

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**MINUTES OF THE 441<sup>ST</sup> MEETING OF VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)  
HELD VIA TELECONFERENCE AT 10.30AM ON 17<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2020**

**Present:** Denis Wormwell, Chairman  
Sarah Fowler, Board Member  
Nigel Halkes, Board Member  
Allan Lambert, Board Member  
Fiona Pollard, Board Member  
Nadine Thomson, Board Member  
Dr Andy Wood OBE DL, Board Member

**In Attendance:** Andrew Stokes, England Director  
Peter Mills, Business Services Director  
Patricia Yates, Director of Strategy & Communications  
Stephen Darke, Head of Tourism Affairs, DCMS  
Henry Bankes, General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Humphrey Walwyn, Head of Research & Evaluation (item 7.)  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift, Head of England Action Plan (item 7.)  
Emma Wilkinson, Senior Brand and Customer Marketing Manager (item 8.)  
Dale Rustige, Governance Executive (Minutes)

**Apologies:** Sally Balcombe, CEO / BTA Accounting Officer

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

1. The Chairman welcomed the Board to the meeting, which was held via teleconference.
2. The Chairman welcomed the three new members to their first meeting: Nadine Thomson, Sarah Fowler, Dr Andy Wood.
3. The Board noted that this would be the current Chairman's, Denis Wormwell, last meeting. His term of office was due to finish on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. The Board thanked the Chairman for all his hard work, efforts and commitment to the organisation and the VisitEngland Advisory Board.

**Agenda Item 2: Apologies**

4. The Board noted apologies from Sally Balcombe.

**Agenda Item 3: Declarations of interest**

5. There were no new declarations.

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

6. The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019 were approved.

**Agenda item 5: Matters Arising / Action Tracker**

7. There were no matters arising or actions due.

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

### 8. New Ministers / Budget

The Board noted the paper. Patricia Yates provided a verbal update:

- (i) The appointment of the new Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage has been announced as Nigel Huddleston MP, to succeed Helen Whately MP. It was noted that the new minister has a background in travel and tourism.
- (ii) The government has incorporated budgetary measures for the economic impact of covid-19, including an adjustment to business rates.
- (iii) The government's current advice to the public was to avoid mass gatherings, self-isolate if displaying symptoms, working from home if possible, and avoiding all non-essential travel.
- (iv) There has so far been a lack of clarity on the next steps and measures for tourism and leisure businesses. VisitBritain/VisitEngland would be working with both the government and the industry to provide guidance and support the recovery campaign.
- (v) Concerns had been raised on the delays in government funding to the tourism sector, including the DEF timetable, following the impact of covid-19. It was noted that political support and advocates will be key in ensuring issues are communicated to government.

### 9. Coronarivirus / Covid-19

It was noted that updates on the impact of covid-19 on the industry has been covered on the item above.

### 10. English Tourism Week (ETW)

The Board noted the paper, which covered updates on the ETW work to date.

## **Agenda item 7: Discover England Fund (DEF) Update**

### 11. Interim Report – Year 3 Evaluation

The Board noted the paper, which reported on the Year Interim Evaluation of the DEF. Humphrey Walwyn provided a verbal update:

- (i) The DEF programme has evolved over time. It was initially expected that the programme would fund 10-15 pilot projects in Year 1 and 3-5 projects in Year 2-3. However, the subsequent scope of DEF had been larger, resulting in up to 20 projects in Year 1 and 12 large-scale projects in Year 2-3. This includes the development of projects such as TXGB platform (Tourism Exchange Great Britain).
- (ii) The DEF programme appears on course to deliver strongly against its core objectives.
- (iii) There has been plenty of evidence to demonstrate the effective impact of partnership working with DMOs and partners.
- (iv) Evidence indicates that anticipated long lead in times in product development is evident for projects. Substantive outcomes were not expected for 1-3 years in most cases
- (v) The current report is in an interim evaluation. However, the final impact evaluation of Year 4 of the DEF should be available in late-2020. An indicative 2020 return on investment (ROI) will be produced for each of the large-scale projects.

### 12. Year 5 Funding Panel Recommendations

The Board noted the paper outlining the DEF grant funding recommendations for Year 5. The following updates were noted by the Board:

- (i) There had been 18 applicants out of a possible 20, with 4 large-scale and 4 Year 3 small-scale projects.

