

Board Meeting Minutes

Date: Friday 13th September 2024, 9:30am - 12:30pm
Venue: Launchpad, Hillary House, Prospect Hill, Douglas

Attendees:-

Agency Chair: Andrew Mackness (AM)

Agency CEO: Deborah Heather (DH)

Political Member: Sarah Maltby (SM)

Board Members: John Keggin (JK), Connie Lovel (CL), Leigh Morris (LM), Brian Thomson (BT), Gary Cobb (GC), Claire McColgan (CM), Andrew Jamieson (AJ), Florida Clements (FC), Steven Taylor (ST),

In attendance: Mark Lewin (ML) - DfE CO, Angela Byrne (AB) - Guest, Melanie Allen (MA) - Guest, Barbara Cobb - Secretariat

Apologies:

	Agenda Item	Papers	Owner	Action
VM 20-24	Standing Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologies - none • Conflicts of Interest - none • Hospitality/Gifts (by exception) - none • Previous Minutes - accepted • Outstanding Actions - no comments 		Chair	

<p>VM 21-24</p>	<p>Updates: Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to Visit Agency Board, 4th Term - Purpose of the Board o The Chair thanked all Board members for his welcome and their time in the weeks prior to the board meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o New Board members were welcomed. In depth introductions will be shared at the awayday planned in November, but all attendees briefly introduced themselves. o The Chair's focus will now move to meeting the wider civil service, government, and industry, with the aim of maintaining a strategic, rather than operational, focus. o Comments on the challenging economic environment on the island and beyond, but Board is agreed it needs to drive the visitor economy forward and there is desire from all members to contribute and work crossagency. o Meaningful and achievable targets are key, and respectful challenge of MHKs will be important. o The Biosphere was highlighted by Board members as an asset, and Chair sees opportunity for this to be integrated into the work of the Visit Agency. 		<p>Chair</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Going forward, the Chair would like updates from all Board members, with meetings held in offices and departments around the island. • A number of challenges to the Visit team in driving change and improvement were highlighted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Connectivity to the island appears to be a key issue and the Board will need to speak with a single voice when discussing it. This may conflict with individual Board members' organisations. o The Visit Agency and Board should connect more with the public, promoting the island to residents, as it can sometimes be talked down. o Wider Board discussion held about the approach of media on the island, and ways in which the agency could work with them more productively. Acknowledgement that the media environment can be negative, but that government cannot act to control a free press. CM suggested asking editor of Liverpool Echo to attend November awayday, as Liverpool Council have worked hard to understand the press perspective and have successfully built a productive relationship. CM also highlighted that the UK media coverage of IOM is very positive. o ML highlighted the department PR team as a resource, along with Lexington who hold the government PR contract. <p>DfE CO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation from ML setting VIOM Agency within the wider DfE context. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Decision making within DfE was previously quite challenging, due the range of stakeholders involved, and the breadth of areas that DfE operates in. DfE executive agencies were created to collect decision-making expertise into a board structure. Each of the 4 executive agencies covers 6-8 economic sectors. o Whilst each agency has its own budget, DfE is there to support it, and other department and government funds are available for larger projects. Transparency when spending public money is key to consider. o The purpose of the agency boards is to lead on promotion & product development, and to provide policy input. • AM emphasised the wish to collaborate across the agencies at all levels and emphasised to the Board that ML and SM have advised their doors are always open. <p>Chamber of Commerce, Visitor Economy Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JK advised that the VEF has now separated into two groups focusing on visitor facilitation (accommodation & travel) & visitor experience (on island hospitality & attractions). JK 			
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ML

	<p>will be leading the visitor facilitation group. The Chamber are happy to receive updates from the Visit agency, but would prefer they not attend the full meetings. DH pointed out that Visit would appreciate an opportunity to listen not just to present.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AJ advised that the relationship between VIOM and the Chamber members would benefit from greater working together, as legacy perceptions of the agency can be negative. <p>Airport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC provided some statistics compiled for the 2024 Government Conference, showing the following information comparing Jan-Jul 2023 to Jan-Jul 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total departures reduced 8% Passenger numbers increased 1% Flight delays 16-60 mins reduced 15% Flight delays 60+ mins reduced 42% On-time performance increased 21% Cancelled flights decreased 41% There have been significant improvements since last year, however the evening Gatwick flight is still causing some issues. Operating extensions were granted 75 days out of 92 in the last three months. ML highlighted that steps have been taken to mitigate the impact of delays on the late evening Gatwick flight, including EasyJet changing the scheduled departure time, however there are ongoing issues with air traffic control at Gatwick and continued delays in the EasyJet schedule. AM highlighted that this data challenges the public perception of aviation on the island and suggested creating a more positive message from this. FC pointed out that whilst the data may be positive, there were large numbers of passengers on the EasyJet flights impacted whose negative feelings about delays were unlikely to be alleviated by data or statistics. DH highlighted that passenger survey data from those that use the airport shows high passenger satisfaction scores. JK flagged that most abandoned holidays through Island Escapes are airline related, due to the delays in obtaining rescheduled flights. AP - MA & Hannah Lo Bao (Airport) - To look into an education piece around aviation passenger rights around next available flight. AP - MA & Hannah Lo Bao (Airport) - To investigate how information around public perceptions and sentiment around air travel might be collated, looking into whether this is putting potential passengers off travel to the island. <p>Biosphere</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LM provided update on changes to how the UNESCO Biosphere status is promoted and considered across the 		JK	
			GC	
				MA & Hannah LB
				MA & Hannah LB
			LM	

