

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 29 January 2026 at VisitScotland’s Office in Glasgow and via video conference (MS Teams)

Present: Stephen Leckie (Chair)
Barbara Smith
Lindsey Paterson
Steven Walker (MS Teams)
Cara Aitchison
Shona Marsh
Paul Easto
Keith Nicholson (MS Teams)

In attendance: Vicki Miller (Chief Executive Officer)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Events)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Cat Leaver (Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence)
Jill Walker (Director of Marketing)
Mike Slack (Chief Technology Officer)
Lynn Jack (Chief People and Culture Officer)
Emma Hallington (Senior Advisor to CEO)
Joanne Hellen (Executive Assistant)
Anne-Marie Greer (Head of Financial Services) – *attended for the Financial & Governance items*
John Quinn (Head of Data & Insights) – *attended for the Competitive Intelligence Update*

Observers: Gary Cox, Deputy Director for Business Strategy and Tourism (Scottish Government)

Apologies: None

Minutes: Joanne Hellen

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed the attendees to the hybrid meeting. On behalf of the Board, the Chair paid tribute to Head of Corporate Governance and Performance, following her recent passing, noting her significant contribution to VisitScotland and the Executive Leadership Group.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 04 December 2025

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 04 December 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised for this meeting.

MATTERS ARISING

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

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

5. The Director of Corporate Services presented two policies for approval, following their presentation for consideration at the previous meeting.
 - Internal Environmental Sustainability Policy
 - Generative AI Policy

The Board approved the two policies.

6. The Director of Corporate Services presented a new Register of Interests Policy to the Board for consideration. This new policy has been developed to formalise existing practices and includes requirements for team members involved in procurement processes and grant allocations.
7. The Board was reminded that it is the personal responsibility of each member to ensure their register of interest records remain up to date.

ACTION: Board feedback on the Register of Interest Policy to be provided via the dedicated email channel prior to March meeting.

CHAIR REPORT

8. The Chair provided the Board with a written update on his recent VisitScotland activities, including an recent meeting with the Chair of VisitBritain.
9. In light of the latest funding position and anticipated changes in government personnel, the Board discussed and how VisitScotland could play a key role in developing Scotland's broader economic profile, beyond tourism. Opportunities were noted for the organisation to strengthen internationalisation efforts, improve efficiency across the public sector, and deepen understanding of the visitor economy's contribution to wider government and wellbeing objectives.
10. The Board discussed how best to demonstrate VisitScotland's capacity to deliver more within existing constraints. The Chief Executive Officer noted that VisitScotland should ensure a smarter, prioritised approach, to avoid overstretch while maximising organisational impact.
11. The Board discussed the generally static nature of VisitScotland's budget over time despite increased demands, and the potential for the organisation to challenge this. Evidence-based proposals were encouraged to demonstrate the potential opportunity and impacts of enhanced investment.
12. The Board noted opportunities to build on positive support from existing government personnel and maintain momentum in established relationships and ongoing initiatives.
13. The Board discussed the sector's skills gap and the opportunity to present a strengthened case to

government on the professionalisation of the sector, including routes to attract talent and enhance status and funding. Strong examples of skills and capability development were noted at a regional level, however with a gap remaining at national level.

The Board noted the Chair Report update.

CEO REPORT

14. The Chief Executive Officer introduced the CEO Report provided in the Board pack.
15. The Chief Executive Officer highlighted planning work currently underway for the upcoming year, which will align all Activity Business Cases (ABCs) with the Corporate Plan.
16. The Chief People & Culture Officer provided an update on the workforce planning schedule previously outlined in autumn. Several teams have now completed their reviews, covering job descriptions, pay grading and equity, and are embedding new structures. A workforce planning audit will be submitted to the next ARC meeting.
17. The Chief People & Culture Officer updated the Board on the implementation of the Compulsory Redundancy policy following the closure of iCentres, noting that the requirement for its deployment had been minimal.
18. The Board were advised that discussions are ongoing between, VisitScotland, Scottish Government Employee Relations and PCS focused on alignment with Fairwork principles and ways of working. A paper will be brought to the Board for further discussion.
19. The Chief Executive Officer noted high levels of participation across the organisation during the upcoming season of industry events and conferences
20. The Chief Executive Officer advised that the Levy Reform Bill continues through the legislative process.

ACTION: Discussion paper on a PCS recognition agreement to come to a future Board meeting.

The Board noted the CEO Report update.

(The Head of Financial Services joined the meeting)

REFORECAST 3 UPDATE

21. The Head of Financial Services provided the Board with an update on Reforecast 3 for the 2025/26 financial year, as agreed at the December meeting.
22. The Board were advised that financial risks remain unchanged with no material movement. Property-related items continue to progress, with next steps and timings for Rothesay to be confirmed, given the unique nature of the building.
23. Following all adjustments, funds have been reinstated into Market Development and this area will continue to be closely monitored.

The Board noted the RF3 update.

26/27 BUDGET UPDATE

24. The Head of Financial Services provided the Board with an update on 2026/27 Budget Planning following the recent funding announcement from Scottish Government.
25. The Board noted the flat Resource Core budget, and drop in Market Development funding with the removal of one ring-fenced fund, with Capital allocations remaining flat overall.
26. The Board welcomed the provision for ongoing investment into RTIF, noting that the programme continues to deliver strong community value.
27. The Board noted major events funding uplifts relating to golf, with new allocations against Euro 2028 and the Tour de France to be confirmed. The Director of Industry & Events noted that VisitScotland has highlighted opportunities to government demonstrating how different funding scenarios could be utilised.
28. Management noted that no carbon budget allocations has been provided, despite expectations, however will continue to monitor progress in this area and update accordingly.
29. Budgets will be aligned to the new ABC structure and brought to the March Board meeting as a balanced budget for approval.

