

**MINUTES OF THE 461<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD**  
 HELD ON TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 AT 1330  
 VIRTUAL MEETING

**Present:**

Dame Judith Macgregor DCMG LVO	BTA Chair
Nick de Bois	Board Member / Chairman of the VisitEngland Advisory Board
Carol Hui	Board Member / Audit & Risk Committee Chair
Karin Sheppard	Board Member
Peter Gowers	Board Member
Ian Edwards	Board Member / Wales Representative (ex-officio)
Rt Hon Viscount Thurso	Board Member / VisitScotland Chairman (ex-officio)
Mark Taylor	London and Partners (Observer)
Duncan Parish	Deputy Director of Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy, DCMS (Observer)
Patricia Corbett	Northern Ireland Tourist Board, (Observer)

**In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates	Interim CEO
Henry Bankes	General Counsel and Company Secretary
Clare Mullin	Director of Transformation
Gavin Landry	Director Americas
Andrew Stokes	Director VisitEngland and Commercial
Lyndsey Turner-Swift	Deputy Director VE
Gary Robson	Director Europe
Robin Johnson	Director of Marketing
Debra Lang	Director of HR and Professional Services
Serena Jacobs	Director of Finance
Louise Bryce	Head of Commercial partnership (joined at item 3:5)
Evelyn White	Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

**Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introductions**

**1.1: Apologies for absence**

Robin Frewer	Board Member
Tricia Warwick	Director, APMEA, China and NE Asia
Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi	Director of Strategy and Communications

**1.2: Declarations of Interest/Conflicts**

1. There were no declarations of interests raised.

**1.3: Minutes of the Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (For approval)**

2. The minutes from the last meeting were agreed. The Chair added that although this wasn't actioned at the last meeting,

the discussion surrounding business events would benefit from being formed into an action to explore ways to progress this policy objective.

**ACTION:** CEO, in discussion with Duncan Parish, to explore ways to progress the business events policy objective.

#### **1.4: Matters Arising / Action Tracker**

3. Action was reviewed and updates were added to the Action Tracker (attached).
4. The Chair noted the ambition (stemming from the Effectiveness Review) to feature a deep dive at each meeting, as set out on the Forward Plan and encouraged the Board to offer any input to this planning. It was agreed that the risk register would be reviewed annually in March and reviewed by the ARC before the Board. It would continue to be circulated at each Board Meeting.

#### **1.5: Chair's update**

5. The Chair opened the meeting by formally announcing that Patricia Yates had been appointed as the new CEO following a rigorous selection process in which members of the Board had participated. The Board warmly congratulated Patricia on this success and looked forward to working with her. The CEO thanked the Board for their support and said she was honoured to accept this position and take forward implementation of our new strategy.
6. The Chair reported on her three recent site visits to the US, Canada and Europe and thanked Gavin Landry and Gary Robson for their support in facilitating useful programmes with public and private sector partners. Common themes were the speed of resumption of summer schedules, the fear that this was a 'bubble' rather than a longer-term sustainable trend and challenges to the attractiveness of the UK against competitors: especially over value for money. In Europe, there were strong concerns re the new passport arrangements affecting youth mobility. There was however positivity amongst Embassy teams locally to work together to address border disruptions and to promote business and wider tourism as a service export- despite DITs reluctance to prioritise this.

### **2.0: Matters for discussion**

#### **2.1: Pollical update**

7. The CEO and Chair VEAB gave evidence at the DCMS Select Committee earlier today, namely:
  - There were in particular questions from the Committee on how we could improve our work on policy issues and how the Government could speed up PASS compliance.
  - There was support for the BTA's work and recognition of the obstacles with funding, particularly when compared against international competitors.
  - The Committee recognised the loss of the VAT refund scheme had made us uncompetitive with other markets and should be restored.
  - Business events were flagged as being part of this portfolio and there was recognition this needed attention.
  - There was support of the DMO Review to improve the supply in the industry, and active interest in seeing the Government response before the summer recess.

#### **2.2: CEO update & Dashboard**

8. The CEO provide an update on current activity:
  - ALB review - the decision on whether we should move to a stage two Review was thought to be announced by the end of July, at this point a lead reviewer would be appointed and the TORs agreed.
  - PASS forms – confirmation had been received that all business events were approved, but at present VB was asked to pause on all the international spend; discussions were in hand to provide clarity and resolve this across government.
9. The CEO presented the refreshed Dashboard which was taken as read. The Chair sought views on the format which

was welcomed, but there was feedback not to hold back on providing a red RAG status when appropriate and to reduce the use of acronyms. The latest VB commercial video had been released and exhibited at the Institute of Travel and Tourism in Istanbul and was received with immense positivity.

