

MINUTES OF THE 449TH MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)
HELD ON TUESDAY 23RD November 2021 AT 10:30AM AT VISITBRITAIN/VISITENGLAND,
3 GROSVENOR GARDENS, VICTORIA, LONDON SW1W 0BD

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

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

1. Chair's Update and Introduction

1.1 The Chair opened by welcoming everyone to the meeting. He informed members of recent field visits at various locations that were greatly received by the sector and encourage all Directors to visit venues and attractions to build on partnerships.

2. Apologies

2.1 There were no apologies to note.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no new declarations of interest for noting.

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2021 were approved.

5. Matters Arising / Action Tracker

5.1 The actions were reviewed and agreed – see Action Tracker for updates.

6. Political Update

- 6.1 The Board received a verbal update from Patricia Yates on early indications in relation to the Spending Review:
- 6.2 There is currently an internal process taking place to prioritise and allocate expected Capital Funding; this is due to conclude by the beginning of February 2022.
- 6.3 A detailed planning assumption is currently underway in response to the anticipated flatline budget of £7.2m.
- 6.4 It is expected there will be no additional funding or uplift from the GREAT. This demands a tactical and strategic approach which may require refocusing international market on a reduced scale.
- 6.5 DCMS are currently reviewing the proposed uplift for ALBs. Although it remains uncertain, the value of funding the DMO review is widely recognised therefore confident this will be prioritised.

7. Strategy Review update

- 7.1 Sally Balcombe gave an overview of the Joint Strategy Day on the 12th October 2021. It was the first meeting of this size to convene in person for some time which led to useful and meaningful discussions; it provided clarity and identified themes that should be prioritised.
- 7.2 This has evolved into a review, led by Andrew Stokes, to redefine the role of VE and our strategic approach. Consideration must be made on where value is added and which themes would form a best practice/ advisory role should there be a funding freeze. There is a need to prioritise market activity and help identify areas we should focus on and step back from.
- 7.3 This review will feed into DCMS in parallel with the Spending Review in January 2022. The Board highlighted the importance of VEAB consulting on this review and providing input at critical points.
- 7.4 The business model is being reviewed to scope options available to generate revenue; this is also being explored by DCMS. The Chair summarised the importance of understanding revenue behaviours until March 2022 in order to make judgement and measure our successes.
- 7.5 **ACTION: Andrew Stokes/ Patricia Yates to circulate early findings of the 'CSR and recommendations' paper to VEAB and arrange a conference call to provide consultation before the BTA Board on the 14th December 2021.**

7.i National Lottery Days Out Campaign – update

- 7.i.1 Lyndsey Turner-Swift presented an update paper as read. This campaign launched 500 products through the VisitBritain shop for the public to purchase using a £25 voucher obtained through a National Lotto ticket. This was set up in a short timeframe and was soon realised the platform needed to grow significantly in order to respond to the high customer demands and resolve technical challenges. There was a huge internal effort to prioritise this backlog, which is now successfully back on track. The campaign has been extended to March 2022 to maximise the user capacity and be able to benefit from the winter half term break.
- 7.i.2 This initiative with Camelot has embedded a partnership that will provide support beyond this campaign. The learning and opportunities will be shared across future projects. This has also produced operational data that will enhance focus and improve user take up.

7.ii Brit Rail

- 7.ii.1 Lyndsey Turner-Swift tabled an update as read. This government initiative is experiencing significant delays on the research commissioned by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) to explore the consumer appetite and possible revenue abstraction. It is thought research results will not be reported on until March 2022, holding up the entire rail product until then.
- 7.ii.2 DCMS have raised with ministers the implications of this delay and recommended a meeting with the RDG to consider next steps.

7.iii DMC Marketing Fund

- 7.iii.1 Andrew Stokes presented a paper as read. A taskforce was founded in September to develop a set of recovery initiatives with DMCs up until the end of March 2022. The allocated funding of £300k has come from the repurposing of VBs core administration budget due to the inability of accruing financial reserve while inbound travel to Britain was closed to finance forward marketing activity.

7.iv Social Tourism – Introduction to a department initiative

- 7.iv.1 Patricia Yates gave an overview of this proposed initiative driven by DCMS. An underspend budget of £500-£600k is being repurposed to provide an opportunity for those who would otherwise not be in a position to take a holiday (visit attractions, short breaks). VB will work with the Family Holiday Association (FHA) to deliver this initiative by providing support with onboarding and our expertise in sourcing the right products. Although this is awaiting final agreement, there is support by the Secretary of State to launch in January 2022.
- 7.iv.2 Andrew Stokes raised concerns with the proposed timeframe and achieving this ambition. Allan Lambert offered his support having worked with FHA in previous projects to deliver the proposed plan.

7.v Statutory Research Review

- 7.v.1 Patricia Yates gave a verbal update. This is an output from the Strategy Day, where DCMS advised there is no need for VE to deliver statutory research now we have exited the EU. Academic research has been commissioned to report on domestic data and to review where there are gaps and where we could add most value.

8. TXGB Performance update

- 8.1 Andrew Stokes tabled a paper detailing contract variation 6, providing financial support in the following areas; focused target development with booking engines/ distribution channels; product connectivity with VB retail domestic shop; enhanced DMO support to simplify onboarding; and, to improve product experience with TXGB.
- 8.2 The retail shop was due to go live in July but was delayed until September, which was the principle reason commission levels were low during the summer months. The launch of Camelot in October saw a positive increase of commission (plus £26k in a month). Tourism Northern Ireland came on board in November and Wales are in final stages of procurement, both expected to contribute £25k set up fees and continued £8k a month.
- 8.3 The sustainability of this platform may prove challenging, it is anticipated many suppliers will stay while some may move to other channels. This will be closely monitored to ensure we drive the right traffic.

9. Any other business

- 9.1 As Nigel Halkes' last meeting, the Chair expressed sincere gratitude on behalf of the board for invaluable support and commitment over the past eight years and wished him well in his further prospects.

9.2 The dates of the next meeting will be: 15th March 2022 at 1000-1400.

9.3 The meeting was closed at 1230.