

TOURISM POLICY GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Monday 3rd March 2008

Hume Room, Capital House

Attendees

Douglas Logan (Chair)
Graham Birse
Rob Moore
Alastair McIntosh
Lesley Parsons
Pat Denzler
David Hinnrichs
Stephen Spencer
Martin Hunt
Ian D'Annunzio-Green
Iain Limond
William Sleigh
Julie Sanderson (minutes)

Apologies

Alison Ross
Lynn Jones
Alex Stewart
Laura Gordon
Richard Jeffrey
Lenny Hughes

Guests

Simon Williams, ETAG Champion
Ian Herbert, Chief Executive,
Scottish Tourism Forum

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

D Logan welcomed Simon Williams, who was giving a presentation on the Transient Visitor Levy. Also, Iain Herbert, Chief Executive of the Scottish Tourism Forum. He also welcomed new members Iain Limond of JAC Travel Scotland and William Sleigh of WL Sleigh.

Apologies were received (see above).

2. MATTERS ARISING:

2.1 VISITSCOTLAND RESTRUCTURE

Details on the restructure had been sent out recently to members. The interesting part will be to see how the enlarged remit of the Business Engagement Directorate will work out, as this is the one part of VisitScotland which the industry has been most unhappy with. There have been new positions created, but no redundancies. Ben Carter, the current Network Manager for Edinburgh & the Lothians, has got a new job at a higher level. Also it will be interesting to see what happens with the Area Tourism Partnerships, as the Edinburgh & Lothians one has not worked as well as other areas – perhaps because VisitScotland see ETAG as being the industry body?

2.2 CHAMBER EVENTS

The Chamber is looking at holding an event about the possible benefits for all businesses from the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Unfortunately, the last Tourism specific event had to be cancelled due to the lack of numbers.

2.3 UPDATE ON TIC TICKET SELLING OF LOTHIAN BUSES PRODUCTS

L Parsons advised that the TIC was continuing to sell the Tour Bus Tickets, as this agreement had been in place for a number of years and generated significant volume. However, they would stop selling the Edinburgh Shuttle tickets at the end of March, after 7 months, as this has not met with TIC sales targets and ES were not prepared to increase commission by 20%. The TIC office also said that it took too long to train staff to see these tickets – although an online purchase by a first time user can generally be processed in approximately 2 minutes.

2.4 UPDATE ON NOTICE BOARDS ON HIGH STREET

S Spencer said that he was concerned about the report in the Edinburgh Evening News implying that the problem with Notice Boards etc. on the High Street has been solved by the Council's 'blitz' last October. He now had the name of a contact within the Council, which meant that he could go direct re signage for The Real Mary King's Close. However the problem persisted on the High Street and elsewhere in Edinburgh.

2.5 PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO TOURISM

D Logan advised members that the written submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Tourism were on the Parliament website. The City of Edinburgh Council's submission had the following comment with regard to raising extra tourism revenue:-

"A transient visitor tax levy offers opportunities to increase revenue, to support investment in tourism infrastructure and promotion, at relatively low risk".

He also advised members that there had been, so far, two lots of oral evidence to the inquiry: one from a group of pax re tourism skills and another group re quality. Iain Herbert advised that the Scottish Tourism Forum would be giving oral evidence in April.

At this point in the meeting, it was agreed that we should move round the Agenda items:

3. AOCB

3.1 The date of the next meeting is Monday 3rd June, 11am. An invitation will be sent to Dave Anderson, who takes over from Andrew Holmes as Head of Economic Development at the City of Edinburgh Council. It was also agreed that we should invite someone from VisitScotland to update members on how the new Networks would develop, with the reduction in "Areas" from 14 to 16.

If any member is able to "host" one of our quarterly meetings, can they please let D Logan know.

3.2 S Williams advised members of possible problems regarding the lack of hotel bedrooms for the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in 2014. 5000 rooms would be needed in the central belt area of Scotland. It was very unlikely that Hotel Revenue Managers would be able to allocate this amount of rooms and meeting(s) had been organised with them. Meetings are taking place as Byron are the only agency selling tickets.

3.3 D Hinrichs advised that business had been moderate for January but poor in February. I D'Annunzio-Green said that business tourism had been excellent in these months. Also, A McIntosh said that visitor numbers for the Whisky Heritage Centre were also up.

3.4 G Birse advised members that he chairs the Open for Business group which aims to promote the message during Edinburgh's tram construction. He is happy to provide information to the group as requested.

3.5 M Hunt advised that Alice Wood (formerly US marketing at the Scottish Tourism Board) and now employed by him was on a 6 month sabbatical in India helping to promote the next Commonwealth Games there.

3.6 I Herbert reminded members that this was the start of Scottish Tourism Week and that there should be good press coverage of the main events.

3.7 S Spencer reminded members that Pride & Passion were having a whole month of "Back to the Floor" and he hoped that many Management executives in the industry would take part.

3.8 I Limond said that his company had found that advance bookings in June were "soft" at the moment compared to previous years. He cited two possible reasons – possible visitors from European countries, who had teams in the Euro finals, might be putting off travelling during the finals. Also, traditionally, there is always a

downturn in US visitors travelling abroad during a US election year.

3.9 EICC extension is no further forward and The Assembly Rooms are possibly closing for refurbishment. The issue remains that there is no suitable venue in Edinburgh to hold large number of delegates.

4. DESTINATION EDINBURGH – GRAHAM BIRSE

G Birse explained that work had been commissioned by Scottish Enterprise and The City of Edinburgh Council to look at the ways Edinburgh promotes itself. The research is being carried out by Michael Hayman at the Communication Group. Dave Anderson will take ownership of this review in his new role at the Council. G Birse will keep the group updated on progress.

5. TRANSIENT VISITOR LEVY

Simon Williams gave a short presentation on the work that Segal Quince Wicksteed had done for ETAG on this. Cllr Tom Buchanan then gave an update on the views of the City of Edinburgh Council on this. He also said that he had written to the Minister, Jim Mather, for confirmation of his offer to match any money that industry raised direct. Following a question, he confirmed that this must be an industry lead initiative and that any money raised would be “ring-fenced” by the Council.

The next meeting will be held on Monday 2nd June, 11am, Capital House.

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