

MINUTES OF THE 450TH MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)
HELD ON TUESDAY 5th April 2022 AT 10:30AM AT VISITBRITAIN/VISITENGLAND,
3 GROSVENOR GARDENS, VICTORIA, LONDON SW1W 0BD

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

In Attendance: Sally Balcombe, Chief Executive / BTA Accounting Officer
Patricia Yates, Interim CEO/ Director of Strategy & Communications
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs, Finance Director
Andrew Stokes, England Director
Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Head of England Planning and Delivery
Evelyn White, Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair opened the meeting and thanked members for accommodating the revised date and expressed warmest wishes on behalf of the Board to the CEO at her last meeting, for her remarkable leadership over the last seven years during times of unprecedented change and overcoming a multitude of challenges. The CEO thanked the Board for all their support and expressed optimism that recovery was now on the right platform.
2. The Chair welcomed Patricia Yates as interim CEO, upon Sally Balcombe's departure, until the new permanent CEO was appointed. It was also reported that a recruitment process for a new Director at VE was underway and had presently shortlisted seven candidates – an outcome of this selection process was due in May.

1.1 Apologies for absence

3. Apologies were tendered in advance of the meeting by the following:
Andy Wood, Board Member
Nadine Thomson, Board Member
Laura Backhouse, DCMS Observer

1.2 Register of Interests

4. There were no Register of Interests reported at this meeting. It was noted Sarah Fowler had moved organisations since the last meeting and had already reflected this change on the register.

1.3 Minutes from the last meeting

5. Sarah Fowler raised whether paragraph 1.1 should be converted into an action to gain momentum from the Board on engagement more broadly with venues and attractions in a VE capacity. The Chair welcomed this comment and

advised this would link into the discussion under item 4.2 Board Effectiveness (later in the meeting) and would be captured in this action.

1.4 Action Tracker

6. Each action was discussed and the action tracker updated.

2.0 Matters for discussion

2.1 Political update

7. Patricia Yates gave a verbal update on the political priorities:
The BTA had been selected to take part in a new government review of the function and governance of ALB (Arms Length Bodies). This process was thought to be in stages; stage one was to provide data for submission in May. The outcome of this stage would decide which ALBs progress to stage two, it would be at this point an independent reviewer would be appointed and the full scope of the review determined.
8. The BTA recently gave written evidence to the DCMS Select Committee Review on inbound tourism and role of culture, and was expecting to give verbal evidence in June. The Chair highlighted the importance of linking inbound tourism and business events at this forum. It was reported that a ministerial delegation was due to visit South Korea at the end of May to gain insight into other markets.
9. The Inter-ministerial group, that was set up as part of the Tourism Recovery Plan, hosted an exercise called the NE Sprint that took a closer look at regional collaborative working and the leveling up agenda, that both Andrew Stokes and Patricia Yates attended – a full update was provided under item 3.2.
10. The Tourism Industry Council, which is the governments engagement with private sector (and co-chaired by Karin Sheppard, BTA member), was reported to be setting up four topical working groups; inbound tourism, accessibility, sustainability, business events – Patricia Yates was leading the forum on sustainability.
11. The first partnership meeting with DCMS took place on the 4th April which agreed to identify KPIs attached to the funding settlement, many of which were thought to sit within the VE remit.
12. The Chair reported that the DMO Review was now with Ministers for consideration. It was acknowledged DMOs were frustrated with the lengthy process, but communications had been kept open to maintain momentum and provide reassurance that an outcome will be announced in due course.

2.2 CSR and Business Plan

13. The CEO confirmed that the first stage funding letter had been received and tabled a paper that outlined the proposed funding allocation for the next three year, which included £8.2m additional funding. The management letter had not yet been received which would outline the framework expectations. An overview of the funding settlement was detailed as followed:
 - Flatline budget on core grant
 - Uplift and transformation, now included funding in years two and three
 - Common Wealth Games funding
 - No additional funding for domestic marketing
 - Business events fund was reduced by 50% to £500k
 - English Tourism allocation
 - GREAT funds to be committed to international spend.

14. The CEO advised there had since been a requirement made to include the BritRail solution within this funding envelope; this was currently at research stage and therefore was unclear what impact this would have. It was recognised that GREAT funding was significant to VE marketing, and there were challenges surrounding their creative oversight which were being worked through.
15. Serena Jacobs discussed the principles that had been aligned to the business plan and budgeting process. It was fundamental the budget allowed for flexibility in order to respond to uncertainties e.g. Britrail and organisational design. Decisions were made based on priorities agreed by the BTA Board and were now going through the business planning process to identify deliverables.

