

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Tourism

Tuesday, 12 May 2015

Committee Room 3

The Scottish Parliament

Approximately 80 industry representatives were in attendance for the first meeting of the Cross Party Group, with the following MSPs present:

- Tavish Scott, Cameron Buchanan, Jean Urquhart, Lewis Macdonald, Dennis Robertson, Nigel Don, Stuart McMillan and, CPG Convener, Bruce Crawford.

Bruce Crawford welcomed everyone and explained that this first meeting was very much about setting the scene, helping to put the importance of tourism into context and bringing group members up-to-date with developments in the industry.

Mike Cantlay, Chairman of VisitScotland, was invited to make a short presentation in which he contextualised the industry's prominent position by explaining the importance of tourism and the visitor economy to Scotland, the work undertaken through The Winning Years as Scotland prepared for 2014 and set out the key achievements from last year. Mike also touched on the opportunities ahead and spoke of the need to keep taking Scotland to the world in order to capitalise upon the achievements of last year.

Following this Stephen Leckie, Chairman of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, presented the industry ambition as set out in the strategy for leadership and growth, which is guiding the tourism industry through to 2020.

After these short presentations, Bruce Crawford invited the members to ask questions or raise points.

Questions from the floor covered a range of topics and included:

- The Smith Commission and the importance of the forthcoming transfer of responsibility for Air Passenger Duty to the Scottish Government;
- Barriers to expanding tourism post 2014, with exchange rates and the need for improved quality and value for money highlighted;
- Recruitment to, and skills within, the industry were raised and discussed with contributions from MSPs and business owners, who were able to explain the current challenges they face in finding the right people. Education providers also contributed, setting out their hope of working more closely with the industry in the coming years to ensure alignment of students' needs with those of the industry;
- The need for greater awareness of the opportunities of business tourism in smaller, rural areas was raised and agreement from VisitScotland that it will continue to work with partners – particularly local authorities – to ensure greater awareness of the Conference Bid Fund;

- Destination funding and the challenges faced was discussed and this touched on bed tax. There was a plea to look closely at what the solutions to funding might be and this may well be a future discussion for the CPG at a future point;
- Competitiveness was raised, with figures indicating that the UK performs poorly on price with other destinations. This led to points being raised on the need for a reduction in VAT to boost competitiveness;
- The expansion of Heathrow was picked-up and whether this would be good or bad for Scotland. Overall the feeling was it would be beneficial; but that Scotland's own aviation strategy of developing hub and direct routes strategy was a key element in ensuring connectivity for Scotland to the world;
- There was also a question raised about VisitScotland.com which highlighted the importance of digital connectivity for tourism businesses and the need for online transaction options on business websites;
- Business Improvement Districts were discussed and the need for the industry to work closely with the Scottish Cities Alliance.
- Transport was raised again, this time focusing on public transport services and the need to ensure integrated services to assist visitors in making travel plans once here in Scotland;
- The importance of active transport was also raised and discussed, alighting on the need for new and well maintained pathways and routes to keep Scotland an attractive destination for visitors seeking active holidays.

At the end of the meeting Bruce Crawford thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and reminded the group of the next meeting date – Tuesday, 23 June – with the group content that the focus of the next meeting be on the importance of transport in delivering a world class visitor experience.

CPG Secretariat
VisitScotland