

MINUTES OF THE 453rd MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

TUESDAY 22nd November 2022 at 1000
Boardroom, 3 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria

Present: Fiona Pollard, Interim Chair
Sarah Fowler, Board Member
Allan Lambert, Board Member
Nadine Thomson, Board Member
Dr Andy Wood, Board Member
Nigel Wilkinson, Board Member
Laura Backhouse, DCMS Observer

In Attendance: Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs, Finance Director
Andrew Stokes, England and Commercial Director
Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi, Strategy & Communications Director
Rachael Farrington, Head of Tourism Affairs
Evelyn White, Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Interim Chair, Fiona Pollard, warmly welcomed Board Members and acknowledged that since the last meeting Nick de Bois had stepped down as VEAB Chair having been appointed the BTA Board Chair, and that Fiona had agreed to stand in as interim VEAB Chair.

1.1 Apologies for absence

2. Patricia Yates, Chief Executive / BTA Accounting Officer.

1.2 Register of Interests

3. Nigel Wilkinson notified the Board of his role as Non-Executive Director at Rushbond plc, that there was no potential conflict of interest for the BTA, but asked that this was disclosed on the register.

1.3 Minutes from the last meeting

4. Nigel Wilkinson raised there were some minor points that required amending and agreed to send these through after the meeting.

1.4 Action Tracker

5. Each action was reviewed and the action tracker updated.

2.0 Review of Strategic Matter

2.1 Political update

6. Rachael Farrington provided an update in the absence of the CEO, highlighting the new Prime Minister's focus on economic stability which had been reflected in the autumn statement. It was predicted these measures were likely to see a reduction in household spend and affect domestic tourism spend. These challenges were reported to have steered focus to demonstrate our social and economic value through a series of meetings with ministers, and to highlight relevant partnerships that have been carried out in this space e.g. Family Holiday project. It was also reported this had impacted the development of some proposed policies; the TIC (Tourism Industry Council) were looking at these in more detail. Fiona Pollard and Nick de Bois were reported to be meeting with the new tourism minister, Stuart Andrew on the 19th December. Laura Backhouse added that he was also the minister for Eurovision and the Coronation next year. Andy Wood raised the need to address the shortage of staff in the sector, which Rachael Farrington concurred was being supported through policy. There was also support from Board Members to engage simultaneously with the Shadow Cabinet and shadow tourism minister in particular.

2.2 CEO report

7. Andrew Stokes provided an overview in the absence of the CEO; the key points were as followed:
 - Pass Forms – late approvals for this year were being worked through, and that plans for a new approach to alleviate delays for next year were being progressed.
 - Britrail project – suggestions have been put forward to DCMS for projects to utilise this funding envelope.
 - Transformation - consultation had begun with directors, starting with those affected by the new organisational design structure.
 - Culture enquiry sessions – a new workshop had been rolled out to garner input from staff on our corporate purpose and values with the intention of creating collaborative refreshed version.
 - Structure of VE – Andrew Stokes was working with HR on reviewing the structure, so that it is compatible with the evolving environment. It was agreed that Debra Lang would be invited to join the next meeting to update the Board on all staff matters. Nadine Thomas sought a steer on the TOM timeline, which was agreed should also be raised at the next meeting.
 - ALB review – Serena Jacobs advised that the lead reviewer would be announced shortly by DCMS.

ACTION: Debra Lang to attend the VEAB meeting in March 2023 to engage on the restructure and share updates in relation to TOM implementation.

2.3 Strategy and Business Plan update

8. Lyndsey Turner-Swift gave an outline of progress to date and the following points were highlighted:
 - GIA budget – this was being closely monitored in line with activity and options were currently being scoped for the Britrail funding allocation.
 - DMO review – good progress had been made on the business case which had received partial sign-off to progress the accreditation scheme.
 - Quality contract – Andrew Stokes confirmed this was awarded to AA Media Services and he had already begun a series of meetings. Progress on the scheme will now be a standing item for this meeting.
 - Strategy Review of National Accessibility Scheme – the current scheme had been withdrawn due to minimal engagement. Janet Uttley and Ross Calladine were leading on the next steps.
 - Consumer brand – there had been a change to the RAG status from green to amber to reflect delayed delivery.
 - Visitor Income Strategy - a full update on progress will be provided at the next meeting.

2.4 Finance

9. Serena Jacobs took the paper as read, acknowledging there had been delays causing an increase in activity in quarter four, which was being closely monitored.

2.5 Risk Management

10. Serena Jacobs shared with the Board the BTA Risk Management Plan, providing an overview on tolerances and methodology. The largest risk being monitored was cyber security, which had seen significant improvement following the implementation of audit suggestions. It was agreed that the risk register would be reviewed quarterly and audited three yearly. Going forward, the risk register would be routinely shared with VEAB for information. The Chair recognised that some Board Members were also Members of other sub committees and suggested that members should feedback key decisions from these at the start of the VEAB meetings. Andy Wood highlighted the level of high risks that was being carried, which Serena Jacob reassured was being managed through planned action or were risks inherent in the business.