- (ii) 11 projects had been recommended for approval (10 large-scale and 1 Year 3 small-scale projects) totaling £2,305,000.
- (iii) 7 recommended was to be declined (4 large-scale and 3 Year 3 small-scale projects).
- (iv) £2,300,000 investment pot available, with the programme board agreeing to over-programme by 15%

#### **Agenda item 8: England Marketing Update – Marketing and Distribution Priorities**

13. The Board noted the report which outlined the England Marketing Priorities for 2020/21. Andrew Stokes and Emma Wilkinson provided a verbal update:
- (i) Over the past four years, VisitEngland activity has focused on the development and delivery of the DEF. Over the past 2-3 years, the DEF budget has also covered B2B and B2C marketing activities in target markets, which is primarily US & Europe.
  - (ii) Internationally, England is marketed via the GREAT Britain campaign, particularly under the “I Travel For” global campaign during the last 3 years.
  - (iii) This year, the priority would be on the integration of DEF products into the new global campaign and domestic campaigns through a centrally managed £2m marketing and distribution budget. There would also be a new accessibility pilot to improve the representation of those with accessibility needs.
  - (iv) This year would be Year 3 of the Microgapping campaign, the GREAT funded campaign promoting domestic tourism to millennials to take short breaks at home.
  - (v) The Board was informed that due to the impact of covid-19, the marketing priorities and timescales would be adapted to match the current circumstances. Work would also be focused on recovery for both domestic and global markets.
  - (vi) Messaging on social media channels would also be tailored to reflect current circumstances.

#### **Agenda item 9: Business Support Transformation Project – Update on Approach**

14. The Board noted the paper outlining the plans and proposals for the Business Support Transformation Project. Janet Utley provided the Board with a verbal update:
- (i) The key aims of the project would be: help upskill the sector to support Tourism Action Zones and the Levelling Up agenda; support SMEs, lead and educate the sector; help build resilience to the industry through expert guidance (e.g. covid-19, terrorism, etc.); and the review of the Quality Schemes and potential retender.
  - (ii) The key aim for Stage 1 would be to assess whether schemes were fit for purpose, including what they need/value in order to position VisitEngland strongly in tender activities.
  - (iii) The key aim for Stage 2 would be the delivery of advice, building strong partner options, and ensuring that the England voice for the industry is articulated and clear.
15. The Board had a question regarding any potential challenges on the availability of resources or funding to deliver the project. The Board was informed that this has been taken into account and would be included in the upcoming government spending review process. It was also noted the timelines of the project proposals would be impacted by delays in the spending review.

#### **Agenda item 10: Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) & Taking England to the World (TETTW)**

16. The Board noted the paper, outlining updates on TXGB and TETTW. Andrew Stokes provided a verbal update:
- (i) The Board was given a background on the TXGB fund’s original objectives, which were as follows: increase total international visits, dispersal of visitors beyond London, increase visitor spend through improved bookability, and transformation of the DMO/delivery landscape.
  - (ii) The TXGB platform was developed as a business-to-business platform connecting tourism suppliers to a diverse range of domestic and international distributors.

- (iii) There have been challenges in both the supplier and distributor sides, particularly in the understanding of working with international markets. There have also been resourcing issues with the DMOs.
  - (iv) There were also technical challenges resulting from the the diverse booking engine landscape across the England. Work on this has been progressing, with 14 booking engines current connected and further plans in place to greatly expand this.
17. The Board discussed the contracted supplier that currently providing the services for the TXGB platform. It expressed concerns on the potential risk of the supplier going out of business, particularly during the covid-19 pandemic. The Board was reassured that the provider of the technology was a separate company from the supplier. Therefore, the TXGB platform could be taken to another supplier if required. It was further noted that the supplier provides services to a diverse range of sectors, so it is not entirely dependent on the tourism sector. Finally, as part of a wider risk mitigation strategy, VisitBritain/VisitEngland will be undertaking a risk assessment of its key suppliers.

**Agenda item 11: VisitEngland Awards for Excellence (Update)**

18. The Board noted the paper highlighting the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence plans for 2020. Andrew Stokes provided a verbal update:
- (i) The awards were originally due to be held in June 2020. However due to the covid-19 lockdown, the judging panel would be hosted virtually.
  - (ii) A special award was also offered each year by VisitEngland an individual or institution that has contributed something special and unique to tourism in England. The winner for 2019 was England's National Parks.
  - (iii) An update would be provided to the Board in the June meeting on the 2020 awards.

**Agenda item 9: Any other business**

19. There was no other business.

**Agenda item 10: Date of Next Meeting**

20. It was noted that the next meeting will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (10:30).

**Agenda item 11: Close**

21. The meeting was closed at 12.30pm.