

## CONFIDENTIAL

### MINUTES OF THE 447<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB) HELD ON TUESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021 AT 10:30AM VIA TELECONFERENCE

**Present:** Nick De Bois, Chairman  
Sarah Fowler, Board Member  
Nigel Halkes, Board Member  
Allan Lambert, Board Member  
David Martin, DCMS  
Fiona Pollard, Board Member  
Nadine Thomson, Board Member  
Dr Andy Wood OBE DL, Board Member

**In Attendance:** Sally Balcombe, Chief Executive / BTA Accounting Officer  
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Rachael Farrington, Head of Tourism Affairs  
Peter Mills, Business Services Director  
Andrew Stokes, England Director  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Head of England Planning and Delivery  
Patricia Yates, Director of Strategy & Communications  
Dale Rustige, Governance Executive (minutes)

#### **Agenda item 1: Chair's Update and Introduction**

1. The Chairman welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.

#### **Agenda Item 2: Apologies**

2. There were no apologies to note.

#### **Agenda Item 3: Declarations of Interest**

3. There were no new declarations of interest for noting.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the Last Meeting**

4. The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were approved.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Matters Arising / Action Tracker**

5. There were no matters arising to note.

#### **Agenda Item 6: Political Update**

6. The Board received a verbal update from Patricia Yates and the following key points were noted:
  - 6.1. The Government's Tourism Recovery Plan is due to be published soon. The key objective of the Plan is to support the tourism industry to quickly rebuild.
  - 6.2. The 2021 G7 Summit is being held in Cornwall in June. This summit will be a good opportunity for business events and to sell Britain as a destination.

- 6.3. Indoor attractions have reopened on 17<sup>th</sup> May as part of the Government's phased easing of restrictions. There will also be a report due out regarding the covid vaccine passports being proposed by Government.
- 6.4. There have been ongoing discussions across Government on the reopening of inbound tourism and the roadmap for this. There have been some discrepancies regarding countries on the travel green list and the official travel advice to that country.
7. The Board had a discussion regarding domestic sentiment. There has been uncertainty on where to go in the domestic audience. Sentiment data has shown that there has been positive support on keeping borders shut for longer if needed. The Board was informed that the domestic campaign will still be going ahead and the messaging will revolve around getting together with loved ones and city breaks.
8. There was a discussion on whether the Tourism Recovery Plan comes with additional funding for VisitBritain/VisitEngland to deliver on its objectives within the Plan. David Martin noted that the Recovery Plan is under a cross-government review and all Ministers that have a stake in the tourism economy will be reviewing it. The Plan will be considered alongside the upcoming spending review and the plans will be incumbent to the Government to deliver on the objectives.

### **Agenda Item 7: Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) Review Update**

9. The Chairman provided a verbal update on the ongoing DMO review.
10. The review is entering the roundtable phase, which will be held in nine locations across England. This will be the listening/challenge phase of the consultation. The future funding model and structure of DMOs has been one of the key emerging themes from the consultation. It was noted that several hundred respondents had responded to the written survey. Meetings have also been held with stakeholders wanting to be engaged.
11. The structure and variances in the DMO landscape has also been a key area highlighted during the consultation. The roundtable meetings will include discussions on the future scope of Government involvement in the DMO framework, including funding structures. The Board noted that there will be plenty of representation from the DMOs and local regions to allow a broad range of perspectives during the roundtables.

### **Agenda Item 8: Activity**

12. English Tourism Week (ETW) Update
  - 12.1. The Board received and noted a verbal update from Fiona Pollard. She noted that there have been some challenges in running this year's ETW due to the Covid restrictions. Some messaging had to be rolled back to adapt to the current situation.
  - 12.2. Workshops have also been delivered to support stakeholders on what to say in their messaging, including guidance on who to engage with in local and national government.
13. Discover England Fund (DEF) Update
  - 13.1. The Board received and noted the paper. Lyndsey Turner-Swift provided a verbal update and the following key points were noted:
    - 13.1.1. The full £5.5m funding has been fully allocated during this financial year, with no project underspending. All planned activity has been delivered on, which is very positive.
    - 13.1.2. The evaluations for years 1-4 of the DEF is now complete. This will be made available to the VEAB when the report is ready for publication.
    - 13.1.3. There has been a strong focus on sustaining DEF products and the VisitEngland and Marketing Teams have worked closely with project teams and their plans.

13.2. Board members were thanked for their engagement work with various project teams, including the insights and feedback they provided on these. Among the projects looked at were: Costwolds and Great West Way, England's Coast, Destination Plymouth and the project team working on showcasing England's heritage offering.

