

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 27 AUGUST 2002

REVIEW OF AREA TOURIST BOARDS

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** For Committee to take a view on the current consultation programme from the Scottish Executive on the future role of Area Tourist Boards (ATB) and related matters.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Scottish Executive in May 2002 started a consultation exercise looking at the future role of the ATB interests in Scotland. Comments/submissions on this are to be submitted by the end of September.
- 2.2** The review was within the context of the drive to improve the support to businesses at the local level in an environment when current customers and business needs are rapidly changing.
- 2.3** The key issues identified as part of the review are:-
- (i) The future role of ATB's and what their role should be with VisitScotland.
 - (ii) The present structure of the 14 Boards, is it the correct structure?
 - (iii) The importance of the cities as a gateway for tourism in Scotland.
 - (iv) The role of local authorities in ATB's and whether that role should include funding.
 - (v) The relationship with Local Enterprise Companies;
 - (vi) How ATB's engage with businesses, is the principle of membership still appropriate?
 - (vii) Ways in which information is provided to visitors both at local and national levels.

3 OBSERVATIONS AND RESPONSE

- 3.1** East Ayrshire Council Officers have been involved in a working group at CoSLA and the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development Tourism Sub-group. The joint group have produced a draft response to the issues raised in 2.3 above, this is copied as an appendix to the Committee Report.

The report, in summary, concludes the following in relation to the key issues identified at 2.3 above:-

- (i) The Future Role of ATB's:

- ◆ Local delivery mechanisms are vital, particularly in relation to delivering 'buy-ins' to national campaigns;
- ◆ There is scope for administrative saving by centralising back-up services.

Comment: Agree to these recommendations.

(ii) The Present Structure of the 14 ATB's – Is the structure correct, should there be Greater Working Together:

- ◆ ATB's should concentrate on national and sectoral marketing;
- ◆ LA's should take a key role in providing information to the public at the local level;
- ◆ ATB's already join forces where there is a common product;
- ◆ Changes in the structure of the number of boards coupled with changes in membership mechanisms could lead to business to feel more distant from the network, particularly if some of ATB's activities become more integrated with VisitScotland;
- ◆ There should be no radical change to ATB structures.

Comment: Agreed to these recommendations.

(iii) The importance of Cities as Gateways:

- ◆ Important that resources are spent by ATB's who operate as 'City Gateways' to also promote the dispersal of visitors to other areas;
- ◆ City tourism information centres should be equipped to provide more information on the rest of Scotland.

Comment: Agree to these recommendations.

(iv) The Role of Local Authorities:

- ◆ Councils provide 33% of ATB's revenue income. A total of 10 ATB's receive up to 60% of their funding from Councils.
- ◆ Most Councils have agreed a 3 year policy programme for ATB's.
- ◆ CoSLA should have representation on the Board of Directors of VisitScotland (this has just recently been secured).
- ◆ It is vital that Councils continue to be represented on the Boards of the ATB's.
- ◆ Local Authorities should retain funding link with ATB's for tourism activities in their area.

Comment: Agreed with recommendation. In addition, Local Authority membership at Board level should be increased to reflect degree of funding support.

(v) Relationship with Local Enterprise Companies:

- ◆ LEC's make a significant contribution to tourism activities in their area.
- ◆ LEC's need to concentrate more on the training needs of the industry.

Comment: Agree to these recommendations. In addition, LEC's should rationalise their support to local trade associations as this confuses the market place and their relationship with their local ATB.

(vi) The Principle of Membership:

- ◆ Loss of existing membership structures could question the legitimacy of ATB's among the trade locally.
- ◆ Membership schemes need to be clear as to what benefits will be delivered to members.

Comments: Membership schemes need to be retained but refocused.

(vii) Ways Information is Provided to Visitors:

- ◆ Question mark over value of existing network of Tourism Information Centres.
- ◆ TIC's are needed at locations regarded as 'visitor gateways'. These should be funded centrally.
- ◆ There is a need for a secondary gateway TIC in key locations where visitor numbers are already high.
- ◆ Opportunities to provide information through Council access points.
- ◆ ATB's have an important role in bringing together key local stakeholders in developing key destination marketing companies.

Comments: Agreed. Current Council developments with Ayrshire Electronic Community to expand tourism information through their network is already underway.

