

1. Noted that David would raise with Jim Mather MSP the possibility of the Scottish Government making it mandatory for all accommodation providers to be members of a quality assurance scheme.

Jim Mather, Minister for Enterprise, Energy & Tourism is reluctant to adopt an early position on mandatory quality assurance for all accommodation providers. There are examples of such legislation working well in other international destinations, but the majority of these schemes are administered at a local level, with attendant inconsistencies at a national level.

At present all accommodation providers wishing to buy services from VisitScotland, or make an application for marketing assistance through the Growth Fund must be quality assured (either with VisitScotland or the AA, which operates a common standard scheme). Any alteration to these rules would considerably dilute our commitment to 100% quality, and have an adverse effect on Scotland's international competitiveness.

VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme is under review, and the development of a new three-tiered model is designed to offer consumers enhanced advice and guidance while providing businesses with a greater choice of how they choose to engage with the scheme:

Entry Level

A new cost-effective entry level assessment will soon be available to those businesses wishing to benefit from a range of VisitScotland's marketing activities on offer, this will include an advisory visit with a Quality Advisor.

A six-month pilot began in April this year involving a large range of tourism businesses across Scotland, to assess its value to both consumers and the industry. An update on the pilot scheme will be communicated at the end of the six months (October)

Second Tier

The second tier is the familiar star-grading scheme: a cornerstone that continues to provide invaluable, independent and objective advice to consumers and, according to industry consultation, remains highly valued by businesses.

The difference will be the emphasis placed on user-generated content (UGC) as a method of validating a business's star rating. Businesses will receive targeted QA visits, but by harvesting consumer feedback from a wide range of online sites, we can see where we can offer help or even highlight a business consistently exceeding its existing star grading.

Third Tier

We can confidently say that we have some of the best high quality service levels anywhere in the world and the final QA tier reflects the best Scotland has to offer. We want to distinguish those businesses that regularly receive fantastic consumer feedback; providers that display best practice in green, sustainable tourism and disabled access; and those that invest in staff training.

All three QA levels will be launched to the industry following completion of the new entry-level pilot in October 2010 with full roll-out across all new sectors by 2012.

Essentially we are taking an already successful scheme and making it better – opening it to more and different businesses such as shops, taxi companies and airports. Ultimately, it's about giving consumers what they want and recognising success across the industry.

2. Noted that David would prepare a report for the next meeting on what the funding provided to Visit Scotland from Argyll and Bute Council is spent on and where in terms of the Service Level Agreement.

Information Provision

As part of a national network of information provision, VisitScotland operates and promotes Information Centres in Argyll & Bute as follows:

All Year

- Bowmore
- Campbeltown
- Craginure
- Dunoon
- Inveraray
- Oban
- Rothesay

Seasonal

- Ardgartan
- Helensburgh
- Lochgilphead
- Tarbert (Loch Fyne)
- Tarbet (Loch Lomond)

£174,375

In partnership with the Council, and in line with the Council's Economic Development Action Plan, we will undertake a comprehensive review of information provision in the Argyll & Bute area. (NOTE: Additional monies are allocated annually by the Council and are ring-fenced for the operation of Rothesay Information Centre in perpetuity £20,000.)

Total £194,375

Print

- Contribution towards development and production of local print
- Fulfilment of consumer requests & bulk distribution
- Includes guide listings

Print Titles - 2010

Argyll, The Isles, Loch Lomond & Trossachs Where to Stay Guide
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park What To See & Do Guide
Oban, Mull & Lorn What To See & Do Guide
Mid Argyll, Kintyre & Islay What To See & Do Guide

Print Titles - 2011

Argyll & the Isles Where to Stay Guide
Argyll & the Isles What To See & Do Guide
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park What To See & Do Guide

£15,000

Contract Total £209,375

ADDITIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY VISITSCOTLAND OUTWITH THIS AGREEMENT

This section describes the main services provided by VisitScotland to the tourism industry in Scotland which benefit Argyll & Bute businesses and visitors to the Argyll & Bute area.

The tourism industry in Argyll & Bute benefits from a number of activities undertaken by VisitScotland which make a significant contribution to the growth and development of tourism in the area and to Scotland in general. These activities include:

- Undertaking a range of marketing campaigns in **the UK & Ireland markets** to build the brand and **encourage** existing and new customers to visit Argyll & Bute.
- Undertaking **international marketing campaigns** in Europe, North America and emerging markets to build the Scottish brand and encourage visits to Argyll & Bute.
- Providing businesses with a platform to promote the Scottish brand and encourage visits through the organisation and attendance of **trade fairs, sales missions, events and exhibitions**.
- Maintaining a **network of information centres and providing a national visitor information service** so that users of such services across Scotland can find out about, and book visits to, Argyll & Bute.
- Providing **quality assurance schemes and advice to Argyll & Bute businesses**, as well as developing and promoting a range of **welcome schemes**.
- Through visitscotland.com, providing a **global online presence** and servicing thousands of visitor enquiries about Argyll & Bute each year.
- Through business engagement activity **connecting Argyll & Bute businesses to customers every day** through participation in VisitScotland opportunities from direct mail to exhibitions to web campaigns.
- **Engaging with tourism businesses** in the Argyll & Bute area and to advise businesses on growing and promoting their businesses.
- Providing up to 50% (maximum £65,000) **match marketing funding**, through the Growth Fund, to tourism groups who develop successful applications.
- Undertaking a **consumer media relations programme**, actively building relationships with key media and journalists to pitch stories, press trips and ideas to ensure a wide variety of activities and locations feature regularly as well as ensuring tourism developments are regularly communicated.
- **Contributing to local economic development activity** eg. Community Planning and the Argyll and Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership. In particular VisitScotland will be represented on the Argyll & Bute Community Planning Partnership Economy Sub Group.
- Supporting development, delivery and monitoring of local plans and initiatives.
- Providing **information and statistics** from annual **national research programmes**, including Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Surveys, Visitor Attraction Monitor, United Kingdom Tourism Survey and International Passenger Survey.
- Regular **communications** to stakeholders on activity.

3. Noted that David would liaise with David Clements to enable performance indicators for Visit Scotland to be included on the Economy Thematic CPP Group Scorecard

Not discharged: (VS in process of supplying KPI data to Stephen Colligan)

Agreed Reporting Schedule

1. A six month interim report will be provided by VisitScotland to the Council outlining activity and progress to date by end October of each year covered by this agreement.
2. A full year end report will be provided by VisitScotland to the Council outlining the full year's activity and success against performance indicators (as appropriate) by 15th May of each year covered by this agreement.
3. In collaboration with the Council, facilitate an 'away day' to identify tourism ambitions/potential for the area and devise a blueprint for development and promotional activity. First 17th June 2010 - second TBA.
4. ***Agreed that Visit Scotland should be a Partner on the Economy Thematic CPP Group and that David be invited to future meetings***

Agreed.

5. ***Agreed that David would give a presentation to a future meeting on Destination Management Organisations***

VisitScotland is currently preparing a DMO strategy as part of a wider Organisational Review. Views from around the country will be collated and analysed to provide as full a picture of the DMO landscape as possible. I have already provided an overview on the Argyll & Bute situation, and will have further opportunity to provide specific input into what the final DMO strategy will look like. Once that process has been concluded I will be pleased to present to this group.

6. ***Agreed that a presentation on Business Improvement Districts be arranged for a future meeting.***

Agreed. (It is unlikely that time will allow for a BID presentation and a DMO presentation at the same meeting, so the group can choose which comes first.)