ACTION: 2026-27 budgets to be brought to the next Board meeting for approval.

The Board noted the 2026/27 budget update.

FINANCE & BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

30. The Head of Financial Services presented the Finance and Business Performance Report, with no concerns to raise to the Board. Cash levels were noted to be higher than usual due to several settlements yet to be completed. Staff costs remain on track, with pay awards largely completed and within budget.
31. The Board reviewed organisational risks. Planning for Connect 2026 was noted to be progressing well, with its amber rating due to the fact the programme had not yet taken place.
32. The Board discussed opportunities to improve reporting to support clearer interpretation, particularly regarding alignment with phasing to assess whether areas are on track. Whilst phased budgets and monthly cycles are not currently operated, the Head of Financial Services noted that quarterly reforecasting is now undertaken throughout the year and an evolution to half-yearly or quarterly phasing may be possible. Further consideration will be given in due course.

The Board noted the Finance & Business update.

(The Head of Financial Services left the meeting)

COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE UPDATE

33. The Head of Data & Insights joined the meeting to present an overview of the holistic review and restructure of the Competitive Intelligence function which has been completed following the Strategic Change Programme. The review seeks to transform the function from reactive, activity-based reporting to a more proactive, outcome-driven approach, in order to produce

robust, meaningful, and forward-looking data to support organisational decision-making and investment. In the year ahead, the focus is on delivering core insight products and adoption mechanisms that make data easier to find, use, and trust.

- 34. The Board discussed future accessibility of insights for the wider industry, recognising the complexity of standardising datasets to enable comparability. The Initial focus will be on internal testing, followed by a phased rollout to stakeholder groups, noting the need to package outputs appropriately for different stakeholder needs.
- 35. It was noted that quantitative data insights are supported by qualitative intelligence gathered through strong relationships with OTAs and other on-the-ground partners.
- 36. The Board congratulated the team on the work completed and its forward ambition, noting the substantial value of the insights work and its potential to enable VisitScotland to provide consultancy to government and other Public Bodies.
- 37. The value of embedding a data-driven culture across the organisation was noted in order that all teams routinely utilise insights in their own work.

HORIZON SCANNING – VISITOR ECONOMY

- 38. The Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence presented a paper providing an overview of the global competitive landscape and the threats and opportunities in relation to VisitScotland and Scotland's visitor economy. Inbound momentum remains positive, while the domestic market continues to face challenges, though Scotland was reported to be performing comparatively well.
- 39. The Board discussed conclusions from the paper and how best to adapt and prioritise activity in response, including the need to amplify the visitor economy narrative as a foundational enabler of wider economic outcomes, increasing targeted intervention, and seeking additional investment where appropriate.
- 40. The Chief Executive Officer confirmed that no significant shift in market prioritisation is proposed at present, with continuous monitoring in place. Within Europe, the focus will be on maximising resource through key account relationships and partnership optimisation.
- 41. The Director of Strategy & Competitive Intelligence confirmed that all horizon scanning insights and outputs from the recent Executive Leadership Group away day discussions will feed into the current ABC planning to create a focused organisational action plan.
- 42. The Board noted the Oxford Economics projection of potential market-share loss by 2030 due to increased international investment in tourism infrastructure. It was agreed that continued investment will be important to maintain competitiveness.

ACTION: Summary action plan to be presented at the March Board meeting, setting out how investment aligns to priorities.

THISTLES STRATEGY

- 43. The Director of Industry and Events presented a paper on the Thistles Awards, outlining outcomes from the recent programme and plans for future development.

44. Performance metrics were reported as solid, with a balance of new and repeat entrants, and noting that the emphasis would remain on quality rather than volume, with awareness of potential judging pressures. It was noted that the value offered by the industry panel continues to strengthen, with a strong strategic focus.
45. Looking ahead, priorities include developing a solution to devolve regional control to the Central & East and West of Scotland. Engagement with key stakeholders is underway and implementation is expected to take two to three years. The current media partnership with News UK has concluded. Procurement will begin to identify the most effective model for future delivery.
46. Opportunities to strengthen the awards were highlighted, including greater integration with the Business Support Programme and ongoing evolution of categories and positioning to align with Outlook 2030.
47. The Board acknowledged strong public engagement and the partnership with Abbey: Destination Experts, which continues to 2028. The programme's ambitions were seen as positive and well aligned, as the awards continue to be positioned as a strategic lever to drive industry excellence, not solely as recognition. It was noted that costs must be managed carefully while maintaining quality and the strength of the brand across the industry.
48. The Board agreed the value of confirming EICC as a permanent host venue in order to build long-term relationships and strengthen political engagement.
49. The Board discussed the potential to develop media and television opportunities to complement the awards. They also considered how the awards could better reflect the organisation's role as an economic growth agency and emphasise economic priorities.

AOB

50. The Board discussed the 2026 meeting programme. With changes to the meeting cycle, Board members were invited to reflect on the strategic themes they wish to cover across the year. Governance requirements and stakeholder engagement opportunities will also be factored into planning.
51. The skills matrix for Board members will be reviewed at the next meeting to inform future capability needs.
52. The Board noted that additional meetings can be called if required. The Board agreed to discuss the Board meeting programme and membership at the next meeting.
53. Board members raised several potential topics for future discussion, including:
 - the organisation's AI strategy and the potential opportunity for VisitScotland to demonstrate public sector leadership in this area.
 - performance reporting, and alignment with quarterly Corporate Plan progress and finance reporting.
 - opportunities to reposition VisitScotland and drive organisational priorities.
54. The next meeting in March will include guests from VisitBritain.

ACTION: Skills matrix to be presented at next Board meeting.

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.