4 GENERAL COMMENTS

4.1 Within the Ayrshire context, the above points are generally in line with the views of the Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board, and North and South Ayrshire Councils.

4.2 With regard to the development of the new network of electronic tourism information points across Ayrshire by the Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board, we are informed that developments are at an advanced stage following problems with the software development company who won the contract in 2001. This will be the subject of a full report to the next Development Services Committee in October as part of the AATB's operating plan report for 2001/02 and their business plan for 2003.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1** That the Committee support the CoSLA/SLAED Report with additional comments as noted above.

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Director of Development Services

SC/RP/MB
22 August 2002

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. CoSLA and SLAED joint response to Scottish Executive's Consultation.

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1

THE FUTURE OF AREA TOURIST BOARDS

- 1.1 The invitation to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation on the Future of Area Tourist Boards is welcomed by elected members and practitioners throughout the 32 Scottish Councils referred to in this paper.
- 1.2 This response is the result of collaboration between the SLAED Tourism Group and COSLA and represents the formal view of the Local Authority sector. Reference is made throughout the document to "Scottish Councils" and this is to signify the change that took place in 1996 which is when the provisions of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994, and the 1995 Scheme Order took effect in establishing the 14 existing ATBs. Prior to 1996, Local Authorities had a much more direct and greater involvement in leading tourism marketing and now is an appropriate time to review the new arrangements in the context of changes that have been made IN Scottish tourism and by local government itself.
- 1.3 There is a compelling case for change. Scottish councils themselves are very different from their predecessor authorities and the culture of change is being grasped in every area of council activity, not least in the fields of economic development.
- 1.4 Since 1996, Scottish councils have adopted fundamental changes in their practices and are now responding more rapidly to societal changes in the way we relate **to customers**, the way we **collaborate with partners** and the way in which we **apply the new technologies** in a cost effective and efficient manner. The agenda is the same for ATBs.
- 1.5 At the same time, as "all purpose authorities", Scottish councils are more acutely aware and accountable for their responsibilities in providing services to local communities. The democratic duty is of paramount importance and Scottish Councils are rightly concerned that they fulfil their community responsibility for the delivery of tourism services as part of a holistic approach to "local government".
- 1.6 This paper will establish that Scottish councils are not just a key provider of support services but are a major provider of the Scottish tourism product. Visitor attractions owned by Scottish councils accounted for **14,800,835 visitors** (recorded in the 2001 Visitor Attraction Monitor), which equates to **45.14% of all visits** made to all attractions in Scotland (see Appendix 1). There is also a community impetus and expectation at local level for councils to lead the process of tourism promotion. Tourism is seen as a key ingredient of the holistic approach that has been adopted by community planning partnerships.
- 1.7 There is also recognition by Scottish councils that the tourist/visitor has no real interest in the administrative boundaries of local authorities. Recent examples of regional groupings e.g. regional golf tourism alliances and collaboration between councils and other key players, irrespective of location, demonstrate that local government

does not see tourism within a narrow focus but accepts the need to develop the market position and branding of tourism products on a wider regional and Scottish platform. This will mean integration with central support coupled with a greater involvement in central decision-making on national, regional and sectoral support programmes. It also means that the roles of VisitScotland and Area Tourist Boards must be clearly defined.

- 1.8 More than 20,000 businesses depend on tourism for their success and profitability and the sector supports around 193,000 jobs – around 8% of the workforce. In many communities of Scotland it is the major employer. This paper argues that the future direction of tourism should be the concern of everyone involved. The clarification of roles – a key aim of the national Tourism Framework for Action - should not be done in a way that constrains initiative but should be undertaken in an effort to “raise the game” by allowing all interested parties to contribute fully at sectoral, local and national levels.

2

TOURISM – THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

2.1

Scottish councils are a major stakeholder in tourism and have a lead responsibility for co-ordinating Community Planning partnerships for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their areas.

2.2

The role of Local Government is widely acknowledged. Scottish Councils are the main funding source for ATBs (providing 33% of their revenue income) and provide a range of services e.g. roads, planning, tourism, signposting, health and safety and licensing all of which have a direct input on the tourism sector. Councils also provide a wide range of information about their local areas and operate their own web sites, which in most cases have extensive links (locally, nationally, internationally) and are designed to promote local areas and their products and services including tourism.

