

**MINUTES OF THE 455<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE  
VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)  
TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 at 1000  
Boardroom, 3 Grosvenor Gardens, SW1W 0BD**

**Present:**

Lady Borwick (Chair), VEAB Chair  
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member  
Fiona Pollard (FP), Board Member  
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member  
Nigel Wilkinson (NW), Board Member  
Laura Backhouse (LB), DCMS Observer

**In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates (CEO), Chief Executive/ BTA Accounting Officer  
Andrew Stokes (AS), England and Commercial Director  
Serena Jacobs (SJ), Finance Director  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director England  
Debra Lang (DL), HR and Professional Services Director  
Liz Herridge (LH), Director Transformation  
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Tracy Otabor (TO), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

**In Partial Attendance:**

Dierdre Wells OBE (DW), Guest Speaker  
Janet Uttley (JU), Head of Business Support Transformation Project  
Richard Nicholls (RN), Head of Research & Forecasting  
Katerina Rysova (KR), Insights Consultant  
Samee Mohammed (SM), Head of England Marketing, Campaigns & GM  
Marketing  
Sophie Dinsdale (SD), Senior Marketing Manager

**1.0 Welcome and Introductions**

**1.1 Welcome**

- i. The Chair called the meeting to order and declared the meeting quorate.
- ii. FP was thanked for her continued guidance and support to the Chair.

**1.2 Apologies for absence**

1. Apologies were received from Andrew Huggins, Dr Andy Wood and Sarah Fowler.

**1.2 Register of Interests**

2. There were no comments made on the register of interests.

### 1.3 Minutes from the last meeting

3. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

### 1.4 Action Tracker

4. All actions on the action tracker were reported as complete.

## 2.0 Corporate Updates

### 2.1 CEO Report

5. The CEO gave an update to the Board on recent activities since the last meeting:
  - i. **Political Update:** It was announced John Whittingdale [Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries] would remain in his post until 17 December 2023.
  - ii. Nigel Huddleston, [former Tourism Minister], had been appointed Financial Secretary to the Treasury.
  - iii. PY updated the Board on her attendance at the DCMS Select Committee Conference - 'Promoting Britain Abroad', where she met with Kate Nicholls [UKHospitality CEO] and Sarah Green [Chief Executive at NewcastleGateshead Initiative].
  - iv. PY's attendance at the Eurovision Legacy Conference proved extremely valuable; the conference highlighted the positive economic impact the Eurovision Song Contest had on Liverpoolian local regions.
  - v. The Chair and PY noted a successful visit to the World Travel Market where the Minister was also in attendance.
  - vi. A Priority Framework had been agreed with VisitBritain and the other home nations to promote the Sustainability Budget as the core focus.
  - vii. PY was pleased to announce that two Deputy Directors had reached the final interview stages of the renowned Civil Service Senior Leaders Program.
  - viii. **ALB Review:** The ALB Review was awaiting approval from the Review Lead for submission to the Board. The Chair proposed an additional VisitBritain Board meeting date of 7<sup>th</sup> December, to discuss the revised ALB Review.
  - ix. **Board Strategy Day:** PY thanked the Board for their contribution to the Board Strategy Day. Clear priorities had now been agreed for the VE Budget.
  - x. **Office Move to Birmingham:** DL announced 3 Grosvenor Gardens would close on 15 December. An MOU with the DCMS was currently being put in place to allow BTA to take space in Birmingham, co-locating with the Gambling Commission by the end of December. It was explained that this temporary arrangement would allow BTA to establish a core presence and work out longer term accommodation needs.
  - xi. DL informed the Board that the consultation period for the Organisational Design ("OD") had now ended with the final stages expected to take place by Christmas. The Chair thanked DL for her leadership on the OD process during this challenging time.
  - xii. It was announced that a new board apprentice would be starting in January next year.

### 2.2 Remuneration and People Committee (RPC)

6. RPC had not met since the previous VEAB meeting in June.

### 2.3 Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

7. Reporting on ARC, NW noted, among others, that:

- The BTA remained in an overspend position by c. £360k. The Transformation Project was noted as a contributor to this figure.
- Other areas of focus included Accounting Policies, 2023/2024 Annual Report and Accounts Process, Lessons Learned from 2022/23 and a Draft Plan for 2023/24.
- The Committee had been briefed on the internal audit process.
- The next ARC meeting was scheduled to take place in January 2024.

