Meeting note from The Cross Party Group on Tourism

Thursday 15 March 2018

1.00pm to 2.30pm

MSP Attendance

Rachael Hamilton
Stuart McMillan
Alexander Burnett
Claire Baker
Gordon Macdonald

Convener Bruce Crawford welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Tourism, which took place during Scottish Tourism Month.

The focus of the CPG meeting was on celebrating the industry, on the day that the best businesses and people working in the industry were showcased at the Scottish Thistle Awards.

To mark the occasion Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs joined to address the CPG and share her reflections on the importance of tourism to Scotland's economy, communities and our country's position on the world stage.

The Cabinet Secretary described her time (two years plus) of being responsible for the tourism brief in the Scottish Government as hugely positive and rewarding. Fiona Hyslop set out her hopes and ambitions for the industry and described how the Scottish Government continues to support the development of the visitor economy.

The Cabinet Secretary discussed the importance of digital and connectivity; the accolades the country has received; the fact that Scotland is a destination of now; infrastructure including the investment of £6 million in the Rural Tourism Development Fund; investment and the role of SDI; emerging markets and new flights such as the direct route between China and Scotland; social tourism and the difference the Spirit Breaks have made to the lives of low income families; and the importance of respite breaks for carers.

Looking to the future the Cabinet Secretary highlighted the 2020 strategy, City Deals and the potential for tourism elements, the development of the tourism offer, support for and the commitment to the South of Scotland with the £500,000 additional marketing funding referenced along with additional finance for forest tourism in the region.

Themed years were discussed – Year of Young People and the opportunity to bring more young people into the industry and a forward look to the themes for 2020 and then 2022.

The Cabinet Secretary then took questions from the group on issues ranging from infrastructure to views on any introduction of a tourist tax, short-term lets and the potential impact on local residents in Edinburgh, the importance of business events, the challenges facing the industry i.e. cost of doing business.

John Thurso, Chairman of VisitScotland responded at the end of the Cabinet Secretary's session, reiterating the positive position of tourism. Quality is up, interest in the country as a visitor destination is high with more visitors spending more than ever, and the need to be competitive.

In addition Peter Gilchrist a Rising Star Award winner from the Lothian and Borders Regional Thistles Final attended to describe his experiences of working in tourism and being involved with organisations involved in developing the visitor economy.

Peter set out his ambitious and innovative work in the Borders, which included work on community events, spearheading the Visit Galashiels campaign which included delivering social media campaigns, tourist trials and pop-up shops and managed the Scottish Borders Winter Festival.

Peter answered questions on a number of topics including thoughts on the Year of Young People and the opportunities for young people in tourism.

Other points raised included the need to create better options for young people in schools, with businesses engaging more with young people as they make career choices / select subjects for study.

The meeting concluded with a short discussion on future topics which included an update from the STA, an examination on skills and labour challenges (Brexit), regulatory burdens, Cruise Tourism.

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