**ACTION:** Evelyn White to share the new VB commercial video.

10. The Chair noted the planned review of future quality schemes on the Dashboard. Andrew Stokes advised there was support from VEAB to go out to tender which was moving forward at pace and with continued consultation with members.

### 2.3: Finance update

11. The CEO reported on the financial remodelling exercise in relation to admin spend that was due for submission to DCMS imminently to set out options for a possible reduction of 5% and 10% of costs. Serena Jacobs presented possible options with their associated impact for the organisation. The Board advised that a clearer strategic context to the options should be added, including more granular detail on the impact of such cuts. The Board noted the further pressure these exercises imposed on looking for a way to step up commercial revenue.

## 3.0: Corporate updates

### 3.1: Transformation – Building our Future

12. Clare Mullin had shared a short paper on transformation detailing the process to date. She underlined that a wide spread of government and non-government organisations had been key to developing this plan which was further amplified by direct support from BTA and VEAB Board Members. The programme had government funding over a three-year period and was presently working through how to measure capabilities. Claire and the CEO underlined that cultural change was critical to embedding transformation; Tammy Noel, on secondment from the Cabinet Office, was currently leading on this aspect for the BTA.
13. Chair VEAB added that this had been a deep dive theme at their recent Board which had landed the core purpose with momentum. They had noted that challenges relating to resourcing were already emerging and discussed how this could be mitigated. Peter Gowers saw the importance of linking the transformation agenda to various stakeholder outcomes e.g. to help articulate how this was adding value and to connect to external outcomes to bolster the overarching ambition to both internal staff and across the sector. Clare Mullin advised that this would be helped by a clear plan to realise benefits which was currently going through a process of validation before moving into a blueprint and implementing into the programme. Patricia Corbett noted that it was critical to manage in parallel to transformation 'business as usual' by realising areas that can pause. It was acknowledged that resourcing was being addressed, ensuring procurement processes were aligned with delivery and were also focused on embedding skills into the organisation. Duncan Parish flagged the differing agendas between VB and VE and sequencing broader funding models.

**ACTION:** Duncan Parish and Clare Mullin to identify and choregraph transformation milestones/ stage posts - covering overarching financial implications.

14. The Board welcomed this insight and offered their practical expertise where they could. The Chair summarised the key components as identifying milestone and benefits, aligning to financial implications and for driving commitment by the whole organisation. She looked forward to the deep dive scheduled in December.

### 3.2: VEAB

15. The Chair of VEAB gave a summary of the recent discussions from engagements with DMOs, namely:
  - The cost of living crisis seen as a priority across the landscape. DMOs had seen a reduction in both actual and forecasted bookings over key periods, thought to be caused by lower secondary spending, preventing a speedier

recovery.

- TXGB variation 6 plan – this model had proved to be running successfully and had exceeded forecast revenue.
- DEF learnings – a paper has been produced outlining the key learnings which will be shared with Board Members.

**ACTION:** Andrew Stokes to circulate the final version of DEF learnings.

### 3.3: ARC update

16. Carol Hui provided a brief summary from the Committee meeting held on the 7<sup>th</sup> June, which noted:
- The internal audit plan was reviewed and agreed.
  - There was a need to review compliance alongside government professional standards. ARC had therefore scheduled a deep dive in September to gain familiarity into these functional standards.
  - Risk management was discussed: the issues surrounding PASS approval were examined in detail and the level of risk noted.
  - An ARC effectiveness review and its outcome was shared at the meeting.
  - The continuing review of the register of HR and Compliance Policies was being taken forward by RPC in more detail.

### ARC annual report to the Board – annual report and accounts sign off

17. The final draft of the Annual Report and Accounts had been circulated in advance to Board members in order to capture comments or questions. Carol Hui gave sincere thanks to Serena Jacobs for her leadership and to the Finance Team for the prompt and thorough delivery of the Annual Accounts. The Report had undergone earlier review at the ARC, which had sought further disclosures from the Indian Subsidiary. The NAO had since given a clean opinion and internal auditors had recorded assurance as Moderate. Carol Hui summarised the current position of ARC;
- They were content with the accounting estimates and judgements.
  - That they were satisfied with content and appropriateness of the 2020/21 financial statement.
  - That it could be submitted to the BTA Board for approval.
18. Serena Jacobs confirmed that the BTA expected an unqualified audit opinion and thanked the dedication and commitment of her Finance Team. There had been three minor changes from Board Members which had since been incorporated. The Board felt that the AR was an improvement on previous years but asked that in future there should be time built into the Board Agenda to discuss in advance the key messages to be included in the several texts. This was an important opportunity to set out our work and should not be rushed to meet deadlines.

