

**Note of STA Board Meeting
Tuesday 4th February 2025
DWF Law, Edinburgh**

In attendance

Rebecca Brooks (RB), John Henderson (JH), Alex McKie (AM), Calum Ross (CR), Alison McRae (AM), Michael Golding (MG), Marshall Dallas (MD), Clare Winskill (CW).

Online

Alex Borland (AB), Andy Cliffe (AC)

Apologies

Scott Inglis (SL), James Withers (JW), David Lonsdale (DL)

In attendance – STA

Marc Crothall (MC)

Elaine Wilson (EW)

Ruth Souter (RS) – Minute taker

Welcome / Apologies - RB

Apologies from Scott Inglis, James Withers and David Lonsdale were noted.

Minute from 3rd of December 2024 - RB

Minute was approved.

Matters arising - no matters arising.

Meeting Part 1

1. Board Recruitment

- Andrew Lees from Odgers present to discuss current position of Board recruitment.
- Odgers have promoted the positions via LinkedIn and advertised on the Odgers Berndtson website
- Closing date is 10th February
- Key sector touch points: Hospitality, Hotels & Accommodation, Retail, Transport, Food & Drink, Finance, Tourism organisations
- Key skills focus: Technology, Sustainability, Policy, Advocacy, HR Skills & Training, Finance and Legal

Formal applications	16
Reviewing the brief	99
Interested in applying	12
Approaches made	217
Not interested	39

Meeting Part 2

2. Welcome and apologies

- RB welcomed those present and online.
- Round table lunch with Willie Rennie MSP conducted before Board meet was a success with a reaction to the VL and the impact it will have.

3. Minute of last full board meeting – December 2024

- STA finances – budget timeline underway
- Andy Cliffe has announced his move to the South, opening a new position within the STA Board. Will continue to stay in the role until end of March 25.
- New Vice Chair needed to replace AC. CR agreed to step in for the interim and give the STA board time to consider.
- Recent news above led to Board update on recruitment:
 1. 1st Stage - AMc, SI and MC for initial online stage where candidates will be invited to Signature Conference in March.
 2. 2nd Stage – In person interview in Glasgow with JW, AMc, SI and MC to attend.
 3. 3rd Stage -take forward 6 candidates to RB for final decision.
- Agreed that advert needs to be re-tweaked for international orientation. This needs to be stipulated to attract the right candidates.
- Round Table on 9th January with Deputy Gov of Bank of England hosted by the Sheraton Hotel, proved to be a successful evening with a range of businesses invited.
 - Focus centred around the NIC increase on businesses.
- December 3rd, 2024, minutes proposed by CR and seconded by MG.

4. STA Financials

- MC and RS have organised a full review of business scope with AAB on 4th of March
- AAB finance pack provided to all Board Members highlighting current, accurate, finances up until 31st December 2024. Includes YTD Q1-Q3 Report & JAN-MARCH Membership Income.
- Phasing of membership shows a slight difference in forecasting.
- End of P9/Q3 shows a change in forecast, this is due to conversion problems with memberships. Some have not renewed membership and credits were made.
- Modelling on forecast of conference has changed as conference sales increased.
- All STM25 forecast for March period.
- More generated for Period 11, at approximately £95,000, highlighting an increase from current model. April, will however, look different due to this.
- £12,000 tickets to sell for the conference to make forecasted profit. On track.
- Good headway on sponsorship for conference.

- Variance from original budget due to staffing changes.
- 5% Increase in membership fees gives a £12,000 uplift for 25/26.
- Conference numbers increasing 250/300 attendees
- Original budget profit forecast set at £2k, now looking at £4k profit forecast.
- Monies taken for conference accrued into months ahead.
- New members income for year 25/26 at £40k
- £125k in bank
- £75k outstanding
- £90k billed
- Budget for 25/26 being revised with updated NIC's and due for completion in coming weeks
- Locked with AAB until April
- Mindful of CONTRA relationships not shown in accounts and given high value products and use of space for events.
- Big drop off in DMO's as funding has dropped.

