Key Notes & Actions

1. Funding Update

- All funds being administered by VisitScotland have been launched or are about to be launched. 3 funds are in the final stages and will be signed off by the end of the week.

  All funds are operating well and any issues arising are being dealt with immediately.

- Sector and Destination Operational and Market Readiness Fund
  - Most approved applications have now passed through the Finance system and payments to successful organisations are being made.

- Weddings fund due to close on Thursday 25th February at 5.00pm.

- An update on Local Authority funds, SFBF, B&B, large self-catering and exclusive use is expected tomorrow (25th) at the STERG meeting.

2. Issues Raised

- G.Morrison highlighted that an issue raised 2 weeks ago regarding the SFBF has still not been resolved. Previously the SGov had confirmed that the hospitality elements of Visitor Attractions were eligible for the Top Up fund, however many ASVA members have confirmed that their Local Authorities have denied them the Top Up because they didn’t get written clarification from the SGov that the hospitality elements of Visitor Attractions were eligible for the Top Up fund.

  **Action:** G.Morrison to email R.Graham with details of the Local Authorities who are not making payments as it should be consistent across the country. R.Graham to raise at STERG.

- F.Campbell advised the group that she has written to SGov regarding the large self-catering grant as there has been no movement on it. It was noted that many funds have had an uplift on their funds however this has not applied to self-catering.

  In addition it is believed that the B&B Council Tax fund has been withdrawn in order to make it fit for purpose. The main issue here is that the funds aren’t moving.
F.Campbell submitted a proposal to SGov early last week which outlined a Council Tax option for self-catering, this was due to be presented to Kate Forbes last week however this has not yet happened.

**Action: R.Graham to raise formally at the STERG meeting tomorrow (25th).**

- W.Macleod noted that UKH (Scotland) has been uncovering a number of inconsistencies in approach and interpretation across Local Authorities and that Hugh Lightbody had been very helpful in trying to resolve these issues.

- W.Macleod highlighted that clarity is required on state aid de minimus as it applies to financial support as we move forward. It was noted that there has been no response from the SGov State Aid unit on this. Clarification from the UK Gov also required on state aid now that we are no longer part of the EU. W.Macleod requested that this is raised at STERG.

**Action: R.Graham to follow up with the SGov state aid team as VisitScotland has a direct link.**

- R.Graham confirmed that he had received the Agritourism issues sent by Caroline Millar and noted that these would be raised at STERG tomorrow (25th).

C.Millar reiterated the following points:
- Self-catering grants are not flowing
- Support for this lockdown is less than the previous lockdown despite being a longer period of time.
- There has been no support for self-catering which accommodates <7.
- Agritourism members were advised to apply to Local Authorities for discretionary funding, however feedback received has advised that the discretionary fund is only for those who have received no funding to date. Is this right?

**Action: R.Graham to confirm the interpretation of the discretionary fund at STERG, it was noted that this shouldn’t be the case.**

- Specific business examples went to SGov a few weeks ago - is there an update?
  **Action: No update has been received. R.Graham to raise at STERG**
- Is a specific Agritourism fund, for those not able to source any funds possible? The diversified nature of many Agritourism businesses has excluded them from many of the funds that they could have applied for.

- D.Macleod highlighted that the roadmap announced by the FM has provided no certainty on when businesses will be able to reopen and therefore clarity is required, (for all sectors), on how long the funding will last. How far will core funding, furlough etc. be extended? If the sector is to be closed for longer then ongoing funding will be required.

**Action: R.Graham noted that the point on extended funding was well made and that it would be raised at STERG during funding discussions.**

- A.Rankin reiterated that the FM’s announcement yesterday has provided no clarity for businesses and this will have a significant impact on the outdoor sector and the marine sector. For the charter and small cruise ship sector it is now the end of the line, they have no clarity on trading or any dispensation on the 2m rule.

There is serious concern that in Scotland we are doing nothing to progress discussions around testing protocols, vaccination passports, mechanisms to get people moving again – this will significantly impact businesses.

There are businesses in the marine sector who don’t know whether they will be able to continue and
Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG)

complete confusion for many operators who cannot trade.

It was noted that if businesses close and vessels are sold they will leave Scotland and Scotland will be left without the necessary infrastructure.

Sail Scotland and Wild Scotland are working on a crisis submission to the Cabinet Secretary. This will be submitted tonight in advance of a meeting on Monday 1st March.

