

Note of STA Board Meeting Tuesday 3rd December 2024 The Social Hub, Glasgow

In attendance

Rebecca Brooks (RB), John Henderson (JH), David Lonsdale (DL), Alex McKie (AM), Calum Ross (CR), Alison McRae (AM), Michael Golding (MG), Alex Borland (AB), Andy Cliffe (AC), Marshall Dallas (MD), James Withers (JW), Scott Inglis (SI), Clare Winskill (CW).

Apologies

Scott Inglis (SL), Clare Winskill (CL), Alex Borland (AB)

In attendance – STA

Marc Crothall (MC)

Elaine Wilson (EW) – online

Ruth Souter (RS) – Minute taker

Welcome / Apologies - RB

Apologies from Scott Inglis, Clare Winskill and Alex Borland were noted.

Minute from 11th September 2024 - RB

Minute was approved.

Matters arising - no matters arising.

Meeting Part 1

1. Welcome and apologies

- RB welcomed those present and online.

2. Minute of last full board meeting – September 2024

a) Renewals

- Nothing unusual/abnormal regarding renewals.
- Based on the current economic climate, some members have not renewed.
- Several larger members due for renewal in January 2025 and we are continuing to grow and shape our relationship with them.
- Renewal process has slightly changed. It is no longer a simple, automated process. Members are seeking more for their money and pursuing further
- Businesses seeing growth within areas of the sector have sought to increase membership level, which is very positive.

b) Financials – End of year profit to be carried forward.

c) Recruitment – Changed from previous meeting, footnote was attached to explain changes.

3. STA Financials

- AAB finance pack provided to all Board Members highlighting current, accurate, finances up until 30th of November 2024.
- Slight amendment made to year end under payroll, as E Weatherston leaving STA and new staff member E Wells starting role on contract rather than salaried position.
- AAB have finalised and allocated their budget before STA were able to secure them as a new patron. Still keen to support the STA under possible sponsorship. Currently undergoing discussions.
- Visit Scotland giving £10k funding. Which will go against costs of Signature Conference in March 2025.
- Agreement made to increase fees in January for new members.
- As of April onwards, all current members fees will also increase in line with inflation. MC drawing up forecasts for this throughout December.
- 3 staff on payroll, with 2 staff under contract.
- STA Signature Conference Series is a big driver. Tickets went live for early release tickets on 2nd of December, with previous DMO/Council discount ending.
- MG suggested extra column is added to finances to account for forecast for year end.
- Cashflow will be re-visited going forwards from now.

4. Political Engagement

- STA's engagement with the First Minister and Business Minister continues to be good.
- Navigating a very different economic and policy landscape and although relationships with the Scottish Government are positive, key policy asks are still not being driven forward by them.
- STA have seen a slight shift in membership as members have raised expectations and are looking for stronger positioning from the STA.
- STA remains the voice of the industry with recent 56 Degree Insight industry survey being sent to Scottish Government alongside a note.
- MC and team continue to deliver on Public Affairs Agenda and identify new actions.
- The Deputy First Minister has found evidence from survey very useful.
- MC continuing to have regular calls with Labour's Daniel Johnson MSP.
- Other political engagements, which show both the UK and Scottish Government's willingness to have conversation with industry, include:
 - First Minister John Swinney accepting invite to attend and speak at STA Signature Conference Series on 11th of March 2025.
 - In discussion with Scottish Secretary Ian Murray MP to attend The Signet Library Evening Gathering the evening of the 10th of March 2025.
 - Business Minister Richard Lochhead MSP committed to attend meet on 4th of February.

- Selection of cross-party MSP's committed to attend Business Leaders' Christmas Gathering on evening of 3rd of December, including Richard Lochhead, Neil Bibby, Rachael Hamilton and Ivan McKee.
- Pre-Budget call scheduled with Deputy First Minister on Wednesday 4th of December, followed by a pre-Budget meeting with the business minister and the tourism and hospitality sector
- MC to attend Parliamentary Reception evening of Scottish Budget – Wednesday 4th of December.
- Discussions regarding need to press Scotland Outlook 2030 more next year to halfway point.
- Industry needs to see us take a stronger approach on issues, while at the same time not damaging relations with the Scottish Governments. Getting the right tone and balance will be key.
- Thoughts on how we position ourselves post-budget were discussed.
- Survey gave us a great insight with strong evidence into conditions in sector.
- Currently have positive engagements with First Minister, however government are not always listening in terms of policy asks.
- Need clear message from the Scottish Government about what they are currently doing for us as an industry that we can effectively relay back to members.
- Need to find balance to keep our members happy and continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government

