

**Note of STA Board Meeting
Wednesday 3rd December 2025
Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa, Edinburgh**

In attendance

Rebecca Brooks (RB), John Henderson (JH), Alex McKie (AK), Michael Golding (MG), Marshall Dallas (MD), Clare Winskill (CW), Martyn Wilson (MW), Emma Simpson (ES), Jane McFadzean (JF), Fiona MacConnacher (FM), Ian Stokes (IS), Alex Borland (AB)

Online

None

Apologies

Scott Inglis (SI), Elaine Wilson (EW), Rob Wicks (RW), Geoff Ellis (GE), Alex McKie (AK), Stephen McGowan (SM)

In attendance – STA

Marc Crothall (MC)

Ruth Souter (RS) – Minute taker

Welcome / Apologies - RB

Apologies were noted.

Minutes from 10th September 2025 - RB

Minute was approved.

Matters arising – Amendment to be made to note.

- TVL
- Future Vice Chair Appointment – Interested parties have contacted RB and she will speak to them individually in Jan 2026. MC and RB planning a catch up in Dec 2025 to discuss

Proposer - MG

Seconding - JH

Meeting Part 1 - 15:30 – 16:00

1. Welcome and apologies.

- RB welcomed those present.
- Upcoming evening collaboration with the VisitScotland board, emphasizing the sensitivity around public perception and the need for constructive engagement.
- The event aims to foster industry collaboration and hear from all plus to seek ways to help address VS funding challenges.
- The conversation also covered the importance of lobbying for better support for the sector, the impact of the levy, and the need for data-driven advocacy.

- Plans for engaging with political parties and leveraging public support were highlighted, with a focus on showcasing the tourism industry's value and potential for growth. Focus on the skills agenda, emphasizing investment and workforce growth.
- MC highlighted the need for inclusive engagement with all political parties to avoid criticism.
- The event structure will be informal, with round-table discussions on skills, events promotion, and hospitality.

2. STA Finances and Team update **MC**

➤ P7 YTD actual and rolling forecast.

- Pack sent to Board in advance on meet to include all relevant documents.
- Marc provided a detailed financial update, including the actual versus budget forecast and the surplus of £34,007.
- The conversation covered new memberships and the renewal of patrons and supporters.
- Marc discussed the impact of inflation on membership renewal and acquisition and the importance of maintaining momentum and visibility through STA communication and media presence.
- STA Reputation and profile giving us a good strong place in membership and renewals.
- AB suggests applying for grants, but this can put us in a position for lobbying. Fundraising may be an option, but not something we wish to investigate just now.
- Cash in hand is good.
- MG happy with P&L and year end all looks good - £26K is making him nervous. Reserves line needs to be in place going forward to give momentum.
- Again 3-6 months cash reserves are best.
- Opportunity sits within Conference to shrink deficit. Bigger price difference between member and non-member in March 2026. Hoping this will result in growth of membership.
- Quarterly review pack will be produced monthly, and RS will send out to Board.
- Tax review is on-going. Interpretations from AAB need double checking and we are asking STA Patron RSM UK to review and provide a second opinion
- Booking.com, Trip.com, Arnold Clark and AGS Airports have all agreed to sponsor the Signature Programme 2026.
- New members joining – large affiliate yesterday we are on target to surpass new membership budget. Large Patrons due to renew are all over the line.
- Our m/ship subscription fees will rise in Jan for new members joining Jan to March and the higher subs rates will be applied to all due for renewal from 1st April.
- Encouraging as we have not had much attrition on due to rates,
- New Board and good idea to have a deep dive in members and show key patrons, supporters etc with potential to have Patrons/Board Buddy system.

3. TVL

- The discussion includes the challenges around the levy and the potential impact on local authorities and the Scottish Government.
- Have had the opportunity to speak across many platforms which has given us presence in this difficult environment.
- We have proven that we can shift the dial through persistent lobby and bringing forward options.

- The way the expedited bill is presented will present an option for flat fee or % model.
- Pressure on Edinburgh Council if a lot of other councils go fixed. We have been having private conversations with Daniel Johnson MSP to soften approach. Still a flaw in %model and the government are aware of this now. Ability to flip from % to flat fee doesn't need a full consultation likelihood will be a truncated consultation on proposed fixed rates of c4 wks. only.
- Decision on where Councils invest the money still rests with the Councils as per the guidance.
- Most Authorities consulted with prefer a flat fee option.
- Reverse on this, we have seen what has happened in England with Chancellor now giving power to Regional Mayors to introduce a levy. Consultation is under way.
- Efforts and coordination of everyone has been phenomenal.
- Industry, media response had landed very well.
- A formal note of thanks to Fiona Campbell from the STA Board. Letter to be sent on behalf of RB.
- STA Communications need to keep TVL live across socials.
- STA needs to shout louder about their success on the TVL.
- Businesses have become weary of the TVL now and must bear in mind that the industry is becoming fatigued by it.
- The conversation shifts to the political engagement with various parties, including Labour, Conservatives, and the SNP.
- Marc Crothall emphasizes the importance of having a strong message and consistent language in political engagements.
- The discussion includes the need for data-driven work to support the tourism industry's arguments and the potential for public appeal.

4. STM STA Signature Conference timeline

- Programme is now finalised.
- Mon 9th Seminars at Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa
- Mon 9th Dinner at Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens
- Tues 10th Conference at EICC
- Tickets will be released in stages this year, giving our Council and DMO members the opportunity to purchase at a discounted rate.
- Extra-large and large Affiliate Members will all receive one free ticket this year, to highlight our appreciation for them and all they do to support the STA.
- Working with Union to assets.
- First round of tickets went live on Monday the 1st of December, with next release being the 15th December.