2.3

Appendix 1 –“The Role of Scottish Councils in Tourism” (produced by SLAED – August 2002) brings forward facts and figures to show that Local Government is a major provider of the tourism product in Scotland. It provides evidence to show that it is the largest provider of visitor attractions nationally and is responsible for the largest share of visitors to attractions throughout Scotland. The key findings of this study (Appendix 1) are summarised below:

- Council owned sites recorded **14,800,835 visitors** (recorded in the 2001 Visitor Attraction Monitor)
- **45.14% of all visits** made to all attractions were made to council owned sites
- Councils own **55% of the top 20 “free” attractions** in Scotland
- Councils own **32.5% of the top 20 “free” and “paid” attractions** in Scotland
- Councils own **47% of all 199 “free” attractions** in Scotland
- Councils own **6% of all “paid” attractions** in Scotland
- Councils run **111 (21.5%) of the 514 sites** in 12 out of 18 categories
- Councils own **27% of sites in the top 5 categories** with the highest numbers of visitor

- **Around 55% of visits to museums and galleries** were made to Council owned sites
- The National Audit of Scotland's Museums and Galleries (2001) records that **councils own 42% of all 435 sites** accounting for **41% of all visitors**
- Councils own **8 (40%) of the top 20 museums and galleries**
- Councils provide 83% of income for their own museums and galleries
- Councils provide 13% of income for independent sites
- Councils spend **around £10m annually on tourism projects** supported by European programmes
- Council owned **country parks account for 97% of all visits** in this category
- Council owned "**other historic sites**" amount for **67% of all visits** in this category
- Council owned **historic monuments and archaeological sites amount for 35.53% of all visits** in this category
- Councils owned "**historic houses/palaces**" account for **20.91% of visits** in this category
- Council owned "**zoos, aquariums, aviaries, heritage centres and places of worship** account for **between 8% and 13% of all visits**" to these categories of attractions.

2.4

In addition, Scottish councils are **major funders of direct services and joint arrangements** to support the local tourism product and marketing via:

- Provision of **genealogy** services
- **Film** location and commissioning initiatives
- **Convention bureau** activities
- Community and Council **web-sites** (with key links)
- Advice and support to individual tourism businesses
- Local delivery of **Small Business Gateway** jointly with Scottish Enterprise
- Sponsorship of local **events and festivals**
- **Twinning** and friendship links
- Overseas **trade development**, tourism and cultural events
- **Local interpretation** infrastructure and sign posting
- Provision of tourism **brochures**
- Town centre environmental **enhancement/improvements**
- **Seafront** redevelopment projects
- Promotion of **local crafts** and trade fairs
- Provision of **sites and premises** including railways

2.5

Other tourism products include:

- Sports/leisure – includes **international venues of sports** and swimming.
- **Parks/civic spaces** – in addition there are nature/cycle trails, signposting and country ranger services and beaches.
- **Golf** – in addition to ownership of Open Championship venues such as Carnoustie, which hosted the 1999 Open bringing 175,000

spectators to the area, there is associated marketing, product development and golf events. There are around **80 golf courses owned by the 32 Scottish councils** representing around **14% of all Scottish courses**. Based on the sportscotland database there are 62 golf courses in Scotland actually run by local authorities, either directly or through trusts. Where there is more than one course in a "complex", each course is counted separately. This number excludes courses owned by local authorities but either leased to clubs (as with several courses in East Lothian and Fife for example) or managed under links committee arrangements (as in Angus with Carnoustie, Montrose, etc).

- **Libraries** – associated with genealogy services, councils own burial grounds and war memorials.
- **Harbours** – attract cruise ships and visitor yachts.
- Other Infrastructure – includes **forests, camera obscura, airports, fisheries, racecourses**.
- **Conference & Exhibitions** – includes ownership/lease/ support to SECC/EICC/Aberdeen Exhibition Centre.
- Tourism Initiatives – include a wide range of festivals some of international repute, film commission offices, events such as **Highland Games, Hogmanay, Dressing the City/Town, Whats on Guides for visitors**.
- Partnerships – other than core funding ATBs, some councils provide **TICs, town centre initiatives/improvements, signposting and business support**.

