

## Minutes of meeting of the VisitScotland Board held at VisitScotland.com, Livingston on 19 June 2007

**Present:** Peter Lederer (Chairman)  
Alex Pagett  
Willie Dunn  
Brian Houston

**In attendance:** Philip Riddle (Chief Executive)  
Eddie Byers (Director of Industry Engagement)  
Riddell Graham (Director of Strategy, Partnerships &  
Communication)  
Willie Macleod (Director of Visitor Services & Quality)  
Malcolm Roughead (Director of Marketing)  
  
Chris Maguire (Minutes)

**Apologies:** Pat Buchanan  
Lesley Sawers  
David Noble (Director of Network Operations)  
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chairman opened the meeting and a short discussion followed on the earlier presentation by Marco Truffelli, Chief Executive, VisitScotland.com and Nick Kuenssberg, Chairman, VisitScotland.com.

### 2. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON 18 MAY 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May were approved.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman noted the matters arising and that the issue of new technology would be dealt with under agenda item 10.

### 4. COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Riddell Graham (RG) introduced the competitive environment paper which provides an update on trends in Scotland and across the globe. RG informed the Board of the communication process behind the publication of the 2006 UKTS figures and that a

briefing paper on the overall 2006 statistics had been produced and this was well received by the industry. This paper had also been incorporated into the Board paper.

RG also drew the attention of the Board to section 4 of the paper that focused on the Canadian experience of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). The Chairman noted that the key point and the reason behind the success of these organisations was due to the fact that they were 'management' rather than 'marketing' organisations. The Chairman asked whether the Board felt it would be useful to disseminate the paper. RG updated the Board on ongoing work with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise to produce a guide to DMOs and that this would be available in early autumn and should be a very useful resource.

The Board noted the paper.

## **5. VISITSCOTLAND.COM**

Malcolm Roughead (MR) updated the Board on the current performance of VisitScotland.com against its Business Plan. MR drew the attention of the Board to conversion rates and how these compared to the industry average. The Board were informed that traffic to the site was high due to the strong content and search optimisation. The contact centre continued to perform well, assisted by good staff training.

## **6. EVENTSCOTLAND**

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the recruitment process for the vacant EventScotland, Chief Operating Officer position; interviews would take place the following week. He then updated the Board on the meeting of the EventScotland sub-group of the main VisitScotland Board that took place earlier that morning.

The Chief Executive then updated the Board on how EventScotland is working across a number of different portfolios within the Scottish Executive. In order to ensure that this worked effectively EventScotland had established a group with senior representatives from different Scottish Executive Directorates with an interest in events. This approach had been welcomed by the Executive and was working well.

The Board noted the paper.

## **7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OVERVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS**

The Chief Executive introduced a paper outlining key developments since the previous Board meeting. He updated the Board on meetings that had taken place with Jim Mather MSP, Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism and John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Sustainable Economic Growth and that they had been extremely constructive and that the strategic growth ambition had been well received. A presentation that had been used in the meetings was circulated to the Board for information.

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the activity that would take place over the summer and how VisitScotland was contributing to ongoing discussions. He updated the Board on the likely direction of travel on a number of issues. This includes the focus of VisitScotland's activity in relation to promoting Scotland domestically and internationally and the proposed Strategic Board. He informed the Board that the Minister had confirmed that VisitScotland was not going to be rebranded as "Welcome to Scotland".

The Chairman informed the Board that he had been very pleased with the meetings that have taken place and that the focus of the discussions was on driving economic growth.

The Board noted the paper.

## **8. KEY OPINION FORMER SURVEY AND TOURISM BAROMETER**

RG introduced a paper that updated the Board on the results of the latest IpsosMori Key Opinion Former Survey and the high level results from the VisitScotland Tourism Barometer. RG informed the Board that one of the key issues that emerged from the research was the lack of differentiation made by all audiences between VisitScotland and VisitScotland.com.

Alex Pagett (AP) asked if there was any scope for joining-up this activity with another organisation such as Scottish Enterprise. RG replied that some discussions had already taken place, but that he would look into this further.

The Board noted the paper.

## **9. QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

Willie Macleod (WMac), Director of Visitor Services & Quality introduced a paper that updated the Board on the scope of work, current activities and recent developments of the Quality & Standards (Q&S) department.

WMac informed the Board that Q&S has developed a diploma and advanced diploma course for the quality advisor team. The diploma is aimed at all advisors and has been set at HND equivalent. An advanced diploma for senior advisors is set at degree equivalent. Both qualifications are accredited by SQA. Six staff have embarked on the course and it is anticipated that it will take approximately one year to complete. VisitScotland will be the first grading organisation to have such a qualification and the aim, over time, is to have a fully qualified assessment team.

In relation to the training scheme for Quality Advisers, AP asked whether there might be scope for communications activity around this as it was interesting initiative. WMac replied that his team worked closely with the communications team and they were involved in projects from the outset and this worked well, but that he would ensure that opportunities around the training were maximised.

Discussion followed around changing consumer behaviour in relation to the role of consumer reviews in quality assurance. WMac informed the Board that the new Tiscover technology platform allowed this facility and that thinking on how to develop this was ongoing. He informed the Board of feedback from Bournemouth who had been using this technology and that it seemed to be working well. However, what the feedback indicated was that, while consumers welcomed peer reviews, it should not be used in isolation and that consumers welcomed advice from formal quality schemes such as those delivered by the AA and VisitScotland.