ACTION: Nigel Wilkinson (ARC member) and Fiona Pollard (RPC member) to provide an update on the respective Committees at the start of each VEAB meeting going forward.

3.0 Activity for Board Feedback

3.1 SME Support and Training

11. Andrew Stokes provided an overview of the key developments on SME support, training delivery and the review of the National Accessibility Scheme. Suzy Faulkner, lead on VisitEngland training initiatives and gave an overview of the progress made on both Taking England to the World and Business Recovery Webinars which had now been merged. The success of these training programmes had identified the need to expand learning further including the creation of an 'England Academy' which will launch in 2023; a bespoke model tailored to differing levels of understanding and commercial ability which will be designed to reach a broad audience.
12. Board Members were very encouraged by these developments and supportive of the future direction, and shared the following observations:
 - The value of partnership across the industry whilst developing the Accessibility Tourism Strategy was underlined, and the importance of engaging with other nations to gain learning opportunities, to avoid duplicating programmes that were already available.
 - It was suggested that other modules of interest, particularly from a tour operator lens, would benefit the education programme e.g. political engagement, commerciality, revenue, price, demand forecasting.
 - The importance of maintaining the exclusivity of the education programme to LVEPs, and to explore whether formal recognition for participating in this programme could be established.
 - It was recognised that consultation with LVEPs was key to the continued growth of this programme.

ACTION: Board Members to consider other training modules and send these examples to Suzy Faulkner.

3.2 DMO Review

13. Lyndsey Turner-Swift provided a detailed update on the progress made on the DMO Implementation. Board Members were asked for views on the roundtable feedback session; the financial risk linked to the DDP pilot; and, LVEP coverage and acknowledged gaps. A summary of the Board's observations was noted as:
 - To extend the feedback to ensure Local Authorities understand and get behind the structure'
 - To provide clarity on differences between DDPs and LVEPs
 - The timing of the roundtables had been well received having been a truly consultative process.
 - To encourage local coalitions where possible, and to reduce complexities.

- To identify the willing participants in expected gaps and to introduce a time limitation, as well as managing the volume.

4.0 Deep dive

4.1 England Consumer brand development

14. Samee Mohammed joined the meeting and tabled a presentation on the objectives and scope of the England Brand Project and sought input from Board Members on the guiding principles. A summary of observations made by Board Members was as followed:
 - To align commercial stakeholders in the same way as industry partners e.g. attractions, OTAs.
 - The need to align language used from a policy perspective e.g. 'London plus' rather than 'London vs'.
 - To consider the optimum fit in a congested landscape where there are already multiple brands.
 - The importance of the discovery stage was pivotal to direction and dictating the framework.
 - To further refine the purpose and rationale for England focus, balancing the consumer and political need.

ACTION: Allan Lambert, and any other Board Member, to share understanding in relation to consumer brands with Samee Mohammed.

4.2 TXGB - Review of Variation 6 and Options

15. Andrew Stokes provided an update on the TXGB platform and shared background to the Variation 6 clause due to expire in March 2023. A paper was circulated which outlined the progress against the strategic interventions, which also reported both performance and progress made on new initiatives. Overall, it was noted that the performance had been strong, having delivered upwards growth and enabled a data source. It was noted that the contract runs out in March 2024 and that early thought should to be given to the ongoing relationship. Due to timelines, it was advised the formal recommendation to the Variation 6 clause may require contribution from Board Members before the next meeting in order to agree the sense of direction. Comments from Board Members were as followed:
 - It was concurred that there needs to be careful planning and consideration given to the relationship at critical points of the contract.
 - There was clarity sought regarding the revenue share, which was confirmed as 0.25% of turnover from March 2024. The initial model aimed to have paid back the investment by years 5 -6.

5.0 Papers for noting/ comment

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

6.0 Any Other Business

17. Henry Bankes advised that the recruitment process for the permanent VEAB Chair was due to commence before Christmas, and that Fiona Pollard would stand as interim Chair until June 2023.
18. The Chair sought views on the introduction of a VEAB working group utilising the Board members skills to directly support the DMO Review Team. Nigel Wilkinson agreed to lead this group, Allan Lambert and Sarah Fowler also volunteered to support where appropriate.

ACTION: Nigel Wilkinson to lead on DMO Review on behalf of VEAB, with support from other Board volunteers.

19. Before concluding the meeting, the Chair outlined areas that had been agreed by the Board to frame the next meeting:

- Going forward, every meeting would now start with an update on RPC and ARC matters from respective Committee members.
- Debra Lang to be invited to provide an update on all People matters.
- Accessibility was agreed as a timely deep dive theme

The meeting closed at 1300.