**ACTION:** To build into the planning of ARA at an earlier Board meeting to allow for constructive feedback to the front end/ visual display.

19. The Chair said she would like just to suggest two small amendments to the Annual Report i.e. that the description of the RPC mandate should be expanded to include its work on the Estates Strategy and Flexible working and secondly, that the paragraphs on European activity should provide more detail of current concerns, such as those detailed in the item 1.5 Chair's update (the Chair agreed to send on revised wording).

**DECISION:** The Board approved the Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2020/21.

### 3:4: Camelot learnings

20. Robin Johnson shared the Campaign Learnings paper. There were operational learnings identified in phase one which were quickly absorbed into the campaign: across process management, data reporting and analysis and other technical enhancements which saw significant improvement to the performance in phase two. There were four strategic learnings for closer inspection by the Board to put us in a better position for the future:

- The need fully to challenge and test in advance initiatives for feasibility.
- The need to ensure technical platforms had the capability to delivery.
- Applying more rigorous risk management; more challenge and stress testing.
- Planning full business continuity; and having a crisis response process across all areas.

21. The Board agreed there had been huge progress made across the project that would certainly benefit future programmes - especially for the Transformation programme. They asked how the learnings would be captured for future managers and staff. Robin Johnson explained these learnings would be imbedded now through identifying owners in relevant areas to lead on the implementation. And they were written into the work being taken forward by the Transformation team.
22. The Chair highlighted the importance of appropriately informing staff of these outcomes and to sharing widely how the learnings will be meaningfully implemented. The danger of reinventing the wheel was always present.

**ACTION:** Patricia Yates, with support from Robin Johnson, to devise an agreed approach to communicating campaign learnings to all staff.

### **3:5 Board Engagement**

23. The Chair welcomed Louise Bryce, Head of Commercial partnership, to give a presentation on the new approach to global stakeholder relationship management focusing on priorities and plans over the next 3-6 months - including on areas and aspects where the Board could be involved. The papers presented a tiered approach to provide strategic focus across both public and private sectors to help influence a wider public and private sector audience.
24. The Chair noted that this policy was a key part of our new BTA Strategy and that this offered a working model to help support developing our partnerships. Duncan Parish recognised there were subtle differences in the scope and role of different types of organisation and how they engaged with government. The CEO described the BTA role as an advisory function to balance both relationships with industry and government, to enable a composite voice to be heard and to share best practice, based on accurate and useful data. The Board confirmed that there was benefit for the BTA in supporting a strong industry voice but maintaining an independent channel of advice to Government, with appropriate contacts also with Parliament and the Media. The Chair felt that the recent overseas engagements at a senior level and operational level had been fruitful and immediate with further stakeholders of interest in securing tourism recovery.
25. The Chair, on behalf of the Board, agreed with the approach detailed in the engagement plan with the suggestion that this will be closely reviewed by the Board in 3 months time.

**ACTION ref 27 updated:** The Board to review the Engagement Plan and its Effectiveness at the Board Meeting in December.

### **4:0 Deep Dives – The Americas**

26. Gavin Landry led the deep dive discussion on the Americas, firstly thanking the Chair and CEO for this forum and the Chair's recent visit. The prominent challenge presented in the market, as a long-haul market, was the highly competitive growth in other competitive areas that were only recently on our radar, as well as staycations in the US. Recent changes to Covid rules had opened up travel more widely but it was still far from clear whether the summer rush was now a bubble that would burst with the autumn or be sustained. Another area of opportunity was our audiences, in that this was a crowded space up against large brands, changing tastes, possible growing economic constraints and still prevailing economic uncertainty. For our teams overseas with limited financial means, the emphasis was on active networking, partnerships and creating clusters of capacity from across the international teams.
27. There were three asks presented to the Board:
- Advocacy - Sphere of influence with stakeholder and government.
  - Serious consideration to take on North America market.
  - Potential to increase investment – wealth of opportunities.

28. The Board were complimentary of the presentation and associated paper. The CEO noted that it had been shared and discussed in the meeting of Regional Directors with the Minister and had prompted more thought and attention being given to making our marketing more effective. Feedback from the overseas network was always valuable.

**5:0 papers for noting**

29. The Chair noted these papers and no comment was brought for discussion at the meeting.

**6.0: Any other business**

30. No Further items were presented.

The meeting closed at 1800.