Action: R.Graham to feedback to SGov tourism team at STERG tomorrow (25th)

- S.French highlighted the growing frustration and anger among the inbound tour operators due to the lack of clarity on international travel. There is a complete lack of urgency for a timeline on international travel. Significantly more funding will be required if 2021 is anything like 2020.

- W.Macleod highlighted that the one off grant schemes although very welcome, for many businesses are eroded on the day they are received, in addition the SFBF payments are inadequate. Given Scotland’s dependency on the UK Gov for additional funding there is a real concern that if the UK and Scotland are moving at different speeds for reopening then there needs to be different speeds for supporting businesses. This needs to have a 4 nations approach particularly as we are approaching elections.

- V.Brooks, noted real concern from the outdoor sector as they are unable to plan for reopening. Outdoor businesses require time to prepare before opening, for example, training for instructors, which can’t take place in Level 4.

Huge concern about lack of alignment between Scotland and England and the impact this will have on bookings.

The sector has had a lack of funding, the current fund is specifically for restarting businesses, however there is an immediate need for emergency funding for survival. A meeting with the Cabinet Secretary is scheduled for Monday 1st March.

- J.White noted in the chat that, seasonal seaside amusement arcades, High Street Gaming Centres and machine suppliers to pubs are furious that there was no clarity yesterday (in the FM’s statement). Businesses are going bust as we speak. We are not getting the support we need, nor any clear line of sight as to when we can open.

- G.Morrison challenged the need to continually submit requests for addition funds based on the fact that if current funding was expected to last until March and businesses were not likely to open until later, e.g. May then shouldn’t the funding be extended? It was also reiterated that the funding provided through the SFBF is tiny in comparison to what some of the larger businesses in the sectors need.

Action: R.Graham acknowledged this point and agreed to raise at STERG tomorrow (25th).

- A.Rankin noted a lack of faith in how the SGov are managing funding support and highlighted that last week had been given 24hrs to submit a funding paper. This is not acceptable.

- It is recognised that there is genuine confusion between the many funds that are available, what they are for, the period of time that they are expected to cover etc. It was noted that in Wales there is one fund for all sectors which avoids confusion and prevents people falling though the gaps. Learnings should be taken from here for future fund delivery
3. VisitScotland Activity

- VS have submitted to SGov a Visitor Management communication proposal which is related to the opening up of the countryside. As this is an educational piece of activity it is expected that this will go ahead just as soon as VS are able to.
- VS have also submitted a proposal for a domestic campaign, which is ready to go, however VS are still waiting on the green light from SGov. VS have raised concern that Scotland could be left behind as other parts of the UK activate their campaigns.

4. Recovery Planning Process

- The recovery planning process has been broken into 3 phases to meet some key government dates:

  **Phase 1:** Priority short term (up to 2 years) recovery proposals for SGov support.
  STERG met with the Tourism Task Force on 11th February to share 8 short term recovery initiatives, which were identified from the Task Force recommendations. These initiatives will be submitted to Cabinet at the beginning of March for immediate funding.

  NOTE: THIS IS OVER AND ABOVE THE IMMEDIATE AND URGENT NEED FOR ONGOING BUSINESS SUPPORT AND ANY OTHER EXISTING BUDGETS WHICH HAVE BEEN AGREED.

  **Phase 2:** Develop full set of short term, (up to 2yrs) and medium term, (2-5yrs) proposals which require SGov support and which will enable Scottish tourism achieve its vision of recovery.
  (Target date for submitting to Scottish Government end of May)

  **Phase 3:** Review, adjust and continue to build the recovery plan.

  The recovery planning process is a stepping stone to getting us back on track towards the ambitions outlined in Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future.

- G.Morrison noted that during the Task Force meeting a number of members were keen to be involved in the shaping of the proposals, clarity required as to whether this happened yet or is still to happen?

  **Action:** K.Christie to confirm the status of the recovery proposals and update G.Morrison.

5. AOB

- K.Bramham requested clarification on the next intake for the Tourism & Hospitality Development Talent Development Programme.

  **Action:** R.Graham to follow up with Lawrence Durden at the STERG meeting tomorrow (25th).

6. Closing Comments

- The key issues which were identified during the meeting are summarised as follows:
  - Clarity on when businesses will be able to reopen
  - The urgent need for significant additional funding that will allow businesses to survive until the point of reopening.
  - Concern about forthcoming elections and purdah and the ability to influence SGov in this period.
  - Critical for SGov to recognise that once we move back to a level system, businesses who may legally be able to open in a L3 or L2 still may not viably be able to open for business.
  - Clarity on visitors from England needed.

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Next Meeting
Wednesday 10th March, 9.00am-9.30am