



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

Annex 1: Reference number R8-STA-P2-01 Addressed to Scottish Tourism Alliance

Lord Brailsford, Chair of the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry, in accordance with Rule 8 of the Inquiries (Scotland) Rules 2007, hereby requests the following information:

Background information

1. Please provide a brief overview of the history, legal status, aims and funding of the Scottish Tourism Alliance ("STA").

The Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA) is the overarching leadership and representative body for Scotland's tourism and hospitality industry.

The STA is an A political non- for-profit membership organisation which was established in March 2012. It is funded purely via membership subscriptions, project management fees, event sponsorship plus any profits made from STA event activity.

The STA's core purpose is to; inform, support, and offer advice to its members and key stakeholders and to make strong, direct representation to senior Scottish and UK Government ministers and public agencies. Its primary aim is to represent and shape a vibrant tourism industry for Scotland's visitors and people and to work hard to influence the creation of supportive policy to enable Scotland's tourism industry to reach its growth potential.

1. Please provide a brief description of the groups/individuals which STA supports or represents.

The STA comprises c250 trade associations, businesses, destination groups and other organisations with an interest in tourism and hospitality. The [membership](#) is spread across all regions and destinations in Scotland. The organisation is governed by a [Board](#) with representation from across Scotland's tourism and hospitality industry, and supply sectors. The [STA Council](#) which is made up of c25-30 sub sector trade bodies is the primary consultee group together with the [DMO Forum](#). Representatives of the Board Council and DMO Forum make up the [Policy Working Group](#).



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

The Policy Working group shapes the agreed overarching [STA Policy Agenda](#), with areas of focus and action which seek to have a direct impact on addressing the most significant themes and issues facing the tourism and hospitality industry.

The STA co-ordinated the development and launch of Scotland's tourism strategy over the period in 2019-2020 , [Scotland Outlook 2030](#), in collaboration with the Scottish Government and its agencies. The strategy itself being launched on 5th March 2020 only days before the country being taken into lockdown due the pandemic. It was at this point the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG) was stood up. The STA Chief Executive Officer, [Marc Crothall](#), was the industry's representative voice on STERG. When STERG was stood down he took over as the co-chair of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group with the Scottish Government Minister, which is responsible for determining the strategic actions needed to deliver on the ambition of the national strategy Scotland Outlook2030.

Role of your organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic

1. Please provide an overview of the role of STA during the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland.

The STA's core purpose was to inform and support its members and the wider industry by feeding back timely insights on impacts to business plus recommendations to government ministers, officials, key stakeholder agencies. The organisation immediately took on an enhanced and more proactive engagement role to gather in the insights to inform ministers, civil servants, and others to help guide thinking when considering their response to Covid impacts. These included the lock down and restrictive measures, informing guidance as well as recommendations re short- and longer-term supportive interventions in the form of grant in aid.

As the overarching industry association, a key STA role was also to provide as best as possible an ear of support, a shoulder to lean on to those that were in a difficult place mentally. To be a signpost to advice and help, to offer reassurance where possible to business leaders that the sectors voice was being listened too. To be the conduit for two-way messaging between industry and government and to provide regular updates to our networks. This was done via regular convening of the STA Council and DMO Forum members, providing at times daily updates on key messages, plus conducting and being available to have and take calls from industry colleagues (not exclusive to STA members) and others in the supply chain.

The STA was one of the ten Business Organisations that were invited by Govt to attend the regular online Covid meetings with Scottish Govt ministers and their appointed officials. At these meets we were invited to both feed in the latest industry updates we had gathered and share feedback on thoughts to considerations on govt intentions re lockdown proposals and any other restricted measures.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

It was at this point the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG) was stood up. The STA Chief Executive Officer, [Marc Crothall](#), was the industry's representative voice on STERG.