2.6

In addition to direct provision, Scottish councils are an essential contributor to the Scottish tourism product through their responsibilities for economic and social development, licensing, planning, trading standards, roads and transport and environmental health. This role is vital in ensuring that visitors have a satisfying and rewarding experience once they are in the area. This involves ensuring, among many other things, that:

- necessary infrastructure to support the tourism product is in place at the local level;
- visitor attractions are easily accessible, well signposted and well cared for;
- there is adequate, quality information available on local attractions and events that will enhance the visitor's experience;
- high standards of environmental care are maintained;
- there is particular attention to security and safety, for example through lighting, policing and inspection of premises;
- new and enhanced tourism products are developed and supported.

Q1

WHAT IS THE FUTURE ROLE OF ATB'S? WHAT SHOULD THEIR RELATIONSHIP BE WITH VISIT SCOTLAND?

The Area Tourist Board network currently work with VisitScotland and other agencies to provide a local support mechanism to national marketing initiatives. This is particularly the case as the focus moves away from generic area or destination marketing to "product" or "themed activity" marketing. Local delivery mechanisms are vital to ensure delivery of local initiatives and to encourage industry/private sector "buy-in" to national campaigns.

The centralisation of e-bookings at VisitScotland will automatically lead to a greater link between VS and ATB's. Administration efficiencies could be introduced by sharing certain services with Visit Scotland, similar to the processes being introduced at Scottish Enterprise in relation to certain LEC services.

There is much loyalty towards local ATB's, but there are also questions about their efficiency and effectiveness. Many ATB's are almost insolvent. VisitScotland must take urgent action to either centralise some services, such as personnel, accounting, legal – or to provide extra funds to keep these companies afloat pending restructuring. Any major alteration of boundaries will require legislation. If this should be the case then this will inevitably be carried forward in the new parliament and therefore time is of the essence.

Q2

THE PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE 14 BOARDS – IS IT THE CORRECT STRUCTURE, OR IS IT OF GREATER IMPORTANCE THAT THE BOARDS WORK MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER, PARTICULARLY ON MARKETING CAMPAIGNS?

The 14 Boards that emerged in 1996 was little more than a political solution that took no meaningful account of consumer demand or organisational integration of the industry. In a small country such as Scotland it would make more sense if ATB's were fully integrated with VisitScotland with staffs established on a sectoral/regional basis, at city or other key gateway locations, each leading on national themes within an overall national framework and providing a core programme of additional support and specialist services to the industry.

The question of how many ATBs there should be is almost an irrelevance – the key question should be what structure do we need to achieve the key objectives effectively and efficiently. The key must be first to agree on the needs of the customer and the organisational structure of delivery – integrating all the stakeholders – must necessarily follow.

ATB's should concentrate on supporting national and sectoral marketing and have strong relationships with Visit Scotland (for national branding linkages) and Local Authorities should take the lead marketing role at local council level. This is already an increasing trend e.g. the East of Scotland ATB's have a joint ERDF project

covering regional marketing. Thus the role of "new" ATB's should be to work with VS to market Scotland and regions and key centres within Scotland as an appropriate destination for Activity Holidays, Freedom of Scotland, City Breaks, Cultural breaks and Conferences and to advise on appropriate product development to support this programme. There is still a question over international marketing and the collaboration with SDI and Scottish Councils in terms of overseas activities.

Boundaries are always an emotive subject for local communities and any attempt to carve up boundaries of ATBs based on local representation and membership would be devisiive, time-consuming and could damage relationships that have been built via recent partnership working. There is a strong argument that business membership should be with VisitScotland rather than with an individual ATB. At the same time, some areas want even more tightly focussed ATB's but it is felt this role can be undertaken more effectively by Local Authorities within their communities. With the development of themed marketing at national level, it is increasingly important that local destination marketing accords with the national strategy and that funding is directed accordingly. This role could be undertaken effectively by Scottish councils for which the administrative boundaries are already established.

ATB's are already joining forces where they share a common product. This is already happening on some projects such as the East of Scotland Golf Alliance and others. VisitScotland and the ATB network will have to increase involvement in partnership working at all levels. Links between councils, ATBs and VisitScotland need to be integrated far more to ensure that councils – who provide the major share of the visitor attractions in Scotland – are fully involved along with business when looking at product development issues.

