

Cross Party Group on Tourism

Tuesday 17 November 2015, 1230 to 1330

Overview

Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism attended the fourth meeting of the CPG in an open forum session with representatives from the tourism industry and MSPs.

The minister took questions from the floor over the course of the hour long meeting.

The questions covered Destination Management Organisations, the Cut Tourism VAT campaign, litter, Accessible Tourism, Broadband business connections, ferry infrastructure and wider transport connections.

Note of the session

The first question raised related to the work of Destination Management Organisations which had been the subject of the September CPG meeting. The Minister was asked what support the Scottish Government would give to DMOs to enable them to continue their work in promoting local destinations.

The Minister responded that the 250 DMOs provide great service to Scotland and the Minister commended the partnership approach adopted by the groups. Whilst the Scottish Government is supportive of the work of DMOs it was not possible for the Minister to offer any view on future financial assistance given that the Scottish Government's budget detail for 16/17 was not yet announced.

The litter on the verges around Edinburgh Airport was raised by Cameron Buchanan MSP as an issue that gave visitors a poor impression of Scotland. The Minister explained that litter was a topic that regularly came up in his correspondence. Ultimately it was determined that a change in attitudes was the only way to improve the situation and a national campaign was alluded to, supporting the work of Keep Scotland Beautiful.

The minister was asked if it was time to cut VAT for tourism, in reference to the Cut the VAT campaign led by the British Hospitality Association and cited in the Scottish tourism Alliance manifesto for 2016.

The Minister agreed VAT was unreasonably high and given this is a reserved matter it was an area the Scottish Affairs Select Committee could look at. It was confirmed that all SNP MPs were supporting the campaign.

Accessible Tourism and the measures being taken in Scotland to open up opportunities was discussed. The Minister stressed the need to present the commercial opportunities to businesses from this important market and highlighted work undertaken by VisitScotland to do this. The CPG was cited as a good forum at the Scottish Parliament to discuss the issue.

The issue of Broadband roll-out was raised. Lewis Macdonald MSP asked how the Scottish Government was encouraging the use of the voucher scheme introduced by the UK Government. The Minister responded that the Scottish Government had assisted the roll out of the scheme and that a fuller response would be provided in a letter following the CPG.

Ferry infrastructure was raised, by Outer Hebrides Tourism, particularly around increased capacity for the summer months. The Minister promised to respond fully after speaking with Ministerial colleagues on the matter.

The topic was continued by Jean Urquhart MSP who described activity that had been undertaken to lobby Calmac to increase sailings.

Ms Urquhart also raised the issue of business rates and the impact on the hotel sector and asked if this was something the minister would look into. The minister was clear that this was an area that was of concern to all sectors and that the Scottish Government was working to keep rates lower in Scotland.

The importance of transport and in particular the need to engage with transport providers early on in tourism projects was raised with an example from Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and the A83. The Minister commented that so many things outside his portfolio had an impact on tourism and pointed to the work of Abellio which put tourism / leisure transport as a key element within the company's bid.

The meeting concluded and the next meeting was set for Tuesday 23 February 2016, 12.30pm – 1.30pm, with a presentation on skills in the industry and an address to the CPG from Mike Cantlay, his last as Chairman of VisitScotland.

December 2015