

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

Present: John Thurso (Chair)
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)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Destination Development)
Vicki Miller (Director of Marketing and Digital)
Carolyn Churchill (Head of Corporate Communications) For item 5 only

Minutes: Freja Fischer-Møller

Apologies: No apologies

INTRODUCTIONS

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

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 14 September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised. However, it was noted that Keith Nicholson owns a self-catering business and this would be noted in relation to discussions on short-term let regulation.

MATTERS ARISING

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

STRATEGIC REVIEW UPDATE

5. The Director of Marketing and Digital gave an update on the organisation's Strategic Change Programme. It was stressed that in line with discussions at previous Board meetings, the purpose of this programme is to shape the business for future demands in the tourism industry. The focus of the programme is to prioritise resources to deliver long-term growth in the value of the visitor economy.
6. The Board was advised that management is establishing a governance structure building towards an implementation plan, and there was a discussion around the pace of decision-making and the suitable timeline for this evolutionary programme. It was further discussed how management could build in an advocacy role into the programme through stakeholder engagement.
7. The Head of Corporate Communications presented the strategic communication and engagement plan covering both internal and external engagement.

The Board approved the Strategic Communications and Engagement Plan.

8. The Director of Industry and Destination Development presented the Tourism Business Support & Advice Programme, and the Board discussed the opportunities for long-term sustainable and financially robust businesses as well as the importance of close collaboration with the enterprise agencies.
9. There was a discussion around the indicators and criteria for a Quality business, this framework would be used to shape the future advice programme.
10. The Board noted the update of the Strategic Change Programme.

Action: Management to provide a further update on the next phases of the Strategic Change at a future Board meeting.

CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

11. The Chair provided an update on his activities since the previous Board meeting, highlighting the dinner and board meeting with BTA, where Marc Crothall and Malcolm Roughead were speaking.
12. He further updated the Board on the recruitment process for new Board members and Chair.
13. The Chief Executive gave his update to the Board highlighting that the UK market remains flat and business sentiment is still negative due to the cost of living and cost of doing business.
14. The Board was advised that VisitScotland has taken a proactive role in communicating guidelines in terms of the new Short-Term Let licensing scheme, and in the consultation regarding Visitor Levy.
15. It was further noted that feedback from the regional finals of the Scottish Thistle Awards has been very positive.

CORPORATE SERVICES REPORT

16. The Director of Corporate Services spoke to the directorate paper and updated the Board on the Edinburgh Office relocation to Waverley Court.
17. The Board was advised about the budget outturn for the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships and the main issues around project closure were discussed.
18. The Board noted the update.

EVENTS

19. The Director of Events informed the Board about recent and upcoming events including Skyline Scotland, Stranraer Oyster Festival, World Athletics Indoor Championships 2024 and Edinburgh's Hogmanay.
20. It was noted that the project closure of 2023 Cycling World Championships is progressing with in-person debriefings at CEO level with all the host local authorities, extensive debriefings and transfer of knowledge with Scottish Government, UCI and the event delivery partners, and a minimal number of complaints received, actioned and closed.
21. The Director further updated the Board that Trudy Lindblade, Chief Executive of 2023 Cycling World Championships, has been appointed to a new role as Chief Executive of Cricket Scotland, which she will take on early 2024.
22. The Board noted the report.

Action: National Events Strategy to be presented to the Board at its meeting in December.

INDUSTRY AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

23. The Director of Industry and Destination Development provided an overview of recent industry activity.
24. He advised the Board that VisitScotland is likely to be involved in the application process for new National Parks.
25. The Board noted the report.

MARKETING, DIGITAL AND BRAND SCOTLAND REPORT

26. The Director of Marketing and Digital spoke to the Marketing report highlighting VisitScotland's international engagement and intermediary marketing activity.
27. The Board was advised that the Intermediary Marketing team are working closely with destination partners to support the development of trade ready businesses and new bookable regional product. This is designed to stimulate greater regional spread of international visitors. The Marketing & Digital director gave examples of new tour operator programmes including to the South of Scotland.
28. It was noted that VisitScotland's planning for Connect 2024 is going well, addressing the feedback from 2023. It will be held on 17-18 April 2024.

29. The Board was further advised that the Marketing & Digital Directorate has taken over the Tourism Insider with articles to the tourism industry. The latest publication was 19 October 2023.
30. The Board noted the report.

CORPORATE PLAN OUTLINE

31. The Director of Corporate Services updated the Board on the interim one-year Corporate Plan, which is to be published in February 2024. The outlined content was discussed.

The proposed content for the Corporate Plan was approved by the Board.

ANNUAL INTERNAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

32. The Director of Corporate Services outlined the Annual Internal Sustainability report.
33. It was advised that some carbon previously reported in Scope 1 and 2 has been moved to Scope 3 and has been identified as an indirect emission rather than a direct emission. This change assists with the ambitions of Net Zero by 2030.
34. It was noted that there was an increase in carbon due to the full return to business since the pandemic and increase in business travel, but also due to the reporting of additional carbon emissions, which previously were not captured.
35. It was further noted that all VisitScotland properties are now certified as gold standard for Green Tourism Certification.
36. Discussion was held around the impact of responsible tourism. It was noted that in 2020 it was decided to separate the responsible tourism measurements from the annual internal sustainability report.

Action: Management to investigate responsible tourism's impact on carbon emission.

FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

37. The Director of Corporate Services presented the Financial and Business Performance Report highlighting that the total ABC spend to date is 39% of total forecast, and that no ABCs have a RAG financial status of amber.
38. It was further noted that the budgeted payroll savings target is anticipated to be met in full. However, this is only one element of the reforecast and a final financial forecast position will be reported once the reforecast is fully completed.
39. The Director further updated the Board on the valuation outcome of the BTB pension scheme.

POLICIES

40. The Director of Corporate Services presented the policies for the Board's approval:
 - Authorised Signatory Policy

- Data Protection Policy

41. No questions or comments were raised.

The policies were approved by the Board.

42. It was noted that the Subsidy Control Policy would be available for Board members' review and will be presented for approval at the Board meeting in December.

AOB

43. The Chair noted that this was the last formal meeting for Board members Rebecca Brooks and Anne Anderson. He invited both to attend the December meeting as observers.

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.