However, Scottish councils should be given the remit to lead in local marketing campaigns – specific destination marketing, web facilitated promotion, conference bureau operations etc within their own communities – linked with marketing and promotion of their own products and places.

It is essential that any VisitScotland/ATB structure should have an advisory role on appropriate product development grading and classification and for themes on which they have the lead e.g. golf. This will ensure that the market intelligence held by ATB's is used appropriately when partners, such as trade associations and councils are discussing new product development. New product development will thus match the needs of the current and future market place.

Changes in the structure and number of boards coupled with changes in membership mechanisms could lead businesses to feel more distanced from the network. Particularly if ATBs become more integrated with VisitScotland at the centre and undertake sectoral responsibilities for themes on a regional basis.

This is particularly likely if the trade associations and councils are not fully represented at every level of influence in the new structure. If the future direction of tourism support is not dealt with in a fully inclusive manner there will be increased pressures on councils to fund non-ATB

Q3

tourism activities. Further fragmentation of the organisational landscape must be avoided.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CITIES AS GATEWAYS FOR TOURISM TO SCOTLAND – SHOULD THERE BE SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS AND IF SO WHAT SHOULD THESE BE?

Many Tourism Information Centres are too expensive and there is little if any rationale for their location other than a “feel good factor” for the local populace. Customers are getting information and making bookings in new ways. Already, 2000 businesses have agreed to take bookings through visitscotland.com, the national website which has set itself a target of securing around 500,000 room bookings online by 2005.

Certainly, information sources have changed significantly and more purchases are being made online. There is also a significant fall in the usage of TICs by visitors. In 2000 some 7.4 million visitors represented a fall of 14% from 1998 when TICs recorded 8.6 million visitors. Accommodation booking income has also fallen some 30% since 1998. These trends highlight the need for a fundamental review of TIC provision.

Scotland's cities are destinations in their own right, due to the concentrations of visitor centres, local leisure and shopping facilities, visitor and conference accommodation, spectator events etc. It is therefore important that they are able to have a large-scale involvement in marketing and promotion. Local authorities are best placed to lead this activity and city-based local authorities should be given an enhanced remit in this area in conjunction with any revised ATB structure.

In product terms, Edinburgh is much closer to Glasgow than any other area of Scotland. Closer working between the two cities, as exemplified by the Twin Cities promotion, should be encouraged and adequately resourced. The benefit of business tourism should also be acknowledged as cities have become key drivers of Convention Bureaux fostering a healthy competition that has raised the game of conference facilities within Scotland.

It is important that there is an equitable marketing effort in terms of resources spent by ATB's operating as City Gateways to encourage dispersal of tourism benefits within their hinterlands in conjunction with councils at “local” level. Funding also needs to be invested in Tourist Information Centres to ensure they are equipped to provide information on the rest of Scotland.

Cities are a major brand value and also play a major role as gateways for Scotland. The majority of visitors come to one of the cities by sea, air, rail or road as the start of their visit. It is therefore crucial that investment is made in these cities to ensure that the visitor experience is first class. This will encourage longer stay, repeat visits and allow dispersal to the rest of Scotland.

Q4

After the cities there are other types of centres like St Andrews, Oban and Fort William that provide a second tier of nodal points for visitors. Cities and nodal points should be key dispersal points for visitors and each location should be regarded as being of benefit to the distribution of visitors across Scotland. Facilities should therefore be of the highest quality and standard of service. Around 75% of all TIC throughput is handled by 25% of TICs and the key TICs referred to constitute the main gateway and nodal points referred to here. These centres should be funded centrally and could be managed on behalf of the network by the "new" ATBs in accordance with a nationally adopted standard of provision

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN AREA TOURIST BOARDS, AND IN PARTICULAR, WHETHER THAT ROLE SHOULD INCLUDE FUNDING OR SHOULD ATB'S PERHAPS BE FUNDED FROM A SINGLE SOURCE, SUCH AS VISIT SCOTLAND?

Scottish Councils are the main funder of ATBs:

- Scottish councils provide 33% of ATB's revenue income;
- Scottish councils provided £7,873,100 of revenue funding in 2000/1;
- In 10 ATBs Council funding is the greatest source (up to 60%); and
- Most Councils have agreed a 3 year rolling funding programme for ATBs

In context of the status quo the majority view is that councils need to continue core funding ATB's. However there are questions as to how much influence this core-funding role actually buys for Councils at the moment. Some councils have drawn up Service Level Agreements and others make funding subject to conditions on outcomes and performance. The composition of Area Tourist Boards is at least partially democratically accountable through the elected members from local authorities who make up no more than half of their numbers. The others are appointed from the local tourism industry.