Financial support and guidance

It may be helpful, when considering the following questions, to consider the Inquiry's Term of Reference 2(I) ("ToR 2(I)"), which is as follows:

"Financial support and guidance given to businesses and the self-employed, including in relation to identification of key workers, by public agencies."

1. Was there any financial support or guidance proactively offered by the Scottish Government, local authorities, or other public bodies to STA or to the organisations STA represents?

The STA was a recipient of an £80,000 support grant from VisitScotland as the role and importance of the organisation both gathering in intelligence and sharing, being the conduit of industry voice to govt was recognise. Ensuring its members continue to engage was key. The funding of the STA is based on member subscriptions and sponsorship and profit derived from event activity. Many of the small to medium members of the STA were due to renew their membership, but not in a financial position to do so, or needing to prioritise spend elsewhere and with all event activity suspended this put the STA's own financial position and ability to function at risk. The monies awarded allowed the STA to offer a free period of continued membership to those members in this predicament and for the day-to-day activities needed during the covid period to function.

Similar type awards were extended to a number of other sub sector industry trade bodies for the same reason.

A range of other COVID support grants were paid out to STA members on application to specific funds set up and administered via VisitScotland Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Hardship and Pivotal funds, Non-Domestic Rates reliefs were also afforded to business subject to application and criteria, these were processed via Local Authorities.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

Freepost SCOTTISH COVID-19 INQUIRY Email: contact@covid19inquiry.scot
www.covid19inquiry.scot

1.If you were required to initiate contact with the Scottish Government, local authorities, or other public bodies, who did you contact? Did you require to make multiple attempts at contact before receiving a response? Were you ultimately allocated a single point of contact?

The STA's primary day to day direct contact was with the Scottish Government (SG) Tourism Team officials who worked to Minister Fergus Ewing and more latterly when appointed by Nicola Sturgeon Ivan Mckee who took over the role as Minister for Tourism in her reshuffle. Both attended meetings with the STA Council and Board plus other subgroups as and when requested by the STA and proactively engaged with us too seeking insights and offering assurance our issues etc were being tabled by them with their ministerial colleagues and officials.

The tourism officials were also readily available most of the time across the working week Monday -Friday and often at the weekend, in the early months of Covid. If not available immediately available, they responded promptly after. Although they were the day-to-day contact, the lead of the team Personal Data tended to be the person, that I spoke to most. There was no assigned single point of contact. I also had satisfactory level of contact with Ruben Aitken the senior Govt official that chaired the Business orgs Covid meets.

2.How did you find the process of obtaining guidance for your sector from the Scottish Government, local authorities, or other public bodies? How quickly were you able to obtain information? Was the information of any value?

From recollection the communication of guidance at the outset was at times untimely given the lead time it was made available to industry and restrictions etc coming into force. Decisions / Announcements being made on a Tuesday with guidance not being published to Friday and sometimes the weekend was often frustrating especially if it had direct impact on movement. The guidance was of course of value as it provided the direction for business owners their employees and customers if any of the premises.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

3. Did the STA or the organisations STA represents have any input into Scottish Government guidance prior to it being issued to your sector? If so, did you feel that your input was taken on board in the guidance issued? If not, do you think your sector should have had input?

Members of the STA Council, UK Hospitality, the Scottish Licence Trade Association, the Scottish Beer & Pub Association met regularly with SG officials together with a couple of other hospitality representative spokespersons who were not affiliated to the STA at that time- Scottish Hospitality Group and the Nighttime Industry Assoc., to discuss and input into the final shaping of the “HOSPITALITY” guidance. Although the final sign off on the guidance was made by Scot Govt. James Johnston from the SG tourism team co-ordinated these meets. Also invited to attend were independent legal licencing experts from TLT solicitors and the environmental health agency.

