

MINUTES OF THE 451st MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)
TUESDAY 14th June 2022 AT 1015
Virtual meeting

Present: Nick De Bois, Chair
Sarah Fowler, Board Member
Allan Lambert, Board Member
Fiona Pollard, Board Member
Nadine Thomson, Board Member

In Attendance: Andrew Stokes, England and Commercial Director
Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Deputy Director VE
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs, Finance Director
Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi, Strategy & Communications Director
Clare Mullin, Transformation Director
Tammy Noel, Organisational Design
Evelyn White, Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair thanked the Board for accommodating the switch to a virtual meeting and focused their attention to the revised format of papers and scheduling of the agenda, in a move towards optimising discussions at Board meetings. The Chair invited any feedback on these changes and the structure of the meeting.

1.1 Apologies for absence

2. Apologies were received from Patricia Yates, Interim CEO and Andy Wood, Board Member.

1.2 Register of Interests

3. The Chair sought comment on entries to the current version of the Register of Interests. Sarah Fowler raised that her new role had not yet been amended, assurances were provided this would be actioned as a matter of urgency.

1.3 Minutes from the last meeting

4. The minutes from the meeting on the 5th April 2022 were approved.

1.4 Action Tracker

5. Each action was reviewed and discussed, all updates were captured on the Action Tracker.
6. The Chair referred to the Forward Look Plan, that it had been developed since the last meeting and would be informed by any actions seeking deep dives into areas of strategic interest. A more detailed update was provided under item 2.3.

2.0 Review of Strategic Matter

2.1 Political update

7. The Chair provided a verbal overview of the current political landscape noting that challenges relating to the cost of living were widespread and had already shown to have impacted the pace of recovery within the sector, but underlined this should not avert new opportunities.
8. The Chair and CEO were due to give evidence at the Select Committee on the 21st June 2022, to report on the DMO Review and was an opportunity to further amplify our value within the sector to this audience.

2.2 CEO/ Director report

9. Andrew Stokes provided an update in place of the CEO. The following activities were noted:
 - a. Arm's Length Body (ALB) Review – this triennial review was the first since 2015. Stage one entailed responding to a sequence of questions which had been prepared and submitted for assessment; this would determine whether the organisation would move into stage two.
 - b. DCMS, on behalf of the Cabinet Office, commissioned a funding remodeling exercise on admin grant. Serena Jacobs was developing options that were rapidly taking shape for submission this week. Sarah Fowler observed that this process was taking place across other government departments and would welcome insight to these options. Serena Jacobs reassured the Board that collaboration would be sought where possible up against constrained timescales.

ACTION: Serena Jacobs to factor in consultation with Board Members the savings options, noting the competing deadlines.

- c. PASS forms – this remained outstanding and was currently with Ministers for decision.
- d. DMO Review – the outcome of this was thought to be announced in July.
- e. Commonwealth Games (CWG) – a Tourism Day was announced on the 5th July 2022 at UK House pavilion.

2.3 BTA Strategy update – Board Engagement

10. The Chair provided background on Board Engagement as a process that was adapted by the BTA Board in response to the Board Effectiveness Review. The Chair was extremely grateful to Board Members for their receptive response, and had capture interests on a table that was pre-circulated and taken as read. The proposal to introduce Board Engagement had been well received by Board Members and a system was being developed to coordinate speaking opportunities/ engagements in an ambassador role, recognising the time limitations that Board Members were subject to. Fiona Pollard advised she was now mentoring a Director and recognised the importance of also providing connections/ signposting in this capacity.
11. The Chair talked through other recommendations this review had identified and since been implemented, such as the Forward Look Plan. This was an iterative document providing oversight and structure to each meeting, for Board Members to assess and input on the topics and sequencing of agenda items. Improvements were also in hand to refine meeting preparation including a new papers template. Sarah Fowler thanked the Chair for this oversight and noted her apologies in November and requested that the sustainability deep dive be rescheduled as was of particular interest. TXGB, a previous request from Allan Lambert, was also flagged as a subject for deep dive for coordination in this Plan.