On the other hand, the present under funding of ATBs at a time when they are being asked to assist the development of the Scottish brand and deliver new marketing strategies has meant that resources are spread even more thinly with difficulties arising in establishing meaningful priorities.

Whatever the outcome, every effort must be made to ensure a proper balance in geographical and sectoral terms to ensure that influence on future direction of tourism is governed on an accountable basis and at all levels.

To ensure full integration, VisitScotland should have direct representation on the Boards of all local Area Tourist Boards. Similarly COSLA should have representation on the Board of Directors of VisitScotland so that the full influence and interest in direct product provision, promotion and marketing as well as support services provision for the tourism industry can be brought to bear on the future direction of tourism in Scotland.

Q5

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL ENTERPRISE COMPANIES - SHOULD THE MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUNCTION AT THE ECONOMIC FORUMS

It is important the councils continue to be represented on Boards of the ATB's representing their Civic leadership role, their democratic representation role and their product development role.

Local authorities should retain funding currently allocated to existing ATBs.

Local Enterprise Companies play a significant role in the development of tourism businesses, particularly through their range of business support services that help to develop quality standards and skills within the industry. However we recognise that there are some concerns regarding duplication particularly with regard to product marketing and certain product development initiatives which are being developed by the LEC network, in some areas with little consultation or input from the local Area Tourist Board. Further integration will also be required when the proposed Business Gateway is rolled out, when it will be important to ensure appropriate signposting is given to businesses.

There has been considerable concerns over roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in tourism and to a larger extent the National Tourism Framework for Action has clarified roles and will continue to lessen the confusion and create more certainty as the action plan is implemented. Local Enterprise Companies make a substantial contribution to partnership working with Area Tourist Boards, local authorities and the industry generally through a wide range of business support and product development programmes. Local Enterprise Companies are also represented on the Board of Directors of most Area Tourist Boards and collaborate with the other players when bringing forward Area Tourism Strategies and other niche tourism programmes.

The Scottish Enterprise Small Business Gateway Programme is, in most cases, delivered in partnership with local authorities and many of them are involved in formal delivery mechanisms such as in Fife and Tayside where companies limited by guarantee have been established on a partnership basis. It is important that Business Gateways are seen as the portal gateway for advice and assistance. Business principles are universal and in some respects there are no differences between businesses in whatever sector they are represented. However, additional and specialist services can be provided and there ought to be a stronger referral mechanism and method of engagement for the Area Tourist Boards.

Scottish Enterprise should also concentrate more effectively on the training needs of the industry.

Marketing initiatives and business development functions are clearly separate issues requiring different skills and resources. It would be wrong to combine them across Scotland in a single organisation. As

outlined earlier, it would be more appropriate to remit marketing to the ATB's and Scottish councils; and business development to the Local Enterprise Companies – in partnership with councils where this is agreed locally. The framework for partnership working is being developed via the business gateway and local economic forums.

The evidence is that LEC performance in tourism around Scotland is patchy. Boundaries are a big issue. Where the boundaries are contiguous with the ATB as in Edinburgh and Lothians, Fife and Western Isles, the commitment and performance is much better.

Q6

HOW BEST CAN THE ATB'S ENGAGE WITH BUSINESS, IS THE PRINCIPLE OF MEMBERSHIP STILL APPROPRIATE?

The membership structure provides a vehicle to engage in industry liaison, however, not all tourism business sign up to their ATB therefore they cannot claim to be truly representative. Many industry members are also confused as to the nature of their membership believing ATB's to be a direct "arm" of VisitScotland. There is often confusion when both VisitScotland and the local ATB's target the same businesses often in a competitive manner; this is obviously not beneficial to businesses. It would also make sense if companies who operate throughout a wider area, or indeed seek visitors from beyond the boundaries of their "home" ATB could pay a single consistent membership fee and receive services for all appropriate "boards".