From other parts of the accommodation sector namely Self Catering, Bed and Breakfast and Guest House sectors, input was invited from the STA Council leads of the organisations representing these business – Fiona Campbell CEO of the Association of Scotland’s Self Caterers (ASSC) and David Weston Chair The Scottish Bed & Breakfast Association. The ASSC had extensive dialogue and exchanges with govt officials on a number of matters, especially re relief and support as Scot Govt initially diverged from the UK approach in supporting these types of business.

Others were also consulted with too- The Hostels Association and The Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions. Overall colleagues welcomed the opportunity and the invite to input into the shaping of the guidance pertinent to their own specific sector. On most occasions, once there had been an established pattern of coms and engagement with the sector, the guidance that was published was accepted to a point. There were however some very questionable pieces of guidance that industry colleagues/ members of the STA especially those in the hospitality and wedding sector struggled to comprehend with as to what was the logic that was behind them, such as the defining of a café and stating Scotch Eggs classified as a main meal.

At a more national / general level where guidance was being shaped by government officials especially in relation to movement the STA had the opportunity to input views and provide comment on decisions being considered and presented by various govt / health officials. The forum for this was in the main at the convened Business orgs meeting. On most occasions it was felt that decisions had already been reached in respect of boundary movements.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

4. Did STA or the organisations STA represents have any issues or concerns regarding the guidance issued or the implementation of the guidance? Was the guidance applied consistently across Scotland?

There were concerns about the timing of the guidance being issued especially in the early months of Covid. Also, for some the associated outlays needing to be spent by business to conform with the guidance at a time when no grant support had been confirmed was challenging, screens, PPE etc. There was also understandably many questions and differing views and opinions as to how the guidance had been determined, the rational of thought and the evidence to back up decisions that had been taken. Ventilation in hospitality nighttime venues being one where there was ongoing debate re the evidence and facts being considered to arrive at the decisions taken.

1. Was STA or the organisations STA represents provided with any financial support from the Scottish Government, local authorities, or other public bodies? If yes, was the support provided adequate? You may wish to consider the level of support, the speed in providing the support, the accessibility of support and whether there were any gaps to the support. If no, do you think STA or the organisations STA represents should have been provided with financial support?

As per my answer above the STA itself received £80k to help bridge the gap of non- payment of membership subscriptions and membership attrition due to business needing to hold on to their cash not knowing when things would normalise. As a non-for-profit organisation with limited cash reserves this was welcome. We adapted and worked within the constraints of our budget. It still required us to put two of our team members on furlough at a time when having their contribution in the virtual office would have been helpful. Proportionate to the “man hours” worked by myself and others, the support received could have been greater, but we did not request any more seeing our role and time spent doing what we did as important to our members, nor did we take out any borrowing from the bank. Many of our member business and subsector organisations within the STA family did receive grant support or reliefs subject to the criteria put in place – DMO’s, accommodation providers, visitor attractions, travel tour & coach operators. There were however some that did not, these were sole traders, such tour guides and those who had not traded for a full season. The level of support / relief varied and for some it was insufficient to meet the basic fixed overheads they were still having to incur which resulted in unwanted borrowing from the banks.

The time it took to deliver the support/ relief also varied by Local Authority and it was dependent on the application submissions being submitted correctly with the requested information. Where the Scottish Government had chosen to deviate from the UKG approach as to whom and what level of support would be provided such as those who operated in the self-catering sector this also caused a delay in grant provision being paid out. The ASSC would be best to provide comment directly on the latter.



Identification of keyworkers

1. Were STA aware of the identification of keyworkers being an issue for the organisation itself or any organisations that it represents?

There were no reports from any of the STA members that I can recall saying that they had an issue with the identification of key workers. A good number of accommodation providers, pivoted to make themselves available to key workers as per the guidance issued.