#### 14. England Domestic Marketing

14.1. The Board received and noted the paper. Andrew Stokes provided a verbal update and the following key points were noted:

14.1.1. The objective is to get UK consumers to have a desire for travel within England, to travel responsibly, and consider booking a domestic UK break by showcasing the exciting, inspiring and safe experiences available at their doorstep. The target audience will be pre-nesters and families, with a halo impact to other audiences.

14.1.2. There is a £5m GREAT budget for a FY Q1/Q2 domestic campaign. This will be an extension of the previous year's Escape the Everyday campaign.

14.1.3. Success will be measured by a target ROI of 10:1, with messaging that is aimed to raise strong awareness and increase consideration to take a UK break and escape the everyday, including 2000+ engagements with the industry toolkit.

14.1.4. Work will be done with the industry on developing a proposition for cities that will provide consumers with reasons to take a city break.

14.1.5. One of the key objectives of the marketing campaigns was to break the locks of the lockdown, with a focus on ensuring people take the first step with day trips. Overnight stays will follow as they become more comfortable.

14.1.6. 14 DMOs successfully applied to receive marketing funds to aid recovery and support the Escape the Everyday domestic campaign.

#### 15. Domestic Shop / Rail Pass / Heritage Lotter Vouchers

15.1. The Board received a verbal update from Andrew Strokes:

15.1.1. VisitEngland has been in discussion with National Lottery on an initiative to give customers a discount when buying a lottery product.

15.1.2. The BritRail Pass is something that DCMS is very keen on rolling out. The initiative is still in the early stages.

15.1.3. With VisitBritain already having an international shop, the viability of opening a domestic shop is under review. This being done in response to consumer demand. The domestic shop would have a domestic focus and would help drive demand and attention into the domestic market.

#### **Agenda Item 9: TXGB Update**

16. The Board received and noted the paper. A verbal update was provided by Andrew Stokes and Peter Mills.

17. The Board was presented with information on the background, development, and purpose of the TXGB online digital platform. The initial model assumed that the supplier of the platform, Rainmaker Solutions ("RM"), would be self-funding. However, challenges as a result of Covid-19 had caused delays, resulting in RM requiring funding support facilitated by the BTA.

18. The Board noted the rationale behind keeping the TXGB platform running and the value it provides to the domestic tourism industry. The three core areas that it delivers value in include: TXGN functioning as a platform for a large number of national suppliers/providers, operating as an integrated booking system and having up to 80+ different systems registered across the market so far, providing a central platform for distributors nationally (ranging from travel agents, tour operators, DMOs, etc.).

19. The Board was informed that stress tests have been undertaken on the proposed financial support package for RM, including a full risk analysis. It was noted that DCMS had been closely engaged in the planning process.
20. As part of the proposals, an open book accounting approach will be taken between the BTA and RM. The BTA have undertaken various forecast models to assess value for money and operational viability and stress figures indicate a low scenario; the results were shared with the Board.
21. Following a discussion, it was clarified that the money from booking transactions made through the TXGB platform would go straight from the customers to the suppliers.
22. The Board had a discussion and noted the value of keeping the TXGB platform, including the provision of support to RM to keep the platform operational. It was noted that the downside of shutting TXGB down is that the distributions arrangements currently in place will disappear.

#### **Agenda Item 10: Sustainability Update**

23. The Board received and noted the paper. Rachael Farrington provided a verbal update and the following key points were noted:
  - 23.1. Sustainability is one of the objectives within the Government's Tourism Recovery Plan. The sustainability proposals will be looking at what the role of the BTA will be in this and the scale of ambition. A range of stakeholders across the industry have been engaged in the development of this initial work.
  - 23.2. The scope will include areas such as air travel (the largest contributor to carbon emissions), consumer expectations and sentiment, making travel post-Covid more sustainable, possible options for green accreditation initiatives, and the Government's net zero ambitions.
  - 23.3. Sustainability covers broad policy issues ranging from the environment to destination management. Key themes that would be explored will include pre-trip consumer information, visitor dispersal in a sustainable manner, reducing waste and energy efficiency for tourism businesses, and improving the long-term viability of destinations balancing sustainability and economic factors.

There was a discussion regarding getting case-study data on specific areas would require resources from external consultancies. Other government departments may also have some data.

#### **Agenda Item 11: Any Other Business**

24. There was no other business to discuss.

#### **Agenda Item 12: Date of Next Meeting**

25. The dates of the next meetings were noted as follows:
  - 25.1. Joint BTA Board/VEAB Strategy Day - Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (10.00am)
  - 25.2. VEAB Meeting – Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 (10:30am)

#### **Agenda Item 13: Meeting Close**

26. The meeting was closed at 1:00pm.