

The Board of Marketing Edinburgh resigns

In a forthright letter on Monday, the Chair of the Board of the organisation which was set up to promote Edinburgh has intimated the resignation of the entire board.

Gordon Robertson the Chair of Marketing Edinburgh wrote to Councillor Kate Campbell who is Convener of the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee to advise the board's reasons. The letter is copied below.

In it Mr Robertson wrote : "We regret that as it stands Edinburgh is left with no plan to engage with residents. to manage the city brand, to understand tourism trends or data, develop policy, manage the new tourism strategy; no climate for partnership or to provide a cross industry forum to manage tourism for the better in the city."

Somewhat incongruously this is the committee which has had responsibility for Marketing Edinburgh, but now the board, including councillor members, has resigned.

Earlier this year the council's draft budget proposals caused much discussion when the council threatened to cut the funding to Marketing Edinburgh by 89% over two years. The Chief Executive, John Donnelly, resigned shortly after the council offered a reprieve to the body. He had led the organisation for five years, turning it around from the days of the Edinburghhhh campaign, which was universally condemned by councillors and the public.

The council reinstated £267,000 of funding to the annual budget subject to the development of a business plan which would transition to zero council funding. The council funded the organisation with a total of £890,000 this year, but a cut of £300,000 was planned for next year.

The board has confirmed that they had such a plan, but the committee behind closed doors would not accept it. The board members were Lord Provost Frank Ross, Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron and Cllr Susan Webber, Chair Gordon Robertson who is the Director of Communications at Edinburgh Airport, Dr Gordon Rintoul of National Museum of Scotland, Stephen Ingledew, Sandra Blake, Paul Rowllings and Claire Harrison-Church. These last four were appointed in June 2017 and were considered high profile appointments. These four along with Dr Rintoul were non-remunerated non-executive directors.

So what now for the capital city and its destination marketing strategy? The organisation encompasses Film Edinburgh led by Rosie Ellison and Convention Edinburgh headed by Amanda Ferguson.

Working from offices in Frederick Street the team has brought in investment of £900 million to the capital, a 90:1 return on investment in the year 2018. For every £1 of council funding the body generated a £90 return to the city's economy. They began under Donnelly's direction with the hugely successful This is Edinburgh campaign.



This is Edinburgh generated £50 million in economic impact for Edinburgh

The Edinburgh Reporter understands the council committee are not in favour of an arms length organisation such as Marketing Edinburgh. Discussions between the two bodies in private last Thursday led to a Marketing Edinburgh board meeting on Friday to decide their future.

The company was set up by the council administration to bring in more investment and income to the city, while promoting it on a busy competitive world stage. And it seemed to work. Cutting the finances was a move in the direction of making the company stand on its own two feet. In these days of underfunding for the council that seemed sensible, even if the cuts were draconian.

But if Marketing Edinburgh ceases to be, what or who will plug the gap?

We have contacted Councillor Kate Campbell as Convener of the relevant council committee for comment.



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