

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland board held on 27 March VisitScotland's Office in Stirling and via video conference (Teams)

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

In attendance: Vicki Miller (Chief Executive Officer)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Events)
Jill Walker (Director of Marketing and Digital) (MS Teams)
Cat Leaver (Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence)
Lynn Jack (Head of People and Culture)
Emma Hallington (Senior Advisor to CEO)
Michelle Lavery (Head of Corporate Governance and Performance)
Connor Freeman (Senior Business Partner – Financial Planning)
Raymond MacIntyre (Lead Economist)

Apologies: Paul Easto

Minutes: Emma Hallington

INTRODUCTIONS

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

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2025

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 23 January were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. Two Board members noted additions to the register of interests. No other conflicts of interest were raised for this meeting.
4. The Chairman noted that any outstanding Register of Interests updates should be submitted by Board members as soon as possible.

ACTION: Updated registers of interests documentation to be submitted as required

MATTERS ARISING

5. It was noted that all matters arising are completed or covered during today's meeting.

CORPORATE PLAN

6. The Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence presented the final version of the Corporate Plan to the Board for approval. The Board were thanked for their feedback prior to the meeting and were asked to provide final input.
7. The Board discussed the use of data within the document and how this would continue to evolve, it was noted that it was important that the document continued to reflect the the sustainability agenda given the progress VisitScotland had made in this area. The language used in sections relating to the challenges and VisitScotland's role should be reviewed to ensure clarity of meaning and more focused around the current operating environment rather than challenges.
8. The Board discussed the various audiences for the Corporate Plan, acknowledging that although the primary audience was Scottish Government that this document would be viewed by industry and used by academia as a key source of information.
9. The Chief Executive Officer noted that it was important that the document remained succinct and the intention moving forward was to refresh VisitScotland's corporate website to include more focus around the importance of the visitor economy and the role of VisitScotland as an economic growth agency. It was also noted that the document would continue to be updated throughout it's lifecycle with links to the measurement framework and other relevant data sources and insights.
10. The Chief Executive Officer flagged that the Corporate Plan will be published on 1st April on VisitScotland.org, this will be followed up by a full launch later in the month which will be part of a wider communication programme focused on the Visitor Economy.
11. The Board thanked the team for their work on the Corporate Plan and subject to noted amends updates approved the final document.

The Board approved the final version of the corporate plan, subject to noted amendments.

2025/26 BUDGET

12. The Head of Corporate Governance and Performance and the Senior Business Partner Financial Planning updated the Board on the 2025/26 proposed budget. The Director of Corporate Services highlighted the positive impact the outcomes of the Strategic Change Programme have had on the core budget, putting us in a stronger financial position.
13. The Board reviewed the proposed operational and capital expenditure budgets, noting that elements of content development for our digital platforms to be treated as capital expenditure.
14. The Board congratulated the team in the work done to produce the proposed budget and were encouraged to see the impact of the Change programme delivering on the

Scottish Government's Public Service Reform agenda as well as demonstrating a good use of public funds.

The Board approved the 2025/26 Budget

RISK APPETITE WORKSHOP

15. The Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Corporate Governance and Performance updated the Board on recent review of VisitScotland's corporate risk register, initial recommendations included the addition of risks relating to the visitor levy, the development of a forward look digital strategy and measurement.
16. The Board discussed the macro-economic risks and if these needed to be reviewed in the current climate and the potential over reliance on the US market. Management noted that there are a number of risks relating to the current economic and geopolitical environment and associated mitigating actions. It was noted that the corporate risk register will be updated if there are unclosed risks at the closure of Strategic Change Programme and also any potential future legislation.
17. The Board discussed the organisation's risk appetite and how this might evolve as an economic growth agency. It was agreed that risk appetite should be established as hungry for all strategic pillars – Market Development, Place Development and Business and Experience Development. Organisation Development should have a risk appetite of open. It was agreed that VisitScotland should operate at a risk appetite of open level for all activity areas with the exception of compliance which was set as cautious.

ACTION: External environment risks to be reviewed in light of current global climate.

The Board agreed to risk appetite levels identified above

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

18. The Director of Corporate Services presented three policies for approval. It was noted that the policies were available on SharePoint.

For approval:

- Staff Badge Policy
- Excess Fares Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy

For consideration:

- There were no policies for consideration

The Board approved the Staff Badge Policy, Excess Fares Policy and the Bullying and Harassment Policy.

DAMS PROCUREMENT

19. The Director of Corporate Services presented the DAMs Procurement paper, highlighting that this procurement had been reviewed by the Board at tender stage, it was noted that that there had been a relatively low score by the winning supplier in one particular area. Following closer review procurement concluded that this area was not critical to delivery and they were comfortable that the supplier will be able to deliver and will ensure contract

performance will be closely monitored.

The Board approved the DAMs Procurement.

CHAIR REPORT

20. The Chair provided the Board with an update on his recent VisitScotland activities, highlighting the Public Service Reform Summit hosted by the Minister for Public Finance, as well as other meetings with Scottish Government officials and MSPs attended along with the Chief Executive Officer.
21. The Chair noted that VisitScotland is recognised by Scottish Government as leading the way amongst public agencies in relation to Public Service Reform through our Strategic Change Programme which have enabled the organisation make efficiencies and evolve the organisation.
22. The Chair flagged that Scottish Government officials have offered to attend the Strategy Away Day in to provide an update and support any wider discussions.