There are serious questions on whether ATB's should retain member organisation status. Many believe that membership is a barrier to the inclusion of all businesses. In some cases membership is seen as an initial subscription, which entitles the member to then pay more to buy specific services. As long as quality assurance standards are applied universally and rigorously any member should be able to participate in any sectoral initiative irrespective of location.

By removing membership status there would be a number of implications:

- Membership effectively guarantees a representation role at a time when the Scottish Tourism Forum is trying to position itself as the voice of the industry. Loss of this representation role would limit the ATB's legitimacy among the trade locally.
- Is there any guarantee that enough funding will be raised to continue ATB activities, including effective marketing if membership income were lost?
- What happens to the disengaged businesses that have potential to improve performance?
- What happens to the Quality Assurance scheme if membership is discontinued? This raises the question of compulsory or statutory registration for accommodation providers. Perhaps this could be done by councils - to ensure that the full picture is maintained of the complete accommodation stock - irrespective of membership of

VisitScotland. It would however have to be properly resourced. Alternatively, all accommodation providers should be members of VisitScotland by statute, in which case VisitScotland should undertake and enforce the classification system.

- Whatever organisational arrangements are in place, any membership scheme must be clear as to what benefits the individual member will derive. Prospective members will have to see there is "value for money" in any new membership scheme.

Q7

THE WAYS IN WHICH INFORMATION IS PROVIDED TO VISITORS – SHOULD THIS BE AT A MORE LOCAL LEVEL, PERHAPS USING LOCAL FRANCHISES OR OTHER EXISTING LOCAL FACILITIES SUCH AS LIBRARIES?

While the use of the Internet is growing at an increasingly fast rate and e-business is the way forward for many sectors, there is still an important role for "face-to-face" information provision to visitors through properly resourced and effective Tourist Information Centres (TIC's). Both the industry locally and visitors welcome the extensive network of TIC's and it is important that in key areas and gateway locations these are retained. With the high operational costs of stand alone TIC's, increasingly TIC's are utilising shared facilities with tourism businesses or other service providers, this should be further encouraged as long as the highly rated service quality is maintained. However, individual businesses could be utilised more to provide wider information to visitors and this should be encouraged through local partnerships.

There is concern over the value for money aspect providing many of the existing Tourist Information Centres given that visitors obtain information in a variety of other ways including web facilitated sources. Certainly the need exists for dedicated manned Tourist Information Centres in the locations regarded as gateways to areas within Scotland. These should be funded centrally and provide information about facilities throughout Scotland.

Below this level there is a need to rationalise TIC provisions. There is a clear need for secondary gateway TICs to be provided in key locations where visitor numbers are already high. The aim being to re-orientate visitors by providing more detailed information about that particular area. In recent years initiatives have been taken to locate key TICs within existing public or private sector establishments where the provision of a TIC is of mutual benefit to the private/public operator as well as to the Area Tourist Board network. At local level there are many opportunities that now exist for integration of tourism information with other community based provisions. In many cases the decentralisation policies of local authorities have provided new opportunities through a range of access offices and helplines for more detailed information and methods of orientation to be accessed rather than through the provision of a separate TIC. There are issues regarding signage and general awareness as well as maintaining nationally recognised quality standards.

Scottish councils should be given the remit to provide visitor-servicing

facilities to an agreed national standard using the most up-to-date computerised information. This would enable both efficiencies in administration costs and a better spread of information points (using existing local authority facilities).

ATB's can best engage with businesses via joint public/private marketing and promotional projects and campaigns, on both geographical and activity/theme subjects. In this context, the existing set up of local businesses, being members of the ATB would no longer be appropriate. It is suggested therefore, that the principle of membership locally be abandoned and consideration be given to a membership scheme for the whole new VisitScotland/ATB network.

ATB's have an important role in bringing together key local stakeholders in developing destination marketing campaigns e.g. hotels and other traded associations. This role should continue.

ATB's have a clear role in delivering information and other services to visitors. However, it may be that this should be provided electronically at the most local level. There is no reason why rural pubs, shops, petrol stations cannot have Internet terminals to provide information that is backed up by local leafleting. How this is done could be dealt with locally.

The issue is who maintains the information provided by electronic means? Trade associations, ATB's, Action Groups, individual businesses? However this is done, the information given must be accurate and up-to-date. Also the delivery must be of sufficient quality and ease of use. This is often the first interface between visitor and Scotland!!

AGENDA