

## Board Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024, 9:30am - 12:30pm

**Venue:** The George Hotel, Castletown

**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 Stuart Clague (SC) Guest

**Apologies:**

	Agenda Item	Papers	Owner	Action
VM 27-24	<b>Standing Items:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apologies - none</li> <li>Conflicts of Interest - none</li> <li>Hospitality/Gifts (by exception) - none</li> <li>Previous Minutes - accepted</li> </ul> LM suggested action to create a Biosphere presentation should be past to the new Biosphere IoM Chair, Jason Bissel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outstanding Actions - no comments</li> </ul>		Chair	MA/JB

<p>VM 28-24</p>	<p><b>Updates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful away-day and Board is fully committed to being a Board that makes a difference to the commercial sector and the visitor economy</li> <li>• CEO has had to do a lot of work to deliver on 4 occasions to Treasury, with the support of ML and Ministers' support, unfortunately, we have not been able to secure funding</li> <li>• Had to reduce budget by 260k which has put pressure on marketing</li> <li>• <b>AM states the need to explore new funding channels and creative ways to operate</b></li> <li>• Thank you to the team for all the work they have put in moving to the Welcome Centre</li> </ul> <p><b>CEO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covered in CEO update</li> </ul> <p><b>DfE CO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On financial issue, seeing real pressure across government</li> <li>• Finance Agency focussed on sustainable finance and are joining United Nations forums and delivering a road map over 2 to 3 years. Challenges around Beneficial Ownership and Moneyval</li> <li>• Digital Agency successfully delivering AI training, over a 1000 people. Lots of interest in E Gaming globally.</li> <li>• Business Agency focussed on engineering and local economy strategy</li> </ul>		<p>Chair</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government support for large projects especially on brown field sites e.g. Travelodge</li> <li>• Lots more interest from High Net Worths recently</li> <li>• Department had to find 1.5m across the department therefore the reduction in the Visit budget, by December we will still be £300k adverse to budget it's a clear edict that there is no discretion there, the number must be hit but there is still money available in NESB and the Challenge fund. <b>(see Item 31-24)</b></li> <li>• CM brought up that she was looking at funding a joint Campaign between Liverpool and Isle of Man and that the opportunity for the Isle of Man was extensive and mentioned the excellent Manchester Evening News article and that local press in the NW was such a great opportunity.</li> <li>• All agreed that funding a Wanderlust campaign was essential.</li> </ul> <p><b>Visit MHK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SM stated she wanted to recognise the team for the positive stuff that is being said on social media and on the videos etc. And that whilst times are tough following what ML had said about budget that there was still so much positivity about what Visit is doing.</li> </ul> <p><b>Steam Packet</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BT Announced trialling a Northern Ireland, although doesn't believe it will work.</li> <li>• Condor used to supply Jersey &amp; Guernsey now they have split caused by government interference.</li> </ul> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial position has changed because of increased costs, but the position is as expected.</li> <li>• LM emphasizes the importance of promoting the unique journey experience of the Steam Packet and the need for enhanced value packages.</li> <li>• ML asked if Brian could share the marketing plan with Visit on behalf of DfE.</li> </ul> <p><b>Airport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DH provides an update from the airport, noting a 7% increase in visitor numbers from April to September and a 9% drop in October.</li> <li>• Discussion on the new software for better data recording and the impact of the Bristol route cancellation.</li> <li>• DH confirms the Patient Transfer Contract awarded to Loganair and the increase in seat capacity for Dublin flights, subject to budget sign off.</li> </ul>			
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VM2924	<b>Visit Performance Review (standing item) &amp; Passenger Survey/Interpretation Report</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DH mentions the passenger surveys for Q2 &amp; Q3 were not correct, having been distorted by Charter flights leaving the Island, need some work to add in YoY comparisons.</li> <li>DH asked the Board to consider the dashboard, and whilst numbers are down, she pointed out that the average spend is up. The team will do some work on how much of the increase is due to inflation and how much is genuine extra spends.</li> <li>BT questioned the cancelled ferries looking high and thought perhaps they were counted both ways. DH responded that she</li> </ul>			
	would check and recollected that 2023 was about 41 at the time of the Board meeting Early December. <i>Note: DH has since corrected and redistributed to the Board and apologised to IoMSPC.</i>			
VM 30-24	<b>CEO Visit Board Report &amp; 2024 targets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DH highlights the lost potential opportunity with the Wanderlust recognition and the need for a proactive campaign to promote it.</li> <li>LM emphasised the need for a clear reputation management strategy and a cohesive approach to marketing.</li> <li>ML mentions the appointment of a new director of External Relations and the potential re-procurement of the Lexington contract.</li> <li>DH points out the challenges of the consolidated PR contract and the need for specific tourism contact. ML agreed that Tourism could be reallocated its revenue and act alone.</li> <li>LM suggests exploring efficiencies and collaboration with other departments like Locate Isle of Man.</li> <li>CM highlighted the excellent coverage recently in the Manchester Evening news, and a how effective a localised Northwest campaign would be.</li> </ul>		DH	

