

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 31 July 2025 at The Great Tapestry of Scotland, Galashiels, and via video conference (MS Teams)

- Present:

Stephen Leckie (Chair)

Barbara Smith

Lindsey Paterson

Steven Walker

Cara Aitchison

Shona Marsh

Paul Easto (MS Teams)

Keith Nicholson (MS Teams)
- In attendance:

Vicki Miller (Chief Executive Officer)

Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Events)

Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services) (MS Teams)

Cat Leaver (Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence)

Lynn Jack (Head of People and Culture)

Ivan McKee, Minister for Public Finance (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Gavin Mowat, Senior Policy & External Affairs Manager (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Kevin Fallon, Scottish Government (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Edwina Ryan, Scottish Government (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Matt Hannigan - FPA and Reporting Manager (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Anne Marie Greer – Head of Financial Services (MS Teams) (part-meeting)

Gordon Smith – Destination Development Director South of Scotland (part-meeting)

Karen Jackson, Director of Strategy & Insight, South of Scotland Enterprise (part-meeting)

Sam Smith, Chief Officer for Economic Development, Scottish Borders Council (part-meeting)

David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive Officer, South of Scotland Destination Alliance (part-meeting)

Laura Kirk (Business Manager)

Joanne Hellen (Executive Assistant) (MS Teams)
- Apologies:

Jill Walker (Director of Marketing and Digital)

Emma Hallington (Senior Advisor to CEO)
- Minutes:

Laura Kirk

Joanne Hellen

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed the attendees to the hybrid meeting.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 5 June 2025

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 5 June 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised for this meeting.
4. The Board agreed no conflict of interest in relation to the appointment of a member's partner to the Board of Scotland Commonwealth Games.
5. Board member noted their involvement in supporting Leuchie, The National Respite Charity on their fundraising committee.

MATTERS ARISING

6. All matters arising were confirmed as either completed or covered during today's meeting.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM STRATEGY

(Mr McKee, GM, KF & ER joined the meeting.)

7. Mr McKee provided an overview of the Public Service Reform (PSR) strategy published in June, highlighting its aim to provide strategic direction and empower public bodies and frontline services to identify opportunities for improvement. Key focus areas were noted to include digital transformation, leadership and culture and structural review, with governance and delivery mechanisms being developed for each workstream.
8. The Board noted the VisitScotland paper outlining its approach to the PSR strategy. It was highlighted that considerable steps had been taken to date with regard to workforce planning and estates rationalisation and VisitScotland's proactive approach and efficiencies as a NDPB were acknowledged by Mr McKee.
9. Discussion followed around the balance of seeking further savings with reducing the ability of the organisation to deliver its core mission of growing the visitor economy.
10. Discussion followed on the opportunity for cluster working with other areas of the public sector and further streamlining opportunities through prevention and integration, particularly across digital resource and talent sharing. Mr McKee encouraged the organisation to be proactive in this area and welcomed the identification by leadership of any improvement opportunities, barriers or central support required.
11. Mr McKee addressed recent issues raised by STA regarding the visitor levy in Edinburgh and confirmed the ongoing engagement of Scottish Government.

(Mr McKee, GM, KF & ER left the meeting.)

ACTION: The Board requested Management to consider further opportunities for collaboration and efficiency based on data driven decisions under the PSR framework and

to report back to the Board in due course.

BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

12. The Director of Corporate Services presented the updated draft Board Terms of Reference. The document had been presented to the Audit and Risk Committee, where it was felt that feedback previously provided by Board had been appropriately addressed.
13. It was noted by the Board that this model exemplifies good practice and should be reviewed on an annual basis and used as a tool for future Board member onboarding.
14. No further comments were raised by the Board.

ACTION: Management to add future review of the Terms of Reference into the Board Planner.

The Board approved the Terms of Reference.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT APPROVALS – REVISION TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK

15. The Director of Corporate Services presented proposed changes to the current Scottish Government Framework Document, which forms the key governance document between SG and VisitScotland. All changes were noted to be minor and included updates to delegated financial authority for procurement and addition of new section to recognise that the organisation does not currently have any regulatory function.
16. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the framework would continue to be reviewed regularly and at least every 2-3 years.

The Board approved the changes to the Scottish Government Framework

ACTION: ARC to review any longer term governance arrangements around procurements.

ACTION: A library of key documents to be set up for Board, to be used during induction process for any incoming members.

QUARTERLY BUDGET REFORECAST

(The Head of Financial Services and Financial Planning Analysis & Reporting Manager joined the meeting).

17. The FPA & Reporting Manager provided the Board with an overview of the Q1 reforecast process for 2025/26.
18. The Board reviewed the amount identified for reinvestment into the Strategic Change Programme, achieved through a blend of increased commercial income, staff cost savings and reduced core ABC spend.
19. The Head of Financial Services confirmed that a quarterly update process is being adopted to reflect the current pace of organisational change, with quarterly updates to be brought for Board

approval.

20. The Board recognised the significant savings made and proactive financial management of the organisation to date. The Board noted the need to remain proactive and continue focus on strategic change and partnership opportunities for the current and future forecasting.

The Board approved the reforecast.

(The Head of Financial Services and Financial Planning Analysis & Reporting Manager left the meeting).

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

21. The Head of People and Culture and Director of Corporate Services presented five policies for approval. Some minor amendments had been made based on feedback received previously.