ACTION: Evelyn White to update the Forward Look Plan and share with Board Members.

2.4 Business plan

12. Lyndsey Turner-Swift verbally updated Board members on the progress of the business plan submitted on the 20th May 2022. The activity had been developed from the role of VE and corporate priorities discussed and amended to reflect VEAB feedback following the last meeting. The key highlights were:
 - SME upskilling and business support had been dialed up to support additional work on accessibility and to start to embed sustainability
 - Business events investment upweighted to reflect importance to England and to ensure impact and growth can be achieved
 - Leadership of the DMO landscape would be dialed up through the implementation of the Government's response to the De Bois review expected in July and supported by discretionary funds
 - Investment sustained in all other priority areas but noted the change in approach in Marketing to brand guardianship and B2B (i.e. no consumer campaigns)
13. This was a positive position for VE at the start of the year. 2022/23 included a number of major projects included England consumer brand, Quality review and refresh, DMO Review and support for wider BTA transformation programme. Any opportunities for reallocation of budget to support these priorities in-year would be maximized and the required staff resource and capacity to support VEs enabling and leadership role is protected. VEAB would have a key sponsorship role across these projects over the year ahead.
14. The Chair valued the importance of this update and saw benefit of there being a regular communication of progress made against the business plan, to inform Board Members of topical activity particularly useful when in an ambassador role at speaking at engagements.

ACTION: Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi to produce a core script specifically for VEAB, for consistent comms in ambassador role.

3.0 Activity for the Board Approval

3.1 Quality Scheme Review

15. Andrew Stokes presented an options paper outlining the proposals for the Quality Scheme Review. The VEAB were being asked to consider each option and to seek a recommendation on whether to; stop, renew or reinvent. The consequence of each option was discussed in detail, highlighting the impact of each proposal.
16. Nadine Thomson queried whether this scheme could be linked to DMOs in order to broaden the reach, Andrew Stokes agreed there was appetite amongst some DMOs and thought had been given to formalising this through training and accredited; DCMS were currently reviewing short term tourism, which included accreditation, and there was potential this could offer ways to develop this approach.
17. Board members agreed that any decision should be aligned to priorities and that a more detailed costs analysis would strengthen each case. It was confirmed that the reinvent options would require a tender process as part of transformation, which anticipated minimal cost whilst stopping the scheme presented a net loss. Board Members noted caution to continually maintain adequately resourced against competing demands, and that learnings from recent campaigns should formed part of the solution.
18. The Board were in consensus to 'reinvent' and agreed to provide their expertise on the proposed new scheme prior to tender to ensure value. Andrew Stokes added this would involve launching a tendering process at the end of July for decision in November 2022.

ACTION: To share with Nadine Thomson (and any other Board member willing to volunteer) the draft of the proposed new scheme prior to going out to tender.

3.2 Domestic Data Review

19. The Chair introduced Richard Nicholls to the meeting and expressed thanks for the detailed paper and took as read. Richard Nicholls summarised the aim of this review was to consider VisitEngland's role in producing and sharing domestic tourism data. The University of Surrey had been commissioned to lead the review which involved interviews with a range of expert users of domestic tourism data; an interim report had been received with the full report due in July. To coincide with this, the ONS are conducting a review of international tourism statistics which could anticipate opportunities to combine IPS with the Great Britain Tourism Survey/ Day Visits Survey (GBTS/DVS). The key findings were; data needs were very diverse; need for more granularity; need for timely or forward-looking data; the importance of the visitor economy and shift from volume to value; and, improvements need to how data was disseminated. Available options had been scoped to adapt these learnings, but costs and legal aspects would not be explored until the final report was received. Andrew Stokes added that the review was also expected to identify statutory obligations post Brexit and if we could improve how usable other data sources were for cross cutting priorities.
20. The Chair was grateful for this detailed insight and sought clarification on our ability to use data, whether that be as a collator or publisher. Richard Nicholls advised although we do not have full control of the use of data, we continue to maintain a good level of influence.