Freepost SCOTTISH COVID-19 INQUIRY Email: contact@covid19inquiry.scot
www.covid19inquiry.scot

General questions

1. Were there any particular shortcomings, if any, in the guidance and support provided to STA's sector?

Frustrations were there in respect of how some of the decisions in respect of the guidance was arrived at. The day of the week issue of the guidance requiring changes to ways of working needing made often late on a Friday put extra pressure on a business, many said it would have been much better for change to be implemented at the beginning of a working week. There appeared to be a lack of appreciation of the impacts of the direct costs to a hospitality business on opening and closing a business – stock loss etc. so the flip flop of lockdowns did not help with losses being kept to a minimum.

The decision not to always take four nations approach also at times caused issue and confusion especially with varied timings and different terminology. Tiers etc

The qualification criteria set for the financial support that was offered when lockdown was imposed could have been better. There was a lack of appreciation that those accommodation business who were not in a lock down authority area still suffered as their client base often were restricted from travelling so, they had no business trade anyway.

1. Is there anything you think the Scottish Government could have done to respond differently to the COVID-19 pandemic?

From an STA perspective we fully appreciated the level of regular direct engagement we had with ministers and officials – Despite the representation back by ministers to colleagues and officials it felt at times that despite the evidence provided due to the nature of the sector and the way it operated the was seen by some as no go / high risk area.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and many in the sector have said since that re-opening the sector sooner and getting the economy moving again would have been better and potentially saved some business from failure or now having to shoulder extra debt.

1. In terms of the various local authorities dealt with by STA or the organisations STA represents, were there any local authorities that adopted the best approach and why? Were there any particular issues with other approaches taken by local authorities?

I cannot honestly remember any of the specifics so would not want to attempt to single out any individual LA's – through our direct contact with Hugh Lightbody representing LA's on STERG we were able to signpost any concerns. These were always acted on as quickly as possible. It was very much about the relationships business had with local authority personnel. It was accepted and understood by the majority that many of the staff in LA's and in the agencies had been pivoted away from their core roles to do something different.

1. Do STA or any member of STA's team sit on any advisory groups or committees with the Scottish Government? If yes, did they raise any concerns about the financial support and guidance given? What was the Scottish Government's response?

The STA CEO and the national strategy co-ordinator both sat on the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG) and the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Task Force which was chaired by the minister.

The STA CEO also chaired and convened regular STA Council & Destination Forum member meets to which govt officials from the tourism team were invited to attend, which they did. At these meets they were able to hear firsthand about the issues and frustrations from the sub sector trade body leads.

The STA CEO was also a member of the COVID Business org group which reported to the cab sec for the economy. Feedback from industry / members and any specific concerns were shared by the STA CEO and on occasion the STA Chair when in attendance – the comments were taken as a minute by govt. officials at these meetings. There was always an openness to listening to feedback and where possible and deemed right and ok to do so a positive response.

The STA vice chair co-convened a tour operator group which was made up of travel, adventure, and golf tourism operator trade bodies. This group met with the minister to make representation for grant support demonstrating the wider longer-term impacts if these types of business did not survive.



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

1. In relation to financial support and guidance provided to business, what, if any, lessons should the Scottish Government learn from the pandemic?

The key lessons for Scottish Government have been to recognise that the sector is far bigger than it may appear to be, it is very diverse in its makeup, and tourism and hospitality impacts every household in one way or another –

There is now greater recognition and understanding that there were many people operating in the sector as sole traders and others in the supply chain who remain vitally important to the sector being able to recover quickly. For those operating in this capacity they need protection too to avoid breaks in the supply chain and a significant loss of workforce. What is also important is to protect the future business pipeline, having sufficient levels of reserves and monies put aside to maintain key stakeholder relationships and to invest in marketing. The levels of financial support for some of the larger business although welcomed was merely a drop in the ocean as their minimum day to day overheads were still needing to be covered, but for many provided huge relief, especially furlough although still a cost to business.

STERG worked and the Business Orgs meets were good to have too. The importance of being able to have that open transparent and regular dialogue with overarching sectoral bodies, associations, and business organisations such as the Scottish Tourism Alliance should never be underestimated.

Lord Brailsford

5 June 2024