For approval:

- Absence Management
- Annual leave
- Long Service and Retirement Award
- Special Leave
- Travel & Subsistence policy – updated to align with rates increase, incorporating safety and efficient internal process.

22. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed there to be only a small number of iCentre-specific VisitScotland policies, which will be withdrawn once the iCentre closure programme is complete. All other policies will be updated upon their regular review date and any reference to iCentres removed at that time.

The Board approved the five policies.

CHAIR REPORT

23. The Chair provided the Board with a written update on his recent VisitScotland activities, which included meetings with the British Tourist Authority and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other meetings with Scottish Government officials that he attended along with the Chief Executive Officer.

The Board noted the Chair Report update.

CEO REPORT

24. The Chief Executive Officer introduced the CEO Report provided in the Board pack.
25. The Chief Executive Officer highlighted that approval had been received from Scottish Government to implement a compulsory redundancy programme, if required and only as a last resort, for the specific group of staff impacted by the Strategic Change Programme.
26. The Head of People & Culture provided an update on status of the situation with the impacted group, including voluntary redundancy uptake, the upcoming internal advertising of vacancies

and closed recruitment process and subsequent consultation process which will be undertaken with any remaining staff. It was noted that communication with all parties had been positive and proactive throughout, despite the challenging circumstances.

- 27. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on changes to the structure of the Scottish Government's VisitScotland sponsor team. The integration of the tourism sponsor, tourism policy, and major events teams was welcomed as a positive development.
- 28. The Chief Executive Officer noted the current industry position to be challenging, however with Scotland positioning more positively than rest of UK. The organisation is responding with additional funding, activating summer activity and short break promotions, and securing media for Autumn/Winter across all channels.
- 29. The Chief Executive Officer confirmed that strategic positioning would be addressed at the upcoming ELG Strategy Day in August and reflected in our future workforce development plans.

The Board noted the CEO Report update.

STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 30. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on the progress of the Strategic Change Programme workstreams, referring to the Highlight Report included in the Board pack. All workstreams were noted to be on track.
- 31. The Chief Executive Officer noted an upcoming change to the Senior Leadership Team with the introduction of a new Chief Technical Officer role. The role will lead on technology strategy to integrate AI and automation to drive organisational efficiency and support ongoing data-driven decision-making. As part of our workforce development, functional responsibilities for each area of the business are being reviewed, more information will be brought to the next Board meeting.

The Board noted the update.

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE MEETING UPDATE

- 32. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) highlighted the update from the recent meeting on 2nd July noting that all risks had been presented to the ARC and there were no significant risk concerns or matters to raise with the Board.

The Board noted the ARC meeting update.

FINANCE AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 33. The Director of Corporate Services presented the Finance & Business Performance Report. It was noted that the risk register section was now updated to reflect our new strategies and Management and Board's recent risk reviews. All items were noted to be on track and with no concerns or matters to be raised with the Board.

The Board noted the Finance and Business Performance Report.

AOB

34. The Chief Executive Officer noted receipt of a Freedom of Information request on 28th July regarding any correspondence relating to funding for the 2025 Nexo Championships. The Board and Chair reviewed each of the four separate request points and all confirmed that no correspondence had been exchanged via any channels during the specified period.

SOUTH OF SCOTLAND OVERVIEW

(The Destination Development Director - South of Scotland, Director of Strategy & Insight - South of Scotland Enterprise, Chief Officer for Economic Development - Scottish Borders and Chief Executive Officer - South of Scotland Destination Alliance joined the meeting.)

1. The Board received a timeline of key developments in the South of Scotland since the opening of the Borders Railway in 2015, including establishment of independent DMOs, formation of SOSE and SSDA and launch of the Regional Economic Strategy.
2. The external stakeholder group highlighted the strength of industry partnerships, which has significantly enhanced regional connectivity and collaboration. A unified, action-oriented Regional Economic strategy is in place, with a quarterly report published to track progress against targets. Collaborative efforts were focused on market, place, and experience development, with upcoming initiatives including £400m Center Parcs investment (in planning) and River Tweed walking/cycling trail to be launched in 2028. Support from EventScotland and RTIF and regional achievements at the South of Scotland Thistle Awards were also noted.
3. The Board discussed workforce housing and transport issues in relation to supporting the planned Center Parcs development. Recruitment challenges within the hospitality sector were noted and the requirement for ongoing multi-agency support within the region for skills development, retention and employment.
4. Discussion followed on visitor distribution and ensuring a broader regional benefit beyond the Borders, including opportunity to develop products for international market in Dumfries and Galloway by harnessing joint investment opportunities, with example of Stranraer coupled with the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere.
5. Opportunity was identified for preventative support from VisitScotland in helping current businesses increase profitability. A current reliance on domestic market was noted, with opportunity to develop an international narrative, particularly for North America, alongside opportunity for potential support from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.
6. The Board noted the need for strong support from Parliament for Dumfries and Galloway to leverage opportunities for future attractions following the loss of the National Park bid.
7. The external stakeholder group thanked VisitScotland for their support in the region and noted the value of VisitScotland insights and data and the support to businesses provided by the Business Support Hub.
8. The Board commended the region's achievements to date and strength of partnership working across the region.

(The Destination Development Director - South of Scotland, Director of Strategy & Insight - South of

Scotland Enterprise, Chief Officer for Economic Development - Scottish Borders and Chief Executive Officer - South of Scotland Destination Alliance left the meeting.)

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.