

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 30 April 2020 by video conference

Present: John Thurso (Chairman)
Anne Anderson
Caroline Roxburgh
Stephen Hagan
Rebecca Brooks
Keith Nicholson
Steven Walker
Cathy Craig

In attendance: Malcolm Roughead (Chief Executive)
Vicki Miller (Director of Marketing, Digital and Global Brand)
Riddell Graham (Director of Industry and Destination Development)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Paul Bush (Director of Events)

Minutes: Gayle Biggart

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chairman welcomed Board members to the meeting and thanked them for joining the meeting by video conference. No apologies were noted.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 19 MARCH 2020

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 19 March 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No new conflicts of interest were noted.

UPDATE ON COVID-19

4. The Chairman invited the Chief Executive to provide a general update on the COVID-19 response. The Chief Executive noted that much of the information contained in the Board papers had now been superseded as the situation continued to be fluid. It was noted that two new funding packages for the industry would go live at 2pm today, with an announcement being made by the Economy Secretary. The funds will be open to (i) small businesses in the creative, tourism and hospitality sectors; and (ii) vulnerable businesses which are crucial to the Scottish economy and will be administered by the enterprise

agencies. It was noted that VisitScotland had already started work to identify businesses who are at risk and eligible for these schemes and that VisitScotland would be working closely with the enterprise agencies. It was advised that information about the funding and signposting to the enterprise agency websites would be added to visitscotland.org.

5. Reference was made to the Scottish Government's strategy of "respond, reset, restart and recover". It was noted that these principles are not sequential and that so far, the main bulk of the work carried out by VisitScotland fell into the "respond" category. It was noted that the focus of VisitScotland's work was now moving into the "recover" category. However, it was advised that a big part of this would be managing expectations for travel and thinking about what the industry will look like in the future. The importance of having a cohesive response to avoid any confusion was highlighted.
6. The Chief Executive praised the staff at VisitScotland and noted their response to the situation had been brilliant so far.
7. Rebecca Brooks advised that tour operators had indicated that they were ready to resume business when it is safe to receive visitors again. However, it was noted that in the early stages, the focus will be on 'staycations' to try to boost local economies. It was highlighted that this would be contingent on hotels and restaurants also being able to reopen. The Chief Executive confirmed that this was consistent with the information VisitScotland had collated through monitoring and data analysis. It was noted that all the information which VisitScotland has been able to gather is being shared with the industry each week, so they have the most up to date information to work from.

MARKETING & DIGITAL UPDATE

8. The Director of Marketing, Digital and Global Brand summarised VisitScotland's recovery planning approach in line with the Scottish Government's four phase strategy. It was noted that VisitScotland would need to be flexible in its approach and adapt and change as more becomes known about how far people can travel and the social distancing measures which will be in place. It was advised that as part of the respond phase, the objective had been to keep Scotland top of mind and build advocacy and trust, as well as continuing to promote the 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' messaging.
9. For the reset phase, it was advised the objective was to support industry to prepare for re-starting. It was noted that this would be done by running industry webinars to provide industry with an overview of the UK market. VisitScotland will work with destination management and sector organisations so they are aware of our plans and can feed into them. It was highlighted that consideration will need to be given to social distancing measures and how demand can be matched with supply. It was noted that technologies would also be investigated to consider how we could do things differently.
10. It was noted that for the restart phase, consideration was being given to bringing some of the features of the marketing automation platform forward to help build pride and

empathy; and promote wellbeing among Scots. It was noted that in the early stages of recovery, it is likely to be Scotland only focused to stimulate travel close to home. It was advised that early conversations had taken place with VisitBritain to ensure a joined-up approach in messaging around responsible travel and social distancing.

11. For the recovery phase, it was noted that the objective was to make Scotland discoverable across all key channels; increase demand for Scotland holidays and drive bookings closely matching supply with demand. It was highlighted that rural businesses would be key to the early recovery phase.
12. The Board praised the work that had gone into developing VisitScotland's marketing recovery plans so far. It was noted that the timing of these messages was key, and the aim was to provide industry with a positive focus. The Director of Marketing, Digital and Global Brand advised that it is importance that industry is provided with timescales for recovery as soon as possible to allow them to plan.

INDUSTRY AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

13. The Director of Industry and Destination Development advised that four Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG) meetings had taken place since mid-March. It was noted that the group is made up of representatives of Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, COSLA/Business Gateway, VisitScotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance (who represent the industry). It was advised that the group has developed an action plan which covers the Scottish Government's four phases of response strategy. It was noted that the impact of COVID-19 on the Tourism Strategy delivered on the 3rd March would need to be considered and that responsible tourism should be high on the Tourism Strategy agenda going forward.
14. It was advised that VisitScotland had conducted an industry survey in the first few weeks of the outbreak of the virus and it was noted that this would be repeated around the end of May to gather further insight on issues facing the industry once some of the relief funding had been made available and paid to businesses who need it. It was further noted that another survey had been issued to a cross-section of 65 tourism and sector groups to establish the potential scale of lost income due to COVID-19, the activities they currently carry out and how they could continue operating. It was noted that the tourism destination and sector organisations would play a huge role in industry engagement and bringing marketing alive at a local level in the recovery phase. The responses from the survey showed that as these groups are reliant on member subscriptions, their funding was under threat. It was highlighted that VisitScotland should be taking the lead to make sure these organisations survive.
15. The importance of a community-based approach to recovery and the potential challenges in rural and island communities were discussed by the Board. The importance of consistency of advice and guidance was also discussed by the Board. It was noted that

advice on cleanliness was being produced by UKHospitality and that once this was supported by the science and had been endorsed by the Government, VisitScotland would promote the advice included in it. The Board noted this approach and advised that there was a danger that if lots of bodies produced advice, the consistency message would be lost.

