

**MINUTES OF THE 466th MEETING OF THE
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD**

held on Tuesday 20th June 2023 at 1000
3 Grosvenor Gardens, London

Present:

Nick de Bois CBE (Chair)	BTA Board Chair
Dame Judith Macgregor DCMG LVO (JM)	Board Member
Carol Hui (CH)	Board Member
Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member
Ian Edwards (IE)	Board Member / Wales Representative (ex-officio)
Rt Hon Viscount John Thurso (JT)	Board Member / VisitScotland Chairman (ex-officio)
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member
Fiona Pollard (FP)	VEAB Interim Chair
Mark Taylor (MT)	London & Partners (Observer)
Laura Backhouse (LB)	DCMS (Observer)
Rodrigo Voss (RV)	Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)

In Attendance:

Patricia Yates (CEO)	CEO/ Accounting Officer
Andrew Stokes (AS)	Director VisitEngland and Commercial
Debra Lang (DL)	Director HR and Professional Services
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Evelyn White (EW)	Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

Guest Speakers:

Lee Gudgeon	Managing Director, Reed Talent Solutions
Steve Dilley	Managing Consultant, Reed Talent Solutions

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1.0 Welcome

1.1: Apologies for absence

1. Apologies for absence were recorded for Duncan Parish; Laura Backhouse attended on behalf of DCMS.

1.2 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

2. The Chair asked that the Register of Interests noted his appointments as a non executive Director of Rapiergroup Limited and as a Director of Rapier Design Group Limited.

1.3 Minutes of the Meeting on 21st March 2023 (For approval)

3. The minutes from the last meeting on 21st March were approved.

1.4 Matters Arising / Action Tracker

4. Each action was reviewed, and the tracker updated.

1.5 Chair's Report

5. The Chair provided an outline of his key priorities and activities since the last Board:
- ALB Review – the review had progressed to consultation with stakeholders, the anticipated reporting date was now expected in the autumn.
 - Meeting of Public Body Chairs/CEOs – the Secretary of State attended and shared the departmental priorities which were summarised as; the use of better 'data'; delivery of more opportunities for 'young people'; and, considering 'place' (linked to the Levelling up objective).
 - Corporate updates from the Permanent Secretary – ALBs were reminded of the importance of diversity in recruitment. The BTA and VEAB had also been recognised for their participation in the Board Apprenticeship Programme.
 - Interministerial Group (IMG) – the last meeting, due to focus on international competitiveness, was postponed.
 - Meeting with Sir John Whittingdale MP – the Chair was joined by FP and the CEO and the topics of UK competitiveness and the organisations priorities were noted. It was noted he had also agreed to sponsor our room booking in parliament for our Exhibition Event in July.
 - Attendance at the North Wales Tourism Annual Trade Forum.
 - Meeting with the new Trade Commissioner for India.
6. An update on Board appointments was given:
- VEAB Chair – the interview process was now complete.
 - BTA Board members – this campaign had been delayed due to the need to appoint a new Independent Panel Member. It was still hoped that appointments would be made before the October strategy day.
 - Patricia Corbett had regrettably stepped down as Tourism Northern Ireland's observer – for reasons linked to a lack of a functioning administration in Northern Ireland - and it was hoped a replacement appointment would be made soon.
 - Interim ARC Chair – Nigel Wilkinson, VEAB Board member, had kindly agreed to become interim Chair for 6 months and/ or earlier if a permanent replacement was appointed. Board members expressed their concern at the delays in the BTA Board member campaign and asked if it could be established if the Interim ARC Chair could be co-opted to the Board.

ACTION: HB to confirm with DCMS whether it was possible to co-opt the Interim ARC Chair to the Board.

2.0 Strategic matters for discussion

2.1: Political update

7. The CEO reported on the most recent political activity:

- A meeting took place with the British Film Commission (another DCMS ALB) with the aim of bringing together leaders from across the film and tourism industries.
- GREAT campaign – initial metrics for the most recent campaign were indicating that the link between viewing and committing to purchase was not meeting target in Europe and the US but was above target in the GCC. This was under review and would be closely monitored with changes being made as required.

ACTION: to share with the Board the tracker data measuring campaigns, specifically to evidence the shift when changes are made.

- Short Term Lets Registration Scheme Consultation – this had been discussed in detail at the VEAB. The BTA had also submitted a formal response. The outcome of the Consultation was expected to be published in the autumn.
 - Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) – the fee for this had been announced as £10 and was due to pilot in Qatar in October. Subject to the success of this pilot, it is expected to be rolled out by the end of 2024.
8. Board members expressed their concern at the barriers to the growth of inbound travel and encouraged consideration be given to developing a ‘competitor watch’ to evidence these issues. The Market snapshot (paper number 6.3) was referred to as being a useful document and whether there was ability to enhance this by displaying more measurable data.