5. Visitor Levy (VL)

- Decision to set as a percentage charging model continues to cause problems within the industry.
- Implications of the percentage model have not been properly considered by local authorities or Scottish Government.
- Although STA worked constructively with the Scottish Government during the legislative process, it is paramount that we are clear with what we take forward in terms of updated asks regarding the VL.
- STA may want to consider developing online toolkit to help support businesses opposed to a VL scheme in their area (e.g. letter template to send to MSPs).
- Majority within the industry still feel it needs to be rolled back to a fixed rate, to allow it to be more manageable with less administration.
- Slim chance of changing legislation and would involve a great deal of technicality. Discussion around the possibility of querying the possibility of a delay instead and actively appealing to local authorities to pause their plans for a VL
- Delay would give us time to equip members and give Government the opportunity to review the charging model.
- STA believe levy is positive for the industry, but only if it is invested in the correct way, back into tourism to make Scotland more competitive and attractive.
- Consensus from meet was to ask government for pause on VL. Ask MSP's to be sensitive to cost burden on accommodation businesses by supporting with cost recovery, with City of Edinburgh Council plans already in place to offer 1.5% retention fee for businesses.
- Influence local authorities through industry voice and why the VL is not beneficial as it stands – cost to administer, economic risk, damage to competitiveness.

Next Steps:

- Re draft of policy statement on VL, with clear bullets with key asks and concerns.
 - Issue updated statement regarding the VL
 - Acknowledge the mix of views and myriads of challenge
 - Represent our members as best we can
 - Put past STA's Policy Working Group
- Discussions regarding political movements continued with regards to the upcoming Budget.
 - Preparations in place at STA to formally respond to the Scottish Budget.

6. Board Recruitment

- Three agency proposals were sourced – Xpress/Berkley, Carlyle and Odgers.
- Large variation in costs.
- All agencies were provided a brief and timeline with recruitment process to conclude in March 2025.
- New Board Members to shadow from April 2025, until September 2025.
- Agreement made to move forward with Odgers tender, to secure the correct person, with the correct skillset.

7. Signature Conference Series 2025

- Taking place in Edinburgh on the 10th and 11th March 2025.
- Tickets went live on 2nd of December and can be purchased [here](#). This is an early release price, and tickets prices will rise again in February.
- Conference series consists of a set of Workshops run on Monday 10th March, covering aspects of Net Zero, Destination management and leadership, Finance and IT.
- There will be an Evening Gathering on the 10th, held at The Signet Library, Edinburgh.
- Finishing with the conference on the 11th of March at the EICC. Starting with Breakfast with the First Minister, before delving into a day of unmissable speaker presentations, panel sessions and opportunity to network with the industry.

8. Round Table Dinner – Deputy Gov of Bank of England

- Hosted on the 9th of January at the Sheraton Hotel, Edinburgh
- Business owners invited to meet.
- Need a further selection of business owners to invite – suggestions from Board invited.

9. AOB

a) Need to grow reserves

- Discussion surrounding how the STA can do this. Suggestions included opportunities such as being Professional Conference organiser (PCO)
- Need to agree parameters with Board, highlight risk to organisation, re-evaluate Vision Statement of STA to ensure this fits in with what we are trying to achieve.
- Must fit with core activity of the business.
- Prompt for further discussions.

b) Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC)

- 40 visitors from ITIC visiting Edinburgh mid-April 2025.
- Looking to have an engagement with the STA
- The STA have organised their council meet at the Sheraton Hotel
- STA will be joining them at their event on the evening at Johnny Walker, Edinburgh.

10. Future Board Dates

- June/September and December dates to be secured in the diary for next year.
- These will be confirmed ASAP.
- Suggestion to re-visit STA/Visit Scotland joint Board meeting every 6 months.

Date of next Board meetings

Board catch-up, In person	4 th February 2025 12:30 – 16:30	DFW Law, Edinburgh
Half Day Strategy Day	27 th March 2025 14:00 – 18:00	Lost Shore, Edinburgh
Board Meet	18 th June – TBC	TBC
Board Meet	10 th September – TBC	TBC
STA AGM	1 st or 8 th October - TBC	TBC
Board Meet	3 rd December - TBC	TBC

STA 2024/2025- Meeting and Events

STA Business Leader Round Table with Deputy Gov of Bank of England	9 th January 2025 – 18:30 – 21:30	Sheraton, Edinburgh
Ongoing 3-weekly Sector Check-In Calls	3 weekly – next meet 13 th January 2025 @ 12.30	Online
DMO Meeting	27 th January 2025 @ 14:00	Online
SCOTHOT STA Spotlight Stage	26 th – 27 th February 2025	SEC, Glasgow
STA Parliamentary Reception	4 th March 2025 – 18:30 – 20:30	Holyrood, Edinburgh
STM: STA Signature Workshops	10 th March 2025	EICC
STM: STA Signature Conference – Evening Dinner	10 th March 2025	The Signet Library
STM: STA Signature Conference – One day conference	11 th March 2025	EICC
STA BOARD &- ITIC (Irish Tourism Industry Confederation) BOARD EVENT - MEET - DINNER & SOCIAL	30 th April 2025	TBC