

MINUTES OF THE 452nd MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

TUESDAY 14th September at 1000
Boardroom, 3 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria

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

In Attendance: Patricia Yates, Chief Executive / BTA Accounting Officer
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs, Finance Director
Andrew Stokes, England and Commercial Director
Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi, Strategy & Communications Director
Janet Uttley, Head of Business Support Transformation Project
Paul Black, Business Events
Evelyn White, Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair warmly welcomed Nigel Wilkinson MBE, newly appointed Board Member, to his first Board and gave an overview of his extensive experience in the private and tourism sector. Nigel Wilkinson expressed his sincere thanks and looked forward to contributing and working with Board Members.

1.1 Apologies for absence

2. Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Deputy Director VE

1.2 Register of Interests

3. The Chair requested that his entry is amended to remove Political Insider to Political UK. There were no other changes raised.

1.3 Minutes from the last meeting

4. The Chair asked that on page 2 'Commonwealth Games' was corrected.

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. The CEO provided an update on the current political landscape:
 - 6.1 The BTA Chair, Dame Judith Macgregor had written to the new Prime Minister emphasising our drive towards growth in tourism through policy delivery.
 - 6.2 Plans were being developed to engage the new government appointments, notably the new Secretary of State, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, and the Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP. The Tourism Industry Council had been postponed until all new Ministers had been announced.
 - 6.3 The ALB Review team were scheduled to brief the BTA Board next week regarding stage two of the process.

7. The new direction on growth was seen as a positive step for VE, as an area that was widespread in tourism, and recognised this as an opportunity to reinvigorate and build on tourism knowledge in government.

2.2 CEO report

8. The CEO shared an update on her current priorities:
 - 8.1 External Engagement – the CEO sought permission from the Chair to share a calendar of her engagements with future Boards, which was agreed.
 - 8.2 PASS approval process – meetings were underway with GREAT to work through the PASS approval process in the future.
 - 8.3 Organisational culture – The Staff Survey results had set a benchmark on culture and formed interventions to build on organisational transformation. Consideration was also being given to the longer-term structure that would further enable Directors to drive strategy.

9. The Chair reflected on the Board consensus from the deep dive on transformation at the last meeting, specially the point raised on how VEAB could offer their support and provide solutions. It was agreed that the risk register was a tool that monitored such challenges and factored in consultation with Board Members at pertinent stages.

10. Board Members underlined the benefit of approaching culture and transformation as separate workstreams and whether the recent changes across government would impact on the transformation priorities. The importance of balancing transformation with delivery was paramount; by realising areas the organisation could pause, and by reallocating resource.

ACTION: To formalise a link between Building our Future Programme and the VEAB.

2.3 Strategy and Business Plan update

11. Andrew Stokes took the DMO Review paper as read and provided an overview of key activity:
 - 11.1 The government's response was currently with DCMS to agree next steps; a first list of potential pilot areas was expected this week, which would determine a shortlist.
 - 11.2 A review had taken place on accessibility which recommended VE should position from a leadership platform in tourism, and that the Sustainable English Tourism Strategy should be cross-cutting.
 - 11.3 Developing a Brand for English Tourism project – this had evolved into two projects as PASS approval had only been granted for the first stage. The second stage will be submitted for approval in the new financial year.

12. The Chair welcomed insight to new commercial opportunities and remarked on the benefits of linking the strategy to the commercial plan and resource model. Andrew Stokes provided assurance that VE were instrumental at the Commercial Board and were cognisant on all activity.

2.4 Finance

13. Serena Jacobs took the paper as read, adding that the information had been reformatted, and sought feedback from Board Members. Board Members fed back that linking delivery/outcomes to financial impact would provide context and enable more informed discussions.
14. An overview of the VE financial position was reported as follows:
 - 14.1 The VE budget was presently forecasting an overspend due to the inclusion of BritRail ring-fenced funding. DCMS were awaiting research to inform next steps.
 - 14.2 Forecasting had moved to a monthly rolling model to enhance agility. There was little change to the forecast since June, but noted Directors were currently considering the approach to underspend as this was deemed a significant risk.