ACTION: to develop a ‘competitor watch’ to demonstrate the UK position relative to others to aid in the discussions around those areas such as Visas and VAT that make the UK less attractive versus other countries for inbound travel from some countries.

2.2 CEO Report and Dashboard

9. The CEO provided an overview of key activities:

- US Marketing coop trial – initial results for the first phase showed good performance against KPIs and sale for our partners, resulting in an economic impact of over £2million.
- Camelot National Days Out Voucher Scheme – the contract for this had been signed and the campaign was due to begin on 3rd July and then run for 3 months; it was hoped it would generate c.180,000 bookings.
- LVEP programme – it was reported that 15 LVEPs have been accredited with a further 8 in the pipeline. The first joint meeting had taken place and feedback was that sentiment had been extremely positive.

2.3 Subsidy Control

10. HB referred to the paper included in the Board pack on this topic and reminded those present that at the Board in March a query had been raised about the applicability of the recently introduced Subsidy Control Act 2022 (“the Act”).

11. The Act had potential effect in relation to the award of grants out of public funds by the BTA, and the commercial operations conducted by the BTA, principally through the VisitBritain Shop (“the

Shop”).

12. HB confirmed to members that, having looked into the matter, he was able to advise members that the Act was, in fact, beneficial to the award of grants, because it had introduced a 30-day time period within which any challenge had to be made, and, for the reasons stated in the paper, did not appear to be applicable to the commercial operations of the BTA.
13. Finally, HB reminded members that the issue of whether there were any public policy issues concerning the Shop starting to sell accommodation remained an open item with DCMS.
14. CH commented that it would be appreciated if the timing on paying grants after the 30-day time limit period could be carefully monitored and observed.

3.0 Papers for approval

3.1 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA)

15. SJ referred members to the final draft ARA included in the Board papers and gave thanks to Board members for their committed support given during the drafting of the ARA. The ARC meeting on 6th June had discussed and approved the form of the ARA for submission to the Board. CH credited SJ for her outstanding leadership and the robust process followed.

DECISION: Board members approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 in the form included with the Board pack. It was agreed that any minor amends could be signed off by the CEO and BTA Chair.

3.2 Indian Subsidiary position

16. SJ took the paper as read. In summary, the recommendation was that the BTA terminate the contract with VFS in relation to India, which would take 6-9 months to achieve.
17. Board members endorsed the approach being recommended. In response to a more general question about operations in India generally, SJ confirmed that it was the intention to review the entirety of the operations.

DECISION: The Board endorsed the recommendation to terminate the contract with VFS in relation to India.

3.3 Corporate Strategy Review

18. The CEO explained as it was now midpoint in the current 3 year strategy, and in anticipation of the Strategy Day in October, it was planned to conduct a review, to ensure that focus was being applied to the right areas.
19. The Chair welcomed this timely review and saw it as an opportunity to consult with Board members, to help identify opportunities that are being missed.
20. Board members shared the following observations:
 - KS referred to the earlier discussion on competitiveness as a key area for closer attention.
 - PG recognised the high number of target outputs and encouraged that there be more emphasis on priorities that could demonstrate measurable value. CH added that an external viewpoint may also provide more insight and unlock barriers.
 - JM cautioned the potential implication of the ALB Review recommendations and whether this would impact to the organisation.

21. A discussion on the proposed focus and format of the Strategy Day took place and the following suggestions were made:
- Emphasis on key priorities where there was traction and could evidence achievements.
 - To recognise how the landscape is changing whilst remaining agile.
 - Consider a guest speaker to address economic trends for the future.
 - Review the progress of the sustainability framework.
 - Create working groups to pre meet to discuss and agree agenda, content and deliverables for each strategic topic, to ensure full value from the day itself.

ACTION: to invite a speaker to BTA Board on 18th September to discuss the role of sustainability from a national tourism agency.

ACTION: the Chair and CEO to agree the outline format of the Strategy Day.

3.4 Estates strategy recommendations

22. DL started by reminding Board members that the Estate Strategy recommendations should remain confidential until formal government approval was received and an announcement made to all staff.
23. DL gave a summary of the paper, which detailed the rationale and steps taken to support the final recommendation as stated in the paper. JM confirmed that the recommendations were endorsed by the RPC, who had overseen the entire process and had discussed the recommendations at length at their recent meeting.
24. Board members noted the indicative savings from the move and were keen to understand the impact of additional costs that would result from this transition e.g. rise in staff expense claims, meeting space etc. DL confirmed that these were already areas identified as requiring to be addressed as part of the move and the Board should rest assured that work was being done to address them.