## **2.4 Members Report on Activities Since the Last Meeting.**

8. The Members provided an update on their various activities since the last meeting:

- NW attended the Tourism Industry Council in October which focused on the application of AI in Technology and Creative Industries. It was suggested VE, through the LVEP network, could provide industry specific support to SMEs to implement AI and its roll out.
- FP spoke about the positive feedback which was received for the practical delivery of VE's presentation at the Visitor Attraction Conference.
- During FP's attendance at the Visit Yorkshire West Riding Conference, FP met with key speakers, including Simon Calder and expressed the importance of VE maintaining a good network of contacts.
- The impact of carbon footprints by websites was explored at a financial conference. FP noted that concern was raised about the heavy use of photographs on VE's website but ways of reducing this footprint was explored.
- AL reported that three of his domestic self-catering businesses were all trading down by 10% - 25% behind last year's figures. He stressed it was a very challenging time for the domestic tourism industry due to cost pressures, high interest rates and a non-uniform reporting structure.
- NT commented that growth was down as clients were spending less money on advertising due to the economic climate and negative association with social media platforms. There was also a notable shift in focus towards AI in the marketing industry. NT explained that AI was improving very quickly, and many brands were now building their own AI platforms to negate data security threats.

LB noted 3 current priorities of the DCMS (i) BTA Review: This was still on track to meet the end of February 2024 deadline. (ii) The DCMS was working with the Secretary of State to deliver the Visitor Economy Growth Programme, which focuses on visa reform, LVEPs and the VEPs role in supporting growth and placemaking and (iii) an update was given on the progress of the DCMS Registration Scheme.

## **3.0 Review of Strategic Matters**

### **3.1 Finance Update**

9. SJ briefed the Board on the current financial performance of VE. VE's financial performance was tracking well to budget, however further analysis on VisitBritain's ("VB") infrastructure would be undertaken to manage VB's overspend position.

### **3.2 VE Priorities 2024/25 and Prospectus**

10. LTS took the paper as read. A summary was given on the development of a VE prospectus that articulated VE's role, priorities and impact to secure funding and effectively lead industry to deliver against the England Visitor Economy Strategy. This prospectus was hoping to be completed by January 2024.

## **England Visitor Economy Strategy**

- After taking the paper as read, LTS explained that The England Visitor Economy Strategy will be developed by a VE/VB internal project team with industry engagement and collaboration over the next 12 months.
- The Chair asked if LTS could revert by the next VEAB with suggested dates for VE to host a Business Events Round Table to focus on 'Gateway to Business in Britain' for Spring 2024.

*The CEO gave her apologies and left the meeting early due to another engagement.*

### **3.3 DMO Review Update**

11. LTS noted VB's visit to the North East, the progress of the DMO Review implementation and plans for supporting the success of the DDP pilots. New commercial partnership opportunities were also being explored with Europe and the Middle East.

### **3.4 Sustainability**

12. JU joined the meeting and updated the Board on actions taken since the last Board paper submission:
  - The Sustainability Landscape: 18 high priority schemes were identified and recommended based on robustness and level of business engagement. JU also mentioned sustainability measurement was progressing slowly in the wider media industry.
  - A meeting with Google had been arranged to explore VB's carbon footprint and the steps that could be taken to minimise this. NT added that the media industry was finding it difficult to agree on how to measure carbon.
  - VB are hosting an LVEP Awareness event for the senior team of The National Trust on 7 December.
  - In her absence, AS shared SF's comments on sustainability to the Board; it was stressed that feedback from the Strategy Day should be reflected in VB's work and the focus should be on long term traction on sustainability and developing a national sustainability tourism certification programme with centralised data.

## **4.0 Guest Speaker**

### **4.1 Local Approach to Sustainable Tourism and LVEP experience**

13. DW, who was invited to speak at this meeting, thanked the Board for the opportunity to present, and commended VB for the People Place Partnership.
  - DW outlined key steps that Visit Kent, alongside local tourism businesses and other key partners, can take between now and 2030 to play their part in an efficient and just transition towards Net Zero and a nature positive future.
  - DW touched on the importance of supporting local businesses to help with sustainability and sustainable travel. VisitKent had partnered with several trainlines to tackle sustainability barriers such as the 'last mile challenge'.

## **5.0 Activity for Board Feedback or Approval**

### **5.1 England Official Statistics Merger Update**

14. RN and KS joined the meeting. An update was given on the plan to merge the Official Domestic Volume and Value Tourism Statistics with the outbound component of the International Passenger Survey, run by the Office for National Statistics. RN reported that the ONS would take on management of the survey and contract from January 2025, meaning significant savings for VE for the year.

### **5.2 England Consumer Brand Update**

15. SM and SD joined the meeting and updated the Board on the second year of the England Brand Development project and the progress made to date. A deep dive session was suggested by the Chair to further explore more ways VE marketing can make England more attractive to those who live in England and not just to international visitors.

## **6.0 Papers for Noting/Comment**

### **6.1 Risk Register**

16. The paper was noted.

**Action:** The Chair asked the Board to examine the areas of greatest risk on the Risk Register.

### **6.2 England Visitor Economy Dashboard**

17. AS reported that VE were on track to reach 29 accredited LVEPs by January 2024.

## **7.0 Any Other Business**

18. The Chair reported that she is overseeing VE's engagement with 'Railways 200'.

The meeting closed at 1400

The date of the next meeting is 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 1000.