3.0 Activity for the Board Feedback

3.1 Stakeholder Engagement

15. Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi explained that the stakeholder engagement paper had been developed to demonstrate the new and evolving approach, and was presented to the Board for their observations. The paper outlined proposed plans to drive our objective for industry to speak as one voice to prioritise government interventions and to create advocates for tourism and VisitBritain/VisitEngland. Due to the complex stakeholder environment, a tiered approach was being fostered to apply focus where it was most impactful, and shared examples of proactive engagement already taking place – Tourism Industry Council (TIC), forums aligned with national Tourism Board, strategy for trade associations, reinvigorate the British Tourism Industry Group, and an engagement programme to support the DMO implementation.
16. The Chair was extremely enthusiastic of this approach and more consultative direction. There were comments from the Board regarding the appropriate levels of focus to each tier, and to prevent tier two in particular from growing given impending factors. It was underlined that a feedback loop should operate when building a consultative approach - reassurance was provided that this was already taking shape. Laura Backhouse reiterated that the TIC and their working groups were the government's main vehicle for articulating clear industry priorities to government, and that a third objective on a mutual/ shared objective to offer in return would further enhance engagement.

3.2 Policy and Government Engagement

17. Rachael Farrington took the paper as read and asked the Board for their observations. Activity had been restructured to apply closer alignment to the delivery of corporate priorities and stakeholder engagement, and were split into categories; Advocacy, Policy, CEO/Chair/ Board Support, Internal Advisory. An infographic had been produced to illustrate and better explain our position amongst stakeholders.
18. The Chair promoted the steps to broaden engagement and encouraged focus on constituency interests and local elements. Rachael Farrington advised this policy was designed to be a tool used by a broad audience and would grow in directions where reach would add value.

ACTION: To share the Stakeholder infographic with Board Members.

3.3 Business Events

19. Paul Black joined the meeting to present a paper to demonstrate the value of Business Events for VisitEngland. The summary provided insight on the current market, the new approach with key results, also addressing existing challenges and proposed solutions. Key results to date included; the successful deployment of VBs Business Events Growth Programme to events in nine English cities to date, and a big uplift in event enquires for cities sourced by the business events team. The main challenges to achieving growth and delivering objectives were considered the lack of compelling data, and the need for stronger support for new bids and existing events from HMG departments beyond DCMS, such as DIT, BEIS and DHSC.
20. The Board extended their thanks for insight of these developments and recognised that strengthening engagement would improve this position across government. The DMO Review was acknowledged as a tool that would further align this ambition and link business to cities; an education programme to build relationships with leaders across the economy and target their approach was championed by VisitBritain.

ACTION: Paul Black to update Laura Backhouse on the Single Candidate Cities programme.

4.0 Deep dive

4.1 Sustainability

21. Janet Uttley provided an overview on the development of the VE Sustainability Strategy and was presenting to the Board at this stage to seek guidance on the framework and sense of direction. This strategy was intended to bring together multiple strategies from core cities, to provide one all-encompassing consistent approach.
22. The Board thanked Janet Uttley and made the following observations:
 - 22.1 Nigel Wilkinson advised there were DMOs that had advanced their sustainability strategy and VE could benefit from collaborating with these DMOs to gain good practices. Andy Wood acknowledged the importance of our role, that by being a provider of information could be the position of influence in which we operate. Sarah Fowler underlined this point, recognising the benefits of signposting, and endorsed a focus on overarching goals as well as activity.
 - 22.2 Janet Uttley proposed the use of business portals for advice and guidance and sought views on what new partnerships could be explored across industry. Allan Lambert supported partnership in the market and highlighted there were schemes in place to share advice.
 - 22.3 The Chair was mindful not to duplicate on initiatives/ strategies, and saw VE primarily as a convener for developing a sustainability programme. There was consensus by Board Members to further consider the associated legal and financial framework and the scale it dedicates, and to gain further understanding on what toolkits were accessible across stakeholder tiers, to better inform the direction and role of VE.
 - 22.3 Sarah Fowler and Alan Lambert volunteered to engage with Management on behalf of the Board, including observing on the TIC Sustainability Action Group led by the CEO.

ACTION: Board Members to share on sustainability partnerships, and to report back on activity at Tourism Industry Council (TIC) Sustainability Action Group.

ACTION: To conduct an audit on the scope of sustainability to define the delivery of VE.

5.0 Papers for noting:

23. The Chair welcomed the TXGB update paper as a standing item. Allan Lambert raised the benefit of also adding as a reoccurring item for a deep dive at future Boards.

ACTION: Evelyn White to include TXGB as a reoccurring item on the Forward Look Plan.