ACTION: The Chair and Richard Nicholls to discuss the potential of collating data on business events.

21. Board Members emphasised the importance of data and ensuring it was aligned to our priorities, and the need to move forward with sustainability and accessibility capacities in particular. It was agreed as a necessity to fulfil the granular level of detail and to broaden users in the future and to seek opportunities for VE to provide leadership.

4.0 papers for noting

4.1 TXGB update

22. The TXGB paper was produced to enable an opportunity to review and input on growth projection at Board level. Andrew Stokes provided an overview, noting that variation 6 contractual monthly payments were ongoing until March 2023. The Board were in support of the initiations and welcomed the regular insight.

4.2 DEF evaluation

23. Lyndsey Turner-Swift introduced this item and provided background to the programme outlined in the paper that was taken as read. There were two distinct phases, years 1-4 saw internal activity whilst year 5 switched focused to domestic activity due to the challenges of the pandemic which severely impacted on the return on investment and saturation of the market; it was estimated this return was delayed by three years and therefore likely to be achieved by 2027. It was noted that the strategic initiatives were received well at national level which now sought continued support by wider activities e.g. B2B, campaigns etc. This was a programme of significant size and breath that was established at speed, and has provided many learnings for the future. Overall, this has seen a positive impact on DMOs and has led to the growth in product development and cross regional leverage e.g. West Way created membership much wider than Wiltshire.

Items 4.3 – 4.5

24. The following papers were pre-circulated for information; DMO Marketing Fund, Social Tourism and Campaign learnings (it was caveated the National Lottery Campaign paper was shared at short notice and could not be commented upon).

5.0 Deep dive – transformation and organisational design

25. Clare Mullin and Tammy joined the Board at this point to lead the deep dive on ‘Building Our Future’ which was the overarching programme responsible for transformation and organisational design. This was a three-year change programme to prepare the organisation for future challenges and embed cross organisation focus; funding had been set out in the Spending Review across this period. This would be governed by a Building our Future Programme Board made up of the Executive Team including Fiona Pollard, VEAB Member to oversee the Project Steering Groups responsible for planning and delivery of all activities.
26. A paper detailing the programme’s journey was taken as read. Clare Mullin addressed the core themes as; data and digital modernisation, training development, and an enhanced People Strategy. The key risks were flagged as; inadequate resourcing whilst up against procurement delays, and embedding change into the organisation. Research and learnings from other organisations had been adapted to ensure best practice during programme initiation.
27. Tammy Noel led the discussion on organisational design and proposed steps to creating an environment receptive to change. The main activity in preparation of transformation would take place between May – September 2022. A review was conducted to determine a baseline of organisation cultural, which resonated tensions that required focus before implementation. The design principles were identified to provide a framework for delivery, careful consideration was given to recognising differences in VisitEngland and determined the need to hold specific consultation sessions.
28. Board Members were extremely grateful for the succinct presentation and welcomed the sense of travel and agreed this was a progressive implementation with core outcomes. The following observations were made:
 - The defined role of VEAB linked to transformation.
 - Resourcing model; cautious of overwhelming the organisation and impacting delivery.
 - Prioritisation and sequencing were recognised as key to the programme’s success, factoring in ‘red flags’ at points where benefits could be compromised.
 - Budget beyond the three-year period and funding pressures.

6.0 AOB – VE Awards and Excellence Review

29. Andrew Stokes shared a paper explaining the preparation mechanism for the tourism awards and took it as read. This was a complex cycle consisting of 18 feeder awards across a period of two years. There was agreement to regularly review the awards structure, taking into account that any changes would take two years to implement. The Chair remarked on the huge success of the recent ceremony and thanked Board Members for their contribution.

ACTION: Board members to share with Andrew Stokes any feedback on the Tourism Awards for consideration during the review.