

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 20 July 2023 in Ocean Point and via video conference (Teams)

Present:

John Thurso (Chairman) Anne Anderson
Caroline Roxburgh
Keith Nicholson
Paul Easto
Rebecca Brooks
Shona Marsh
Steven Walker

In attendance:

Malcolm Roughead (Chief Executive)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Paul Bush (Director of Events, for item 6 only)
Vicki Miller (Director of Marketing and Digital)

Minutes:

Sarah Iversen

Apologies:

Rob Dickson

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chairman welcomed the attendees to the in-person meeting and welcomed those calling in remotely.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD 8 JUNE 2023

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 8 June were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised.

MATTERS ARISING

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

CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

5. The Chairman provided an update on his activities since the previous Board meeting. This included meetings with MPs in Westminster with tourism as a force for good and responsible tourism being the main topics of conversation.
6. The Chairman noted that these were positive discussions and the MPs have a good understanding of what VisitScotland is doing as an organisation.
7. The Chairman provided an update on the upcoming Board members' recruitment, noting planning dates have been agreed and the Board member positions are due to be advertised early September.
8. The Chief Executive gave his update to the Board noting well-documented issues like labour shortages and the cost of doing business continue for industry, but visitor numbers are continuing to recover, and international numbers are positive.
9. He updated the Board on the Short Term Lets (STL) licensing scheme and the impact for VisitScotland, including discussions ongoing around the impact on business listings. All booking sites will need to remove businesses which do not have a licence or have not made an application for a license.
10. It was noted that VisitScotland will facilitate the expert advisory group ahead of the local visitor levy and work will be carried out to ensure the best input from industry.
11. The Chief Executive informed the Board that discussions on the 2023/24 pay award continued.
12. A Board discussion on VisitScotland and flexible working offers took place.
13. The Board was updated on the graduate recruitment scheme which is inviting applications for positions in IT Security, Corporate Communications, Insights, Human Resources, Events and Finance. He noted the application response has been excellent and encouraging to see.

CORPORATE SERVICES REPORT

14. The Director of Corporate Services provided the Board with a success story – a Finance colleague joined as modern apprentice some years ago, he has now passed his first set of exams towards becoming a qualified chartered accountant. This was cited as an example of VisitScotland's ambition to "grow our own" talent.
15. The Director of Corporate Services spoke to the directorate paper, noting that many colleagues are now providing an eight until eleven, seven days a week service for UCI Cycling World Championships. He noted that this had an impact on the team's capacity for other issues.

16. Cyber security continues to be essential practice and the team is aware of VisitScotland's vulnerability and tracking these. This includes business as usual mapping exercises.
17. The Board was informed that Scottish Government has approved the new Edinburgh office and the move is planned for after the completion of the UCI Cycling World Championships.
18. A discussion followed on CWC and VS resources following the CWC event.

EVENTS

18. The Director of Events updated the Board on recent activities including a successful Scottish Open which was well attended.
19. The new Head of EventScotland has been confirmed. Rebecca Edser will join in September and comes to VisitScotland from her current role as Senior Major Events Consultant at UK Sport.
20. The Director of Events informed the Board that events are tracking well though several music festivals have been cancelled due to a number of reasons.

Action: New Head of EventScotland to attend October board meeting

21. The Director of Events spoke to the UCI Cycling World Championships paper and highlighted that a transport meeting has taken place testing the readiness. There are some issues which needs clarified and/or resolved.
22. The Director noted the following risks - protests, bridges, industrial action and parking.
23. The Director informed the Board that ticket sales are beating the set target.
24. A broad discussion followed on the risks and community issues. The Director further noted that all fields and roads have been signed off.
25. The Board approved the following:

The Extended hours policy

The adoption of the Championships Time Delegated Authorities

A submission of an unfunded change control application to the Scottish Government