VM 31-24	<p><b>Winter Promotion Update</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board asked why the bid for funding had failed acknowledging the amount of work that gone into it at different stages.</li> <li>• ML potentially up to 1.7 million pounds in terms of tickets, but also needed 500,000 in terms of additional marketing spend. As indicated earlier about the financial pressures on government, initial concerns were around the optics of giving visitors discounted fares at the cost of the public purse compared to residents.</li> <li>• Since then, the IoMSPCo have made some changes. Another concern around discounting non-Isle of Man residents and give them a better offer than residents. That's one of our problem statements. The second thing in terms of marketing, the £500k and a general marketing campaign.</li> <li>• DH noted that Treasury disagreed with the argument that beyond an administration cost, they were getting any subsidies back in their purse.</li> <li>• AJ pointed out that the lights were basically out in Douglas that in the Hotels in Douglas there is a price war.</li> <li>• Board agreed there is a lot of risk with Hotel jobs going forward.</li> <li>• JK stated that the serviced accommodation is suffering more than non-serviced and that he would be happy to step back and just let this be for serviced.</li> <li>• BT asked whether if both the ferry and hotel were free would people still come?</li> <li>• ML suggested we try again, not with a paper but with a proposition with reduced ticket amounts, car and passengers rather than airlines, Treasury Minister didn't want to have an impact on the Airlines. Packaged with serviced accommodation and ask the Department for funding for the promotional piece through the Challenge Fund, then request the subsidy for the IoMSPC fares from Treasury again.</li> </ul>		ALL	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CL and DH pointed out January was an impossible 'fill' for a GB leisure destination.</li> <li>• AM suggested that DH with the support of AJ could present this to the Ministers.</li> <li>• The Board agreed to re-present the bid for funding with ML agreeing to facilitate.</li> </ul>			DH/ML

VM 32-24	<b>Sentiment Report</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SC presents findings from an industry sentiment survey, showing mixed performance and challenges in marketing.</li> <li>SC discusses the lack of confidence in marketing strategies and the need for improved engagement and investment.</li> <li>SC highlights the importance of consistent marketing activities and the need for better engagement with local DMCs and tour operators.</li> <li>SC emphasises the desire for more engagement and the need for better marketing to attract new markets.</li> </ul>		SC	
VM 33-24	<b>Away Day Follow-up - The Future of Visit Isle of Man</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AM emphasises the need for a clear strategic direction and the importance of the board's role in setting this.</li> <li>AM discusses the challenges of balancing government requirements with commercial goals.</li> <li>AM highlights the importance of making a real difference and the need for a focused, strategic approach.</li> <li>DH discusses the need for Visit Isle of Man to become more commercial and less reliant on government funding.</li> <li>CL highlights the potential for revenue opportunities, such as ticket sales and cruise ship marketing.</li> <li>DH emphasises the importance of identifying and pursuing commercial opportunities to support the organisation.</li> <li>AM suggests that the board should provide clear guidance and support for the organisation's strategic direction.</li> <li>SM discusses the balance of ticket sales in this instance around Peter Kay going to residents rather than visitors, recognising the opportunity to bring big acts to the Island.</li> </ul>		Chair/All	
VM 34-24	<b>Tourism Tax</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DH introduces the tourism tax issue, seeking opinions from the group.</li> <li>LM emphasises the importance of linking the biosphere board into the decision-making process.</li> <li>AM asks for a show of hands on whether the group supports the tourism tax in principle.</li> <li>ST and others express support for the tax but highlight the need for clear details on how it will benefit the economy.</li> </ul> <b>Decision:</b> The group agrees on the principle of a tourism tax but acknowledges the need for further discussion on its mechanics.		DH/Chair	

VM 35-24	<b>Air Strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AS outlines the challenges in air connectivity post-pandemic and the government's involvement. The group discussed the importance of securing core connectivity to London, Liverpool, North Manchester, and Dublin.</li> <li>AS emphasises the need for regional connectivity and the economic benefits of increasing passenger numbers.</li> </ul>		AS	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AS explains the importance of having multiple options within London and maintaining competition. The group discusses the role of regional hubs and their alignment with UK population distribution.</li> <li>AS highlights the need for securing additional regional connectivity to drive growth in visitor numbers. The group considered the impact of losing certain routes, such as Bristol, on overall connectivity.</li> <li>AM summarises the key points from the meeting, emphasising the importance of becoming more commercial.</li> </ul>			
	<b>Actions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deborah to present new proposal to the DfE Department meeting, to include a promotional plan and a secondary proposal for Treasury with no marketing.</li> <li>Deborah and the Chair to work on a clear mandate and strategic direction for Visit Isle of Man to become more commercially focused.</li> <li>Deborah and the board to further discuss the details and implementation of a tourism tax.</li> <li>Visit Isle of Man to seek greater involvement and representation in the strategic air connectivity planning for the island.</li> <li>Deborah and the Chair to provide an update on the above actions at the next board meeting, scheduled for late February.</li> </ul>			DH/ML DH/AM ALL DH DH/AM
	<b>Proposed Next Board Meeting Date:</b> Prov. 21 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2025  <b>Proposed Future Dates:</b> Friday 28th March 2025 - 9:30-12:30 Friday 27th June 2025 - 9:30-12:30			
	<b>Close</b>			