Meeting Part 2 16:00 – 17:00

5. Policy Discussion

- a. Visitor Levy – quick 5-minute update (above)

ACTION: Formal thanks extended to Fiona Campbell of ASSC with regards to work within TVL.

- b. Scottish Budget
- c. UK Budget

- IS sees a challenge in growth with a focus on diversifying the offering beyond bricks and mortar. Need to discuss the evolving nature of visitors. Budget wise, we are holding our breath and seeing what come out of it.
- AB- £820m Block Grant how can we influence how the government spend that.
- MC – Only 25% of that is available to spend as rest in NHS and education, so its about split.
- 100% rates relief to Islands.
- Still 10% of those qualified for rates relief have not applied for it.
- Scottish Gov committed to rates reform, but no impact until 2029.
- Round table with Ivan McKee and pressure is on them.
- Living wage/minimum wage is making it extremely hard. Not good value for those employing 18-24year olds. Many young people seeing that they may lose their jobs due to this.
- Highlands and Islands – we are in a desperate state. No aided business recovery.
- Serious concern in Scottish Borders – many sites up for sale with no interest. Death by 1000 cuts.
- No growth budget and welfare budget only
- 30% more to come to UK than it did in 2019 for USA market. Become less competitive with ailing product that we can't invest in.
- 72% of operators raising prices based on our recent survey.
- Still the largest sector of employment.
- Difficult to focus on one thing to lobby as there are so many areas that need attention. Any case studies we've investigated that has a different example of tourism – the effects of different implementations of different policies.
- Affordability and quality are still the main.
- Commissioning data to see what the winners are doing from a political perspective. Good examples to show the government and how we can galvanise this is another way.
- David Edwards for Scattered Clouds would be good to do this for us.
- STA have been great at communicating the problems, but government doesn't know what to do. If we had data showing what other countries did to rise the industry.
- ½ billion pounds in UK for re-instating duty free.
- 6 billion pounds in UK
- UK Government commissioning metrics in what this would mean for Scotland.
- FM – how do we get new voices being heard and united voices across the UK and the impact of what is happening. Not just accommodation provider perspective, but business as whole. FM looking to get CEO of Booking.com to speak out.
- IS suggest the public voice should be heard – how this is pinching their pockets and will no longer be able to eat out.
- Can we look at possibility of commissioning some data work. David Edwards Scattered Clouds.
- Within policy agenda – how can we have a level of appeal to the public.
- AB - USA are fickle bunch and loyalties go elsewhere, but local firefighters, teachers etc can no longer afford to go out. Price is too high, so average earner is just no longer going out.
- MD – Pre covid times and throughout – biggest challenge with Scottish Gov was getting our voice heard and other industries peaked us to the post – i.e. tech, through talks with large banks, becoming apparent tech investments are hit or miss – so invest in tourism business that are real.

d. Manifesto engagement with political parties

- Elaine Wilson has been in touch with all political parties. Have first meet with Reform next week.
- Round table with Labour next year.

- Who comes into these conversations and how does it fit within their time.
- Programme being mapped out for this activity.
- End of January – Britannia – invite 200 into the conversation – business and MSP’s.
- Swinney committed to our March conference, but no round table.
- We need a Cabinet Secretary.
- Positive skills agenda
- MC will give nod for political parties and send info to Board.

6. AOB

- RB – Abbey is having an Edinburgh Partner evening on 15th January at Edinburgh Castle. Invites have been sent to all. This will be an opportunity to connect with industry stakeholders.

Action Items

- [] Explore ways to appeal to the Scottish public in the policy agenda.
- [] Coordinate with outgoing political figures to leverage their connections and influence for the industry's benefit.
- [] Provide a breakdown of the membership composition.
- [] Investigate commissioning data-driven work to showcase examples of good tourism policies in other countries.

Date of next Board meetings

STA Council Pre-Christmas drinks	Wednesday 10 th December 17:00 – 18:30	Tennent’s Visitor Centre, Glasgow
Board Meet	Wednesday 28 th January 15:00 – 17:30	Edinburgh
Business Leaders, Patrons and MSP’s Reception	Wednesday 28 th January 2026 – 18:30 – 20:30	The Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh
Business Leaders, Patrons and MSP’s Reception	Wk. com 16 th Feb 18:30 – 20:30	RSM UK Offices – Glasgow
Parliamentary Reception	Tuesday 3 rd March 2026 – 18:00 – 20:00	Edinburgh
Signature Seminars	Monday 9 th March 2026 - 13:00 – 17:00	The Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa, Edinburgh
Signature Dinner	Monday 9 th March 2026 – 18:30 – 22:30	Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh
Signature Conference	Tuesday 10 th March 2026 – 08:00 – 17:00	EICC, Edinburgh
Board Meet	Wednesday 29 th April 2026 – 12:00 – 16:00	Glasgow

Board Meet & Strategy Day	23 rd June 2025	TBC
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STA 2024/2025- Meeting and Events

Ongoing 3-weekly Sector Check-In Calls	3 weekly	Online
Council Meeting and early evening gathering	10 th December 2025 – Tennent's Training Academy – 15:00 – 19:30	In-Person
Council Meeting	21 st April 2025 – 14:00 – 16:00	Online
DMO Meeting	8 th December 2025 – 14:00 – 16:00	Online