The Board noted the Chair Report update

ACTION: VisitScotland to pick up with Scottish Government in relation to attendance at the strategy away day in April.

CEO REPORT

23. The Chief Executive Officer introduced the CEO Report and invited the Board to provide any feedback on content and level of information.
24. The Chief Executive Officer provided an update on the launch of the Business Support Hub, a key outcome of the Strategic Change Programme, highlighting the contributions of multiple teams across the organisation to deliver this on schedule. The Business Support Hub sits alongside the main VisitScotland Corporate website which is now being reviewed to allow for a greater focus on Visitor Economy and VisitScotland's role as economic growth agency.
25. The Chief Executive Officer highlighted the results of VisitScotland's annual MSP survey which reviews MSP awareness and perception of VisitScotland and their remit. Perception of the organisation was positive with a strong understanding of VisitScotland's role to grow the visitor economy. The Chief Executive flagged consistent and effective engagement with political stakeholders during a critical period of change for the organisation have contributed to these results.
26. The Board discussed the Visitor Levy, The Director of Industry and Events confirmed that work continues on the guidelines with additional advice currently being drafted for camping and caravan sites. A review of existing guidelines will be conducted in the autumn. The Board agreed that VisitScotland's role was to continue to advise Local Authorities in relation to the guidance encouraging them to consider the timing, the potential impact of a levy on their tourism strategy objectives, businesses and visitors during any consultation process.

The Board noted the CEO Report update

STRATEGY AND COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE OVERVIEW

27. The Lead Economist joined the Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence to provide the Board with an update on the new Strategy and Competitive Intelligence Directorate. The presentation included the directorate's vision, an overview of the structure, priorities and deliverables for 2025 as well as an update on VisitScotland's measurement framework.
28. The Board noted the progress that had been made and discussed the challenges around existing data quality and our ability to baseline KPIs to ensure meaningful targets.
29. The Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence updated on work currently taking place to reconcile ABC KPIs with the measurement framework to ensure that there is a consistent approach to baselining across the organisation.
30. The Lead Economist acknowledged that a lot of data sources are secondary but noted that VisitScotland Connect was a key example of economic data that enabled VisitScotland to measure impact more effectively and confirmed this year's feedback questions have been updated to give NEI more prominence. The Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence noted that there were challenges in relation to regional data which was often reliant on others and is operated retrospectively, a key focus of the for the insight programme moving forward is how to make this data more meaningful and timely.

The Board noted the update

ACTION: Work will continue on the measurement framework an update will be provided at the April Strategy Away Day

STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME UPDATE

31. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on the progress of the Strategic Change Programme workstreams, referring to the Strategic Change Programme Highlight Report included in the Board pack.
32. The Chief Executive Officer noted that the Change Programme was now primarily focused on forward looking workstreams which include the review of technical infrastructure, data strategy, visitScotland.com, events and the people and culture strategy. Recommendations of these workstream will be brought to the strategy away day for discussion.

The Board noted the update

HR POLICY UPDATE

33. The Head of People and Culture updated the Board on the new HR Policy paper included in the Board pack, the Board will be asked to approve the policy at the April Board meeting.
34. The Board discussed the new HR Policy and were content with progress to date and asked that Management continue to develop it with Scottish Government and bring a final version, along with any associated information to the April Board.
35. The Board noted that Scottish Government had advised VisitScotland that if it wanted to implement the new HR policy, it should submit a business case for Ministerial approval, which could be considered in April. The Board agreed to proceed with the development of the Business Case.

ACTION: Board to consider HR Policy which will be submitted for approval at the April Board

Meeting.

ACTION: Head of People & Culture to progress with the development of the business case.

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 36. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee highlighted the update from the recent ARC meeting included in the Board papers noting that there were no specific risks concerns following the meeting.
- 37. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee highlighted three items from the recent ARC meeting; the external audit plan has been approved; the internal audit findings have been received with no issues flagged. The meeting was also updated on the recent payroll incident, it was noted that this was resolved and no staff were impacted but has confirmed that as a result contingency plans have now been implemented.

The Board noted the Audit and Risk Committee update.

FINANCE AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 38. The Director of Corporate Services introduced the Finance and Business Performance Report and noted that moving forward the report will include more detailed reporting by ABC, in place of the previous directorate reports. This will provide the Board with more real time updates on VisitScotland activity aligned with the Market Development, Place Development, Business and Experience Development and Organisation development pillars. There were no further queries from the Board.

The Board noted the Finance and Business Performance Report

AOB

- 39. The Director of Industry and Events updated the Board on VisitScotland's response to Scottish Government's proposal to establish a new National Park in the Galloway area (including parts of East and South Ayrshire). Confirming that the Scottish Government Cabinet will meet in June to consider the recommendation.
- 40. The Senior Advisor updated the Board on staffing changes in the CEO office with a new Business Manager and Executive Assistant starting in post in April. The Advisor will provide Board members with updated lines of communication and responsibilities.
- 41. The Chief Executive Officer updated the Board on the proposed agenda for the Strategy Away Day, taking place in Troon in April. It was also noted that this meeting would be the final meeting for Keith Nicolson, the Chairman is working with the Public Appointments Committee to recruit replacement.

ACTION: VisitScotland to provide updated communication lines to CEO office

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.