

Cross-Party Group on India - AGM

Friday 28 October 2022, 09.00 – 9.30am

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Group members

Pam Gosal MSP
Paul O’Kane MSP
Sandesh Gulhane MSP

Non-group members

Alexander Stewart MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP

Invited guests

Puneet Gupta, PG Paper
Bijay Selvaraj, Consulate General of India
Gopalan Rajagopalan, Head of TCS Scotland
Abhijit Chakraborty, Scottish Indian Arts Forum (SIAF)
Susanne Cameron-Nielsen, Scotch Whisky Association

Secretariat services provided by Yolande Claes, of PG Paper

Apologies

Jenni Minto MSP
Miles Briggs MSP
Jeremy Balfour MSP
Brian Whittle MSP
Brij Gandhi MBE

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convenor, Pam Gosal MSP, welcomed the group to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Apologies were noted.

The Convenor noted that the meeting would focus on the re-election of Office Bearers and Plan for the year ahead.

The minutes from the last meeting of the Group held on 30th September 2022 (Trade theme) were approved by Alexander Stewart MSP, seconded by Sharon Dowey MSP.

The Convenor thanked PG Paper for providing secretariat services.

2. AGM

Re-election of Office Bearers

The Convenor invited the Group to proceed to re-appoint the Office Bearers and Secretary/Treasurer.

The group re-appointed Pam Gosal MSP as Convenor and Paul O’Kane and Jenni Minto as Co-Vice-Deputy Convenors.

The Group re-appointed Puneet Gupta as Secretary/ Treasurer and nominated Yolande Claes as Secretary to the Group. This was approved by Sharon Dowey MSP and seconded by Paul O’Kane MSP.

3. Plans for the year ahead

The Convenor reminded attendees that the Group had held three meetings this year, one on each theme. The Convenor also noted the planned trip to India in early 2023 and that sponsors were being sought.

The Group briefly discussed then planned trip to India in 2023.

Bijay Selvaraj, Consul General of India noted that, since the last meeting, he had met with Martin Bell, Deputy Director of Trade, Scotch Whisky Association and that they were very supportive of the trip. One designated person will anchor the visit programme and coordinate it. All three areas of focus will be covered. The Consul General added that, in terms of education, different states in India had different areas of expertise and that the opportunity to visit more than one place was being considered.

Paul O’Kane MSP noted his interest in the Culture area of focus and that he was liaising with Paisley Museum and UWS on the history of the thread mills and Paisley Pattern which showcases the history and links between Scotland and India.

The Convenor suggested setting up theme sub-groups to develop idea.

Puneet Gupta highlighted the need, in terms of trade, to look at the implications of the FTAs due to be concluded in early 2023 for Scotland. Mr Gupta also noted that tourism should be developed both ways and that it should be considered under the Trade theme. Mr Gupta also observed that the lack of direct flights between Scotland and India was an issue.

The Convenor agreed and noted her awareness of the work carried out by Mr Gupta to help the Bollywood industry in Scotland, for which a good pathway would be beneficial. The Convenor noted that she would discuss further the issue of direct flights with Mr Gupta.

Alexander Stewart MSP commended the CPG for its work so far, with a good exchange of views in every meeting, and suggested linking with the work of the UK Government. He added that the planned trip to India would cement what the CPG is trying to achieve and that Trade was a focus area with great potential.

Mr Gupta agreed that it would be useful to tap into what the UK Government is already doing.

Mr Bijay Selvaraj stressed the tremendous interest of the Bollywood industry for Scotland but noted the need to have a 'one-stop-shop' as a point of contact. This could be a huge, revenue-generating opportunity for Scotland.

The Convenor agreed that, in terms of Trade, direct flights as well as a 'one-stop-shop' were important.

Suzanne Cameron-Nielsen thanked the Convenor for setting up the CPG on India and confirmed that the Scotch Whisky Association would continue to support the CPG.

(Abhijit Chakraborty joined the meeting at this point)

The Convenor briefly recapped the discussion for Abhijit Chakraborty, who suggested having short sequences too rather than a longer 3 to 5-year sequence in order to keep the momentum going.

The Convenor summed up the discussion, highlighting the issues of one-stop-shop and direct flights, as well as the suggestion of short-term and longer-term themes.

The Convenor also mentioned all the education projects carried out by educational institutions, as well as the work done with Museums etc. and noted that she and the Co-Convenors were mapping all the information together.

Sharon Dowey MSP welcomed the idea of touching base with the equivalent CPG in Westminster; she also mentioned other aspects of tourism such as golf and reminded members of Prestwick Airport as an alternative route to Glasgow or Edinburgh.

Gopalan Rajagopalan confirmed his interest in all three themes and added his particular interest in establishing links between educational institutions and the industry, noting very links already with the University of Glasgow and various MOUs.

4. AOCB

The Convenor advised attendees that the next meeting of the CPG on India was likely to take place around March 2023 following the planned trip to India.

The meeting concluded and the Convenor thanked all for attending the meeting.