DECISION: Board members approved the recommendation for the new office location and asked that the RPC continue to oversee the matter.

4.0 Corporate updates

4.1 VEAB update

25. FP gave a summary of the meeting on 13th June:
- An update was given on the next phase of the LVEP programme, to build a framework and to jointly agree each LVEP action plan.
 - There was a robust debate on the proposed Short Term Lets Registration Scheme Consultation that focused on the considered optimal outcome for VE, in terms of its role in any new scheme.

ACTION: to share the submission to the consultation made by VE with Board members.

- A deep dive on the England brand project – this involved thorough research in year 1 which had now moved into phase 2 where the proposition was being modelled.
- A briefing paper on the upcoming Camelot Voucher Campaign was noted.
- Awards for Excellence on the 7th June hosted at the Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter. The event had been well supported and live streamed for the first time; this was reported as a great success.
- AS was congratulated for his OBE for services to tourism.

4.2 ARC update

26. CH shared the minutes from both the 17th March 2023 and 6th June 2023 meetings and recommended that the Equantiis presentation on the Cyber Security Awareness was also given to the Board.

ACTION: DL to facilitate a presentation by Equantiis on Cyber Security Awareness.

4.3 RPC update

27. JM reported on the RPC priorities and outputs from the last meeting on 9th May:

- The Purpose statement was agreed '*Drive a thriving tourism industry, creating economic prosperity across Britain*'. A smaller Value Set had been tested and agreed: 'At VB/VE we work with passion and partnership at pace'
- The Pay Remit recommendation had been endorsed. Since the meeting, it was reported that central government asked that all civil service staff receive a one-off payment of £1500. A counter proposal had since been agreed whereby all staff who did not achieve a bonus value of £1500 would receive the difference and that this would also now be extended to staff who were first employed after April 2022.

DECISION: Board members approved the Pay Remit proposals.

- Suggested updates to the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion; Travel and Expenses; and Redundancy policies had been reviewed and comments made. In addition, updates to the Gifts and Hospitality and Whistleblowing policies had been approved.

5.0 Themed discussions/ Deep Dive

5.1 People and Organisational Design

28. A presentation was given to update Board members on the People Strategy.

29. DL thanked JM and the RPC for their practical contribution and guidance since initiation of the People Strategy. In terms of the current position, Deputy Directors had now been appointed and the next step was to review the Heads of Department level. A 'purpose map' had been developed to support and embed the Value and Purpose statements to bring to life the way in which we work.

30. Board members were very supportive of the status of the People Strategy and in particular were very complimentary of the level of staff engagement evident in the design and implementation of the strategy.

5.2 Guest speakers

31. Lee Gudgeon, Managing Director and Steve Dilley, Managing Consultant from Reed Solutions joined the meeting to present on general trends in the employment market and managing a hybrid workforce whilst maintaining a productive culture and performance.

32. Case studies of organisations who had adopted differing retention packages were discussed. Although there were a range of outcomes, a common theme to tailor hybrid working patterns to individual teams had proved favourable. The change in the leadership community was recognised, where it had become more difficult to learn and share good practices in a remote setting. The impact of hybrid working had demonstrated a mixed result; it had strengthened work life balance which had encouraged more females to progress careers but had also adversely affected an inclusive

culture by not being present.

33. Board members welcomed this perspective and emphasised the commitment behind maintaining a hybrid model in an evolving landscape.
34. The Chair thanked both Lee and Steve for joining the meeting and for sharing this valuable insight.

6.0 Papers to note

35. The Chair noted these papers and no comment was brought for discussion at the meeting.

7.0 AOB

36. Reminding those present that CH was stepping down at end June, the Chair took the opportunity to express his thanks, on behalf of all present, to CH for her greatly valued contributions to the Board and as ARC Chair. All concurred in expressing their thanks and wishing CH all well for the future.
37. RV shared his positive experience as an observer. He thanked Board members for the opportunity to contribute and said he would strongly recommend this placement to prospective candidates.
38. The Chair followed this with a discussion with Board members on the whether there was appetite to join the Board Apprenticeship Programme for a second year. Board members were in full support of this.

DECISION: Board members agreed to apply to join the Board Apprenticeship Programme 2024.

The meeting closed at 1300.