16. The Director of Industry and Destination Development advised that despite everyone working from home, internal communications across the organisation had never been as strong.

EVENTS UPDATE

17. The Director of Events provided an update on the current situation facing the Events Industry as a result of COVID-19. It was noted that the Directorate has been working with the Events Industry and strategic partners across all sectors, and holding webinars over the last couple of weeks to respond to the situation and consider a plan for the sector post COVID-19, as well as providing support to the sector in the short term. It was noted that there had been challenges around there being a lack of clear guidance from government in relation to the events sector. It was noted that the industry had reported supply chain issues and that some of the larger venues were reporting that they would not be in a position to hold events until 2021, with social distancing measures impacting the venue capacity. It was further noted that as events were postponed to future dates, this would have an impact on EventScotland's capacity and availability to support.
18. It was noted that research into consumer confidence to return to events was required to consider the measures which will need to be in place to encourage people to return to events. It was highlighted that some event organisers were looking to technology to help with their events, with some choosing to hold online/virtual festivals. It was further noted that the events industry had considered ways in which larger gatherings could take place going forward and had come up with some creative ideas. The Board emphasised the importance of having an industry standard and making the government aware of these ideas so that they can be taken into account in planning decisions. The Board also noted that businesses should be encouraged to be rounded in their response to recovery and consider elements such as wellbeing and sustainability in their recovery planning.
19. The Board then had a discussion around the Scottish Thistle Award Programme 20/21. It was noted that due to the unprecedented instability in the sector, it would not be appropriate to seek nominations/entries at a time when businesses are struggling to survive. It was also noted that there would be challenges around seeking sponsorship for the event. The Board agreed that given the current circumstances, it would not be possible to hold the Scottish Thistle Awards for 20/21. However, the Board noted the importance of using the launch of the Scottish Thistle Awards next year for 21/22 to bring the industry together and move forward positively in 2021. It was also noted that this would provide an opportunity to include sustainability requirements within the criteria for 21/22.

20. There was a discussion around the 2023 Cycling World Championships and progress which had been made since the last Board meeting. It was noted that following specific feedback from the Board at the March meeting, a document setting out the Host's obligations under the Long Form Agreement with the UCI and CWC Board skills matrix had been provided to the Board within the papers for this meeting. An update was provided on the interview process for the Chief Executive of 2023 Cycling World Championships Limited.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

(a) HR

21. The Chief Executive reported that mental health and wellbeing support for VisitScotland staff continued to be in place, with teams organising daily check-ins, a confidential email address being set up for staff to alert HR of any specific concerns, 24-hour counselling support remaining in place, and First Contact Officers offering support. It was noted that the Chair and Chief Executive were issuing weekly communications to all staff to provide updates and highlight successes. It was noted that confirmation had been received on 14 April that VisitScotland could proceed to implement the pay award for 2020. It was further noted that a staff survey was going to be issued to seek responses from staff on how they are coping with the lockdown and whether they feel sufficiently supported which will inform the interim people strategy. The Board noted that workforce planning had been put on hold.

(b) Insights

22. The Board noted the report.

(c) Communications

23. It was noted that the team had been sending regular communications to industry both in and outside Scotland, and that webinars and blog pieces were being issued on VisitScotland's channels. It was noted that VisitScotland is adopting a support and guidance role at this stage but will take on a more proactive leadership role as we move into the recovery phase. The Board noted that a focus on management, communication and marketing during the recovery phase could lead to a broader, more inclusive relationship with industry at a local level.
24. There was a discussion around the working from home policy generally and it was noted that a working group had been set up to assess the requirements for going back to an office/iCentre environment when the time was right. The Board recognised that the way of working would need to change.

RECOVERY BUDGET UPDATE

25. It was noted that at the March Board meeting, the Board had approved the budget proposal that had been presented to them in the knowledge that this would need to be reworked into a recovery budget. The Director of Corporate Services provided the Board with an update on the work on the recovery budget which has taken place so far. It was

noted that salary and protected activity costs would remain the same, but the rest of the budget would be reconsidered in light of the new requirements going forward. It was advised that the Directors are currently reviewing activity in their areas so that a recovery budget can be presented to the Board in June.

AOB

26. There was a discussion around VisitScotland's leadership role in response to the pandemic, its visibility to the industry, and future funding. It was noted that the work being undertaken by STERG would enable the feedback from industry to be presented to the Scottish Government in a joined-up way with evidence of the financial impact to industry also being included. In terms of leadership, it was noted that the Chief Executive has been liaising with Local Authority Chief Executives to discuss how VisitScotland can help. It was also noted that there is no leadership currently in the events industry and that we are currently filling that gap. The Chairman noted that an additional VisitBritain Board meeting had been scheduled and any feedback should be relayed to the Chairman in advance of this meeting.

CLOSE

27. The Chairman noted the outstanding job that the VisitScotland Leadership Team had done over the past weeks given the circumstances, and the work of everyone in their teams. It was noted that there was a great team spirit within the organisation, and this was as a result of work of the Leadership Team over a longer period. The Board echoed these sentiments.
28. The Chairman thanked Board members for their attendance. Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.