INDUSTRY AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

26. The Board noted the Industry and Destination Development Report.

Action: Update on City Region Deal to be provided at October's Board meeting

MARKETING, DIGITAL AND BRAND SCOTLAND REPORT

27. The Director of Marketing provided the Board with an update on recent activities including the launch of the Scottish Thistle Awards TV advert. It was noted that there is a lot of good content on the back of it which can be used to support activity with industry, including case studies.
28. The Director updated the Board on a recent meeting with Google and highlighted that travel searches are 34 percent greater than last year with a high demand for multiple destinations. London to Scotland searches are 30 percent up.
29. VisitScotland has done a campaign with gateway funding and London and Partners – it has been a successful campaign in terms of reach and metrics.
30. Data shows that domestic demand for Scotland is still there, but consumers want shorter trips and value for money. Scotland is second place in terms of intention with September being a strong month. In winter months, Scotland is second after London.
31. The Director updated the Board on VisitScotland Connect 2024 which will take place at the P&J Live.
32. There are early learnings to take from the feedback of the last VisitScotland Connect including more networking, better lunch offering and accommodation for buyers closer to the venue.
33. A focus for the year is industry activities including workshops across the regions helping businesses get travel trade ready. The team will also run webinar-style events.
34. A Board discussion took place regarding the domestic and international markets and VisitScotland's focus areas. The Director informed the Board that the market investment model is continuously looked at but US is the focus to capitalise on the demand. Some work is also under way in Europe and the extent of this may be reviewed next year. On the domestic side, the budget for paid-for activity is small but media targeting can be specific. In the UK, VisitScotland has partnerships budget to capitalise on the market.

ARC UPDATE

35. The Chair of the ARC updated the Board on the minutes from the last meeting where the focus was on CWC and its readiness.
36. The Chair noted that with David Cameron, Board Member at CWC, now Chair of the CWC ARC, there has been a significant shift in arrangements and assurance.
37. She highlighted the outsourcing of resources to CWC and its implication to VS and the need to size out the post event needs and resources.
38. The Chair informed the Board that the Internal Audit Annual Reports for VisitScotland and CWC were completed. These are separate to each other and the opinion in one report does not read across to the other.
39. CWC is to provide a prompt response to outstanding matters raised in its annual audit report and the internal auditor will follow up.

40. For VS internal Audit – VS was given the highest level of assurance across risk management framework and systems of internal control. Chair of ARC noted that all of the work is improving, and that training compliance is an area that needs to be strengthened.
41. The Chair of ARC congratulated the Director of Corporate Services, the Team and VS an organisation. This was echoed by the Board.

ANNUAL REPORT

42. The Director of Corporate Services updated the Board on the annual report and took them through the performance report section which set out the topics of the report.
43. Based on feedback from previous annual report, the forewords have been written before the rest of the content.
44. A broad discussion around the forewords took place and Management will feedback to the team.
45. The Chairman noted that the change in process was a very helpful new approach.

POLICIES

46. Policies for Board approval were uploaded to Huddle in advance of the meeting to allow members to review. No queries were raised.

The Board approved the following policies:

- a. **Lone working policy.**
- b. **Driving for work policy.**

The Director of Corporate Services noted that a pause has been put on the work of the Information Security Policy due to staff working on CWC.

FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

47. The Director of Corporate Services presented the Financial and Business Performance Report.
48. The risk register was noted as up to date and the team is looking to add in more metrics and KPIs but will pause work due to CWC.
49. The Director noted the positive start to the year and the amber and red activities.
50. Speaking on the finances, the Director noted the salary numbers.
51. The Director then noted the CWC recharge and the need to track other applicable spending as well.
52. The Board reported that it was an excellent report, and they appreciated the format and structure. The Board thanked the team.

PROCUREMENT – MEDIA BUY

53. The Director of Corporate Services provided the Board with background on the contract.

The Board approved the application to tender for media planning, buying and associated services.

AOB

54. The Chairman asked the Board to note the following board dates in 2024: 25 January, 14 March and 25 April 2024.

Action: Board dates for 2024 to be shared with Board and Management.

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.