WMac updated the Board on issues relating to accessibility and that for over 20 years Q&S has operated a scheme to assess and promote tourism facilities (accommodation and attractions) suitable for people with mobility difficulties. The scheme has almost 1100 participating businesses. However, he informed the Board that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has caused all UK tourist boards to reconsider their approach to this issue and that it was clear, in relation to its responsibilities in relation to Disability Equality, that VisitScotland has a specific role in providing advice and guidance to consumers. He informed the Board that this was an area that David Noble (DN) was leading on, but that Q&S is working closely with Network Operations in this area. The issue that was currently being considered was the best way to provide that advice to the consumer and that, at the moment, the favoured approach was to ask businesses to produce an accessibility statement, which is the approach currently being followed in Wales.

The Chairman asked for WMac's view on the initial findings of work being carried out by Ian Yeoman, VisitScotland's Scenario Planner and Professor Stephen Page of Stirling University in relation to accommodation supply data. Eddie Byers (EB) and WMac stated that they had some concerns over the data emerging from this work and would discuss the initial findings with Ian Yeoman and Professor Page.

RG updated the Board on current thinking in relation to delivering a 'lighter regulatory touch' that had been mentioned in the new administration's manifesto. WMac informed the Board that his team were actively looking into the results of the Fitness for Purpose pilot that had been carried out on activity in this area in England.

AP asked about Tourist Signposting and who was responsible for ensuring that it was not obscured for example by trees. WMac replied that this tended to be the responsibility of the relevant local authority or highways agency. However, one route for raising awareness of this issue could be through the National Tourism Signposting Working Group that was chaired by Tony Mercer, Head of Quality & Standards.

The Board noted the paper.

## **10. DEVELOPING AND EXPLOITING NEW TECHNOLOGY**

The Chief Executive introduced a paper that updated Board members on how VisitScotland is exploiting and developing new media. The Chief Executive also led a presentation that illustrated examples of how the organisation was using new technology and also how other organisations are using new media technology.

## **11. VISITSCOTLAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO DELIVERING THE TOURISM FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE (TFFC)**

RG introduced the paper and updated the Board on the progress that was being made by VisitScotland in relation to each of the delivery targets and measures set within the TFFC and also additional areas of activity over the period April 2006 – March 2007. He informed the Board that one of the key issues was the need for continuing and increased private sector involvement. The Chairman asked if the current structure with the various sub-groups was the correct one. RG replied that there was perhaps scope for simplification as at the moment VisitScotland's representatives reported progress separately to each of the sub-groups and that it would be easier to report progress once to the overall Monitoring Group.

The Chairman stated that the issue of differing levels of delivery throughout the country had been raised with him. He asked RG how it would be possible to ensure consistent delivery at the local level in relation to the TFFC. RG replied that this issue was the subject of ongoing discussions and work over the summer as part of the agenda to simplify delivery. RG also raised the issue of ensuring that there was a clear connection between the Tourism Prospectus and the TFFC.

The Board noted the paper.

**Action point: The Board to request an update on activity from other organisations on their contribution to delivering the TFFC.**

## **12. PROPERTY LEASES**

The Chief Executive introduced a paper that updated the Board on activity around the negotiation of property leases in Fort William and Orkney.

The Board noted the paper and stated that they were happy for discussions on the leases to continue.

## **13. PROCUREMENT**

The Chief Executive introduced a paper that codified the procurement arrangements that had been agreed by the Board at an earlier meeting and sought approval to continue the procurement of books and maps, plus the provision of legal services.

The Board approved the tendering arrangements for:

- the supply of the Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey and supply of Books and Maps; and,
- to extend the current contract for legal services by 12 months from 1 July 2007.

#### **14. FINANCE PAPER**

The Chief Executive introduced a paper that updated the Board on the current financial position. He informed the Board that the biggest issue in relation to income at the moment related to local authority income, but that this was not an issue of commitment but one of timing. He informed the Board that expenditure incurred to date was as budgeted.

AP clarified the wording in the Board paper relating to the last meeting of the British Tourist Board Pension Scheme Trustees. Although agreement had been reached, it was a 'qualified' agreement as not all Trustees had agreed to it, and that the concerns he had previously expressed to the Board remained. The Chairman asked if there was anything more that the VisitScotland Board should be doing. AP replied that no further action was required at the moment, but that it should be actively considered when future budgets are being discussed.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **15. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Chairman introduced his report on activities since the previous Board meeting. The Board noted the paper.

#### **16. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

The Chief Executive introduced his report on activities since the previous Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **17. PROGRESS AGAINST OBJECTIVES**

The Chief Executive introduced the revised Progress Against Objectives paper which provides an update on VisitScotland's activities. Brian Houston (BH) stated that the new paper provided a logical structure from the top-down and that that the activity noted in the right hand column is indicative rather than an exhaustive list of items that had been delivered. RG informed the Board on the thinking behind the changes to the format of the paper; that the intention was to achieve greater alignment with the Corporate Plan. The Board agreed that the paper achieved this and that it should only contain an update on activities where there is progress against objectives to advise the Board of i.e. where there is no update to report on, it should not be included.

RG agreed to keep the format of the paper under review and that it would be presented in portrait form at the next Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **New VisitScotland Board Members**

BH asked for an update on the position relating to new Board members and the skill sets that had been identified. RG clarified the current thinking of the Scottish Executive and that the process to fill the vacancy had been put on hold for the time being, although the recruitment process was expected to proceed in the near future. The Chairman informed the Board that the appointment of additional Board members as allowed for under the Tourist Boards Act (Scotland) 2006 had been put on hold. BH stated that when the required skill sets are being identified consideration should be given to the need for accountancy/financial expertise.

Discussion followed on the need to replace Donal Dowds on the Audit Committee and TourCo Board. The Chairman agreed to join the Audit Committee on an interim basis and that a decision on the TourCo Board would be taken at a later date.

### **VisitScotland Pay Award**

In response to a request from AP the Chief Executive updated the Board on continuing discussions with the Scottish Executive relating to the VisitScotland pay award.