

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Tourism

Tuesday, 8 September 2015

Committee Room 3

The Scottish Parliament

Approximately 50 industry representatives were in attendance for the third meeting of the Cross Party Group on Tourism, with the following MSPs present:

John Finnie, Cameron Buchanan, Mike Russell, Jean Urquhart, Rod Campbell, Stuart McMillan, Jackson Carlaw.

The focus of the meeting was on Destination Management Groups, the work they do, their coverage and their future role.

The meeting began with a short introduction from Marc Crothall, Chief Executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance highlighting the details set out in a short paper on DMOs prepared by the STA for the CPG and circulated beforehand. It was explained that the paper should lead to debate about the complexities of DMOs and the way they are funded now and in the future.

The paper itself set out findings from recent survey work undertaken by the STA on DMOs.

Patrick Laughlin of St Andrews Partnership then delivered a short speech in which he explained the importance of DMOs. The key points covered included:

- The geographical reach of DMOs, covering Scotland's most iconic places and those of utmost significance to tourism.
- Differences in their size and scale.
- On average each group employs 2 FTE posts.
- The importance of volunteers to their work.
- That DMOs are independent organisations.
- The background to their creation, falling out of the defunct Area Tourism Board model.
- The support they provide to local tourism businesses and the collective representation they bring through work with 6,000 businesses.
- Their partnership approach.
- That the total turnover from the 16 principal groups identified in the STA's survey equates to £2.8 million p.a.

In his closing remarks Patrick explained that in his view, strong and sustainable destination groups were key to the ongoing success of tourism, that there needs to be consistency of approach in funding and delivery and called for the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to recognise the value DMOs bring and to support their work.

The meeting then moved into Q&A covering the following areas:

- Issues of timescales, as there is an urgency for many DMOs around future funding.
- The need to reduce the number of DMOs and tourism groups to create larger bodies.
- The relationship between destination groups and public agencies, including VisitScotland.
- The need for clarity in the ask for support from the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament.
- The need for clarity in the role, remit, structure and governance of destination groups to ensure consistency and high standards
- That destination groups remain industry led and membership bodies with public support.
- That the industry drive the destination agenda and continue to support local groups to ensure autonomy and freedom from any reliance on public sector funding.
- That destination groups can play a similar role and function to the old Area Tourism Boards.
- The need to understand what other countries and regions are doing and what examples of best practise.
- Scotland already a source of best practice, with the Destination Leadership programme at Napier University highlighted and described.

As part of summing up, Marc Crothall highlighted the potential of a STA organised conference / workshop with destination organisations. This would add to the understanding of the challenges facing destination groups and what solutions might be.

Further consideration is also to be given to what the industry might like the Scottish Parliament to do to actively support the work of destination groups across the country.

At the end of the meeting Bruce Crawford MSP thanked everyone for their contributions and reminded the group that Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism will attend the next meeting on 17 November.

CPG Secretariat
VisitScotland