	<p>island. Biosphere status has been in place since 2016, and 10 year review is due shortly. Whilst the risk of losing the status is currently low, threats and/or damage to the Biosphere's core zones would increase that risk. LM plus others carried out a self-assessment ahead of the 2026 review and decision made to set up Board structure to broaden the focus beyond DEFA. This will help to raise the profile of the Biosphere and promote it across the island more widely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews for a Chair are in progress, with a number of excellent external and commercially focused candidates in contention. Once appointed, the Chair will recruit Board members and work with the newly recruited Biosphere Officer. DH highlighted MA's experience Chairing the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere in the UK, pointing out that she could be a key resource. There was some discussion around the opportunities of Biosphere status for the Agency, and acknowledgement that the status itself was not always widely understood, though sustainability and eco-accreditations are becoming more commonplace in tourism. AP - LM & MA - To create presentation educating Board members on the opportunities of the Biosphere and highlighting what UNESCO means in the wider tourist industry. <p>Steam Packet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BT advised that whilst pricing does not appear to be affecting Steam Packet passenger numbers, the company are responding to feedback by removing the late booking restrictions on offer tickets. Other projects are also in progress to try to improve pricing structures, though he cannot share details about this at present. ML praised the move as good for public goodwill, and also praised the recent Captain's blog explaining the issues with berthing at Heysham and why certain sailings are cancelled. Discussion held by Board members about how hearing from employee experts is beneficial, but there is then a risk of these experts being targeted with personal attacks and abuse on social media. AJ pointed out that businesses challenge negative posts and reviews on social media and trip advisor as a way of maintaining their brands. <p>CEO Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Promotion Campaign Board Presentation o After the identification of visitor shortfall early in the year, DH presented a paper to the Economic Strategy Board (ESB) with the aim of mitigating against these airport passenger losses and boosting visitors. The paper proposed a subsidised holiday package strategy, but was initially refused by the Treasury and is potentially going to be 		<p>LM & MA</p> <p>BT</p> <p>DH</p>	
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	<p>refused again. If so, DH wishes to present the paper to The Council of Ministers with Board support for the promotional plan explicitly stated in support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Board provided comments and suggested revisions to the statement, which DH took onboard. ○ AP - DH to revise statement and circulate to Board for comment and/or agreement. • Expressions of Interest for the Sea Terminal pods went out and the successful applicants include travel and tourism businesses, alongside those in the charity sector. • DH suggested that the Tourism Levy paper be brought back to the Board for consultation especially given the new members of the Board. 	Presentation		DH
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VM 22-24	Visit Performance Review (standing item) & Passenger Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper attached and accepted as read. 	Paper Attached	DH	
VM 23-24	CEO Visit Board & 2024 Targets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper attached and accepted as read. Elaborated on in CEO update. 	Paper Attached	DH	
VM 24-24	Accommodation Feasibility Plan, South Barrule & Mountain Bike Trail update <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AB provided projects overview and update on progress so far. Projects commissioned by previous Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of 60-64km mountain bike course around plantations in south-west quarter of island. Completion due September 2025. Feasibility study of tourist accommodation in South Barrule Forest with various site layouts proposed and models for future land development. To be presented to DEFA for decision on development going forwards. 	Presentation	AB	
VM 25-24	Marketing & Promotion Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA presented overview of overarching marketing campaign that has been developed, using culture and history of island to create seasonally focused campaigns. Autumn campaign video is being finalised and will be issued imminently. Other updates include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent activity - video with Mark Cavendish, the Wanderlust island nomination and associated news media, and a recent Coast magazine article. Work ongoing with IOM Government PR company to develop tourism offering. New contract signed with social media marketing agency and currently trialling Spotify and YouTube adverts. 	Presentation	MA	
VM 26-24	AOB Thanks and farewell to departing board members GC and BM.		Chair	
	Board Awayday: Friday 8th November @ Liverpool Next Board Meeting Date: Friday 6th December 9:00-12:00 Proposed Future Dates: Friday 28 th March 2025 - 9:30-12:30 Friday 27 th June 2025 - 9:30-12:30			
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