

CONFIDENTIAL

**MINUTES OF THE 446TH MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)
HELD ON TUESDAY 16TH MARCH 2021 AT 10:00AM 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
Peter Mills, Business Services Director
Andrew Stokes, England Director
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary
Patricia Yates, Director of Strategy & Communications
Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Head of England Planning and Delivery
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 24th November 2020 were approved.

Agenda Item 5: Matters Arising / Action Tracker

5. There were no matters arising to note.

Agenda Item 6: Political Update

6. Tourism Recovery Plan

The Board received a verbal update from David Martin on the progress regarding the Tourism Recovery Plan. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1. The government has been reviewing and finalising the plans for the reopening of the tourism for alignment with the recovery roadmap. There have been various guidelines and regulations pertaining to the visitor economy that are under development. Cross government reviews have been taking place, which will feed into the roadmap. An events research programme would be underway to pilot mass gatherings. A global task force has also been set up to review international travel arrangements going forward.
- 6.2. Tourism Recovery Plan: The government has committed to publishing the plan in the spring as part of its overall roadmap to recovery. A narrative would be included within the plan highlighting the importance of the tourism sector to the UK economy and what the government has done so far to support the sector. Other strands included within the plan would cover:
 - A review of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector.
 - Ongoing support for businesses, including those distributed via local authorities.
 - Development of policy specifically relating to tourism.
 - Narrative and plans relating to the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) landscape.
 - A comprehensive chapter on the events industry and how opportunities can be maximized for current and future events.
 - Setting the priorities with the BTA for 2022 onwards.
- 6.3. It was noted that Cabinet Office approval has been given for funding towards domestic marketing for the next six months.
- 6.4. It was noted that the development of a vaccination passport system is underway and is being led by the Cabinet Office. DCMS have started engaging on this.
- 6.5. The Board noted feedback that there appears to be some discrepancies between national and local politics and policies. This was an area that would need some review, as there has already been some reports regarding inconsistencies with approval processes for setting up events.

Agenda Item 7: Destination Management Organisations (DMO) Review

7. The Chairman provided a verbal update on the DMO review currently underway, which he is leading on. The following key points were noted:
 - 7.1. The review has been launched and is now public. The relevant information is available via the Gov.uk website. The first phase will be a public call for evidence.
 - 7.2. An independent challenge panel has been set up to review each stage of the consultation. The panel is comprised of representatives from regions across the country. It was noted that members of the panel will not be representing an organisation or a particular agenda.
 - 7.3. In the following phases, a regional roundtable would be set up with the membership comprising a cross-section of DMOs, DCMS, regional representatives and challenge panel members.
 - 7.4. The key outcome expected from the review is to develop the clearest possible picture on the best structure and role of DMOs, including how this would effectively align with tourism objectives. The aim is to engage as widely as possible.
8. The Board noted that a formal submission will be made by VisitEngland for the consultation.

Agenda Item 8: Activity

9. Discover England Fund (DEF) Update
 - 9.1. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. Lyndsey Turner-Swift provided a verbal update and the following key points were noted:
 - 9.1.1. The delivery of the Year 5 programme of the DEF is in its final stages. Some projects required some adjustment due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - 9.1.2. The VisitEngland team continues to provide close support and guidance to partners on the delivery of projects.

- 9.1.3. There has been some integration of DEF products with business as usual and recovery-focused activities.
- 9.1.4. There has been continued work with external media partners in rolling out marketing campaigns, such as BuzzFeed and News UK.
- 9.1.5. The procurement for an external evaluator to undertake the evaluation review of the Year 5 DEF programme has been underway.
- 9.1.6. The final report for Year 1-4 DEF is being finalised and would be shared with the Board.
- 9.1.7. The Taking England to The World training has been progressing well. Existing TXGB connections are being expanded, such as growing Manchester as the gateway to North England; new connections are also under development.

10. VisitEngland Business Plan 2021/22 Update

- 10.1. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. Lyndsey Turner-Swift provided a verbal update and the following key points were noted:
 - 10.1.1. It was noted that elements of the plan had been presented to the Board in November and feedback has been embedded into current plan as presented.
 - 10.1.2. The key priority is to support the English tourism sector towards recovery through business support, stewarding the landscape, being an authority on tourism, and delivery transformation. The priorities were tied in to the BTA's corporate priorities for 2021/22.
 - 10.1.3. Success would be measured through KPIs and evaluation reviews of programmes and activities.
 - 10.1.4. The Board noted the indicative budgets for the different work strands. The total Grant in Aid will be £7.1m. £2m additional funding has been allocated to VisitEngland from the £5 million discretionary pot. DCMS will advise on priorities in final funding letter and post March Budget
 - 10.1.5. In terms of activity, one of the key areas of focus will be in supporting SMEs across the tourism landscape through the different phases of recovery. There will also be continued support for DMOs and combined authorities.
 - 10.1.6. There will be some digital transformation work with the implementation of a grant funding system, and the integration of the TXGB platform with the retail system.

