria is aligned with the strategic pillars of Scotland Outlook 2030, NSET and responsible

tourism. The Board discussed the methodology and criteria, and the management noted that work around that is still in progress.

22. The Board was advised that all partners must be on the same responsible tourism trajectory as VisitScotland, and that work on a longer term, broader strategic approach is under way.

23. It was noted that from 2023 all events will be moved to allow the awards programme to take place within one calendar year after a request from the industry panel, as it will benefit promotion and the winners.

24. VisitScotland has already come a long way in making industry aware of the Scottish Thistles Awards and is progressing well with spreading this awareness to the wider public. The Board congratulated the team for creating a stronger and more relevant Awards programme post-pandemic.

CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

25. The Chairman updated the Board on his recent activities, which included a meeting with Deputy First Minister John Swinney regarding VisitScotland's direction of travel, and the Parliamentary reception on Years of Stories, which was well-attended. He noted that the BTA Board was planning to hold its Strategic Awayday in Scotland this year, which possibly could be aligned with the VisitScotland Board meeting in October. He further noted that he had contributed to media pieces including the Sunday Times on the Scottish Thistle Awards and given a few speeches, including to the Tourism Society and Burns' Night.

26. The Chief Executive highlighted the current focus on 'pounds, people and planning,' noting that in terms of Grant-In-Aid VisitScotland is in a positive position, however it is still indicative until it has been approved by Parliament. It was noted that the cultural sector is particularly challenged, and that there are ongoing conversations with various partners to see how VisitScotland can support the sector.

27. The Board was advised that a voluntary redundancy scheme is in place, but as expected there has not been a high level of demand.

28. It was further noted that work regarding long-term planning is progressing in line with the Board discussions in December.

29. The Chief Executive also flagged that the regulatory environment is causing challenges for industry. Potential impacts were discussed, and it was noted that the management is investigating the implications and appropriate actions. Visitor Levy legislation is earmarked for 2026, and legislation relating to alcohol advertising is expected to go through Parliament before the next election.

30. It was noted that a full presentation of the MSP survey results would be available at Board members' request.

Action: Board members to give feedback to management on VS Says as appropriate.

CORPORATE SERVICES REPORT

31. The Director of Corporate Services spoke to the directorate paper, highlighting that the Events funding platform (Granicus) has now been procured and aligns with the Cloud Adoption process. He noted that the exit of 5-6th floor in Ocean Point is progressing as planned and updated the Board on office management in the Glasgow office. It was further noted that VisitScotland is preparing documentation to the information request from the Scottish Covid Inquiry.

32. The Director gave an update on staffing and resources in the Finance team, and how the continued support to the 2023 Cycling Worlds team is managed. The Board supported the presented solutions; however, it is important to make sure that VisitScotland follows the independence requirement regarding the internal auditors from Azets due to potential partiality when sharing resources, and that it may be required to use a third party.

33. Finally, the Board was advised that the V4 budget for 2023 Cycling Worlds is under way and will be presented to the CWC Board on 23 February and to the VS Board on 16 March for final approval.

EVENTS

34. The Director of Events updated the Board on recent activities. It was noted that EventScotland is working with Scottish Government, Edinburgh City Council and Creative Scotland looking into investments in the 13 festivals over the last 10 years as they are financially challenged.

35. It was further noted that the public consultation on the National Event Strategy will take place in March.

36. The Board was also updated on the delivery of Hogmanay in Edinburgh with a new supplier and a smaller setup than in previous years. Learnings will be taken forward into planning of the next Hogmanay.

37. The Director further advised the Board that the first of the 2023 Cycling Worlds Championship events – Zwift E-sport - will already take place in Glasgow on 18 February. The team will also for the first time present to the UCI Management Committee, which will take place 3 March in Holland. The ticket sale will launch in February, and the prime sponsor will be announced in March.

38. The Board was also updated on the Gateway Review, where the key concerns are pace, prioritisation, and momentum. Delivering against the critical path's milestone dates and holding the budget are challenges that have been raised by the CWC Board and are priorities for the executive team.

INDUSTRY AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

39. The Director of Industry and Destination Development provided an overview of recent industry activity noting that both iCentre ticket sales and QA income have reached their targets.

40. The Board was advised that the process of excluding non-payers in the QA scheme has started and the remaining businesses in the scheme will be up for renewal soon.

41. The Director noted that businesses have a big desire to engage in Responsible Tourism which was also one of the take-aways from the very successful Highland Tourism Conference, which was held in November 2022.
42. It was further noted there had been good uptake on the RTIF grants. Significant pressure was expected for 2023 and 2024 due to inflation and increasing costs.

Action: Management to prepare a deep dive on product development at a future board meeting.
Action: QA scheme to be discussed at Strategy Away Day in April.

MARKETING, DIGITAL AND BRAND SCOTLAND REPORT

43. The Director of Marketing updated the Board on two key projects; VisitScotland Connect and VisitScotland.com and it was advised that both projects are on track.
44. The Director highlighted two new aviation routes; the Delta's Atlanta-Edinburgh service and Westjet's Calgary-Edinburgh service and informed the Board that work is being done to support the route launches.

BUDGET AND PLANNING UPDATE

45. The Director of Corporate Services provided an overview on the budget and proposed the 4 stages of planning. Following completion of stage 4, a full ABC budget will be brought to the March board meeting.
46. The Director highlighted a new operational scenario - redeployment support workstream/skills training/transition support. All operational scenarios are easy to implement. The strategic scenarios are to be discussed further at the Strategy Away Day in April.
47. The Board expressed its appreciation at seeing redeployment and training in the budget.

The Board approved the proposed budget process and timetable for 2023/24.
Action: Management to prepare Full ABC budget for the Board meeting in March.

POLICIES

48. The Business Continuity Policy was uploaded to Huddle in advance of the meeting to allow members to review. No queries were raised.

The Board approved the Business Continuity Policy.

PROPOSAL TO MIGRATE BOARD PAPERS TO M365

49. The Director of Corporate Services presented a proposal to migrate Board papers to M365 and use Sharepoint instead of Huddle. This solution would provide better data management and data protection as well as an annual saving of approx. £10.000. It was noted that the Board members for 2023 Cycling World Championship have an external site on Sharepoint, which works well.

The Board approved the M365 proposal.
Action: A training session ahead of implementation and upload of Board papers to M365 to be held for Board members.

FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

50. The Director of Corporate Services presented the Financial and Business Performance Report, which was noted by the Board.

AOB

51. The Chairman informed the Board that the location of the next two Board meetings will be communicated as soon as possible.

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.