2.3 BTA Strategy update

16. Patricia Yates tabled the vision and corporate priorities that had been agreed at the recent BTA Board, the overarching theme being to drive value rather than volume. Lyndsey Turner-Swift talked through the VE priorities and key deliverables, noting there was little change to the sense of the direction agreed at the end of last year which was to move forward as an enabler.
17. The development of TXGB and growth within commercial was discussed in detailed, which was mainly due to the opening of the retail platform and the Camelot project. It was noted that visits should remain in the forefront of this initiative going forward, to enable the distribution of products in both domestic and international markets. The Chair highlighted the importance of establishing measurable data for analysis into unfulfilled potential, identifying key benchmarks and for presenting deliverable evidence to the BTA Board.

ACTION: Andrew Stokes to provide a monthly summary that sets out latest financial data on revenue to target (related to our de-risking) and a report tabled for the next board meeting to inform discussion on growth projections to market potential.

18. Patricia Yates talked through the business events strategy and underlined the impact of the reduced funding; although there were no guarantees, it was thought opportunities through GREAT could arise. VE had applied focus to upskilling destinations and reported that our practical toolkits in relation to sustainability had been well received by the industry.
19. Patricia Yates acknowledged the important of data and digital transformation in future design. The governance structure to deliver this framework was being developed and would have oversight by the Directors. The Board recognised the complexities of transformation, and that careful preparation was needed before moving forward. The Chair concurred that the BTA Board had also flagged this as a risk and would be monitored.
20. Andrew Stokes provided an overview of the commercial programme vision, which was seen as integral to growth but faced challenges due to funding uncertainties. There was focus on optimising existing activity and retail platforms as well as testing new models within marketing.
21. Patricia Yates gave an update on organisational design, a new set of design principles were under development and were due to be ready by mid-April. Areas that would stop were addressed; this was due to the need to refocus on key priorities within available funding and resource.
22. The Board welcomed this intricate level of detail and were in support of the sense of direction. Sarah Fowler was particularly complimentary of the positive focus on sustainability and accessibility, and offered to provide support to Directors where possible.

3.0 Activity

3.1 England Tourism Week

23. The English Tourism week was deemed a success by DMOs and partners, with 132 media stories, 22 broadcast interviews, approximately 770 times pre-recorded radio package, £2m hashtag hits including 82 tweets from MPs; a full report of these findings to be shared in due course. The themes were 'You're welcome' and the importance of skills and careers in the industry. The 'Tourism Superstar' received the largest number of votes in recent years and

was awarded to George Finley of Matlock Farm. The Chair thanked Fiona Pollard for her engagement with DMOs and building on these relationships.

3.2 NE Sprint

24. Andrew Stokes tabled a paper detailing the background of the NE Sprint, which was an initiative involving a widespread of government departments exploring the levelling up agenda. This exercise was highlighted as a positive platform that inherently weaved in the tourism strategy, it recognised the challenges with route development at airports and the effect to the surrounding area, and highlighted complexities of local governments. The Chair was grateful for the VE presence and level of ministerial engagement on the visitor economy and concluded the need to focus on regional delivery as well as the national picture.

3.3 DMO Marketing Fund

25. Lyndsey Turner-Swift tabled a paper detailing the background of this scheme and took it as read. Against immense time pressures, they received 17 applications and were able to award funding bids to 11. Partnership played a strong theme in those that were progressed. Nadine Thomson was duly recognised for her time in supporting this process and assessing all 17 bids. The BTA Board were consulted on to provide overarching approval. Sarah Fowler noted that sustainability made limited reference in successful bids, but assurances were given this was in the criteria and would be addressed at the next stage.

3.4 Social Tourism

26. Andrew Stokes provided an update on the DCMS project that was working with the Family Holiday Charity to enable families, who could not otherwise, to take a holiday. Discussions were underway with DCMS to explore whether this could become a regular scheme. The criteria attracted many applicants and proved to be a strong partnership working with Family Holiday charity.

4.0 Any other business

4.1 VisitEngland Awards for Excellence Event

27. Andrew Stokes provided an overview of the suggested contenders received from across the organisation for the award of outstanding contribution, and sought feedback and any new nominations. The Board were invited to send their recommendations to the Chair by close tomorrow.

ACTION: Board Members to recommend contender by close of play 6 April, to be signed off by the Chair.

4.2 BTA Board Effectiveness Review

28. The Chair detailed the background of this review commissioned by the BTA Chair, Dame Judith Macgregor, which was in summary to consider if there were ways to further enhance the role of Board members and whether the VEAB could also adapt these learnings. It recognised that the outputs from the Joint Strategy day should continue to be forefront of meeting agendas and enable deep dives, and to explore with Board members if they had capacity to contribute more outside of meetings, cognisant with time constraints e.g. engagement at business events. There was also a discussion on revising the format of meetings, to consider different locations and to facilitate externally led deep dives. The Board concurred with this approach, adding that mentoring is already taking place and this would be a good way for this to be formally established, and welcomed the opportunity to discuss in detail and develop a plan.

ACTION: The Chair, in consultation with Board members, to create a Forward Look Plan to develop Board effectiveness proposal for discussion with colleagues, noting the three priorities (meeting formats, strategic oversight role, board engagement).

The date of the next meeting: 14th June 2022.