11. England Domestic Marketing

- 11.1. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. The Board noted that Emma Wilkinson's had taken her new role as the Head of GREAT and congratulated her. Emma provided a verbal update in reference to the paper and the following key points were noted:
 - 11.1.1. The plans for domestic marketing have been aligned with the international marketing plan. It is also lined up with government agenda and the Tourism Recovery Plan.
 - 11.1.2. The delivery of the Escape the Everyday campaign will continue on to December 2021.
 - 11.1.3. The GREAT campaign will undergo a refresh, with the launch of the new direction and strategy from January 2022.
 - 11.1.4. The approach for the domestic campaign would be targeted to build desire in UK customers to travel responsibly and consider booking a domestic break. Key audiences will be pre-nesters and families for "Escape the Everyday".
 - 11.1.5. The timeline for 2021/22 will be the Escape the Everyday campaign from April-June; City breaks from July-September; then an England focused campaign from October-December 2021.
 - 11.1.6. The target of the domestic campaign is to deliver a 10:1 return on investment (ROI).
 - 11.1.7. The DMO marketing recovery fund has been extended to 30 June 2021. This was able to support 14 DMOs in total.

11.2. The Board was provided a brief update on international marketing plans. The ROI target for international will be 10:1. The theme was to get customers to choose Britain as their next destination by inspiring and providing assurance that it is a safe and inspiring destination. Visitors will receive distinct British experiences spanning heritage and culture.

12. GREAT Campaign Update

12.1. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. The verbal update had been integrated with the update provided on Domestic Marketing above.

13. Business Support Update

13.1. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. Andrew Stokes provided a verbal update in reference to the paper and the following points were noted:

13.1.1. Engagement on the business advice hub has been very positive. It is the most visited page on the VisitBritain.org website during the past few months.

13.1.2. Case studies will be launched featuring businesses and how they have managed through the pandemic and lockdowns.

13.1.3. Business support roadshows are being rolled out, which will help drive more engagement with VisitEngland.

13.1.4. The planning cycle for the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence 2021/22 is underway.

13.1.5. The latest edition of VisitEngland's popular Pink Book will be published shortly; the book outlines regulatory requirements and guidance for accommodation providers and attractions in England.

13.1.6. The We're Good To Go (WGTG) initiative continues to be successful, with over 45,000 applications received. A media announcement for WGTG has been timed for ExploreGB, highlighting its alignment with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) 'safe travels' stamp.

13.1.7. The Taking England to the World (TETTW) programme is being prepared to have a virtual delivery option.

13.1.8. The TXGB platform has seen strong sales in October-November 2020. December 2020 to January 2021 have been challenging months, however February 2021 has seen record sales and March has started strongly. A partnership has also been set up for the TXGB platform to sell Rugby World Cup packages.

14. TXGB Update

14.1. The Board was updated on the review of the arrangements for TXGB and the risks regarding the current provider of the platform. The situation is currently being reviewed by the Executive Team, the Finance Team and DCMS.

Agenda Item 9: Tourism Sustainability

15. The Board noted the paper and took this as read. Patricia Yates provided a verbal update in reference to the paper and following points were noted:

15.1. As part of the recovery, many sectors have been taking the opportunity to refocus on sustainability initiatives. The government has renewed its commitment to this, particularly with the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow coming up this year.

15.2. The area of sustainability covers a board range of issues ranging from environmental factors to destination management.

15.3. Roundtables have been taking place with industry and political representation and engagement. Discussions have been very productive.

- 15.4. The key issues that have been flagged related to the impact of transport, also striking a balance between residents, visitors and businesses. Societal factors have also featured, including looking at how tourism is beneficial for all.
- 15.5. There has also been very good engagement with DMOs. The Board thanked Sarah Fowler for her engagement in the roundtables and as a sponsor from the VEAB.
- 15.6. A policy paper will be developed based on the findings and discussions and shared with the Board in due course.

Agenda item 10: Any Other Business

16. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- 16.1. Sally Balcombe provided the Board with an update regarding KPIs. Due to the current climate with Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns, there have been some challenges with DCMS setting definitive KPIs due to the uncertainty.
- 16.2. There are some inherent challenges in measuring the total volume of support offered by the BTA to the government, industry and SMEs. The team will be looking at using narrative to demonstrate success and achievements.
- 16.3. Furthermore, there is a multifaceted transformation programme being rolled out behind the scenes within the BTA, with major systems being upgraded. The transformation will serve to strengthen the organisation's core capabilities.
- 16.4. The BTA still remains under huge financial pressure and there will be added pressure from added objectives from the government. The extra funding from DCMS will help, however the pressures will still remain.
- 16.5. A review is being done to identify areas within the organisation that are stretched and at risk, and doing a review on pinpointing the highest priority areas.

Agenda item 11: Date of Next Meeting

17. The date of the next meeting will be Tuesday 18th May 2021 (10:30am).

Agenda item 12: Meeting Close

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