5. Update / Discussion on STA meetings and KEY events - Scottish Tourism Month Activity

➤ SCOTHOT

- Free for the STA
- STA exhibition stand for presence
- Good profile for STA – benefitting from marketing and advertising
- Scottish Hotels Awards later in the evening

➤ Parliamentary Reception

- 4th of March with Ivan McKee and Daniel Johnson MSP
- Funded by the Caravan and Motorhome Club
- Coincides with ITB Berlin which is running 4th – 6th of March

➤ Signature Conference

- Starts at 13:15 on Monday 10th March at Edinburgh EICC. Four workshops covering Net Zero, Business Finance, Destinations and Technology.
- Evening Gathering on the 10th of March at The Signet Library, Edinburgh. This is supplemented by Harris Distillery, Buck and Birch, Taste of Arran, Tennent's and Matthew Clark.
- Speakers lined up, include Minister Richard Lochhead MSP, Philip Bartlet, RBS's Senior Economist plus Scotland, Permanent Under Secretary of State Kirsty McNeil and British Lions rugby legend, Gavin Hastings OBE
- 11th of March conference starts at 8am with breakfast with the First Minister.
- Conference starts at 9am with Fiona Stalker from the BBC Radio journalist
- Breakdown of the day can be found [here](#).

➤ Lost Shore

- Meet with our patrons

- Edinburgh for dinner with the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation in the evening

Meeting Part 3

6. Visitor Levy (VL)

- EW was highly commended on her well written, concise and non-confrontable policy piece around the Visitor Levy.
- Round table meet with Conservatives to be arranged with all council reps from the Conservative Party.
- Impact the Visitor Levy has on business
- Must concentrate on competition piece
- Edinburgh Council now realising the implications that come with a percentage model
- Percentage model to get a scaling of contribution
- Don't take levy off the table but look at the current proposed model.
- Some companies can't display an all-inclusive rate based on percentage due to their own business model
- Edinburgh Council believe hotels should pay the levy.
- *A discussion around the percentage levy was held and how it is implemented across the industry*
- AMc commented on the broader sectoral impact a percentage model will have. £2 per night appears to be a softer landing than a percentage based on room rates.
- Questions arose as to whether Edinburgh can survive a 5% levy, based on quality etc. Believed that levy should be incremental.
- Imperative that people are aware of risks before consultation.
 - Flat rate still attracts VAT
 - Modelling issue is the problem
 - Some larger booking websites believe it will take at least 9 months to roll out the scheme
 - Discussion continued over difference of fixed rate levy opposed to a percentage rate and the benefits of the fixed rate proposal.
 - Important to find a model that everyone can use and has transparency of ease.
 - Must get across the articulation of damage and what the levy is doing to future bookings within the industry. It is causing displacement, taking funds from shops and restaurants, etc and the worry is that eventually the tourists will go. People will make a choice not to stay overnight.
 - Tours Operators will go elsewhere and sell to other countries that don't have a complicated model.
 - Not looking promising for Scottish Tourism/Hospitality industry with VAT, NIC, Business Rates and now the Visitor Levy.

Where do we go from here?

- EW believes it's important we see how things play out now that we have the Scottish Government's attention.
- Important to keep on top of MSP's.
- Adapt the consultation to include questions for each Local Authority.

- Agree on an approach going forward.
- Get in front of Labour/SNP/Lib Dem Councillors and educate them on the VL.
- Agreed to produce a facts and figures style document with key indicators to support local groups to help them lobby. Use of Vicki Millers statistics from VisitScotland, as well as statistics from Booking.com

7. AOB

None

Date of next Board meetings

Half Day Strategy Day	30th April 2025 14:00 – 18:00	Edinburgh
Board and Patrons Event	1 st May – am	Lost Shore, Edinburgh
Board Meet	18 th June 2025	London
Board Meet	10 th September 2025 12:30 – 16:00	Inverness
STA AGM	1 st October 2025 09:00 – 14:00	Glasgow
Board Meet	3 rd December 2025 – TBC	Edinburgh

STA 2024/2025- Meeting and Events

Ongoing 3-weekly Sector Check-In Calls	3 weekly – next meet 10 th February 2025	Online
DMO Meeting	28 th April 2025 – 14:00 – 15:30	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