

## **MINUTES OF THE 457<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)**

**WEDNESDAY 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at 1100**

Room 401, West Bay  
Titanic Hotel Liverpool, Stanley Dock, Regent Road  
Liverpool, L3 0AN

### **Present:**

Lady Borwick, VEAB Chair (online for items 1-14, in-person from item 15)  
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member  
Fiona Pollard (FP), Board Member (in the Chair)  
Nigel Wilkinson (NW), Board Member  
Sarah Fowler (SF), Board Member  
Rebecca Norton-Price (RNP), DCMS Observer (from item 16)  
Madeleine Cullum (MC), DCMS Observer (from item 16)  
Mel Harradine (MH), Board Apprentice (online)

### **In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates (CEO), Chief Executive/BTA Accounting Officer  
Andrew Stokes (AS), England and Commercial Director  
Mark Wildig (MW), Interim Finance Director (from item 15)  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director England  
Debra Lang (DL), HR and Professional Services Director (from item 15)  
Liz Herridge, Transformation Director (LH)  
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

### **In Partial Attendance:**

Kirsty McLean (KM), Director Policy, Strategy and Government at  
Liverpool Combined Authority (for items 1-2)

### **Apologies:**

Andy Wood, Board Member  
Nadine Thomson, Board Member

## **1.0 Welcome and Opening Remarks**

### **1.1 Welcome**

1. As a number of attendees, including Lady Borwick, were delayed due to train cancellations, FP took the Chair. The agenda order was adjusted to accommodate expected arrivals. FP welcomed everyone to the meeting, acknowledging the excellent hospitality offered by the Titanic Hotel and noting some of the great ambassadors for the city she had met since arriving.

### **1.2 Apologies for absence**

2. Apologies were received from Nadine Thomson, Dr Andy Wood and Satpal Chana.  
3. The meeting was declared quorate.

### **1.3 Register of Interests**

4. SF, CEO of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, advised that one of their sites had been nominated for a VisitEngland Excellence Award (awards presentation that evening). SF had not been part of the judging panel.

### **1.4 Minutes from the last meeting**

5. The minutes dated 12 March 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **1.5 Action Tracker**

6. England consumer brand development to remain on the tracker. Work was being taken forward to appoint a creative agency and an update would be provided at the September meeting. Given the General Election announcement, business events to remain on the tracker and would be picked up for the September meeting.

## **2.0 Liverpool City Region Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Presentation**

7. The Board was pleased to receive an informative presentation by Kirsty McLean, Director of Policy, Strategy and Government at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Key points from the presentation and following discussion included:
  - The breadth of Liverpool's visitor economy offer, level of regeneration and the city's long-term aspirations for the future
  - An active LVEP with solid partnerships with the local authorities and private sector
  - Liverpool's bigger picture view of the visitor economy to drive growth, social impact, employment, skills development etc
  - Supported by international, local nature recovery and events strategies and an emerging ambitious transport agenda
  - Liverpool was the first operational ABID. Good progress was being made with positive buy-in from the private sector. Keen to investigate financial devolution further and drive the visitor levy to effectively fund regional strategic infrastructure development.
  - Establishing a Destination Development Partnership (DDP) for the region was a logical next step for exploration. Initial discussions currently underway with potential partners but more information was required on the DDP framework.
  - Visitor levy pros and cons were discussed (see item 5.2). The topic was suggested as a potential agenda item for the next LVEP conference.
  - Commendation for Nicola Said, the current VisitEngland Regional Development Lead for her strategic support to the LVEP to date.

KM was thanked for her contribution. [KM left the meeting]

## **3.0 Corporate Updates**

### **3.1 CEO Report & 3.2 ALB Review**

8. PY updated that the General Election announcement put certain restrictions on areas of work due to purdah. Cabinet Office pre-election guidance had been issued to all staff and Board members, was being closely followed and all activity was under review. DCMS approval had

been granted for the VisitEngland Excellence Awards and Disney campaign (already contracted). It was also noted that timelines for Board/senior appointments and the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) would be affected (see item 15). The Board expressed its support for the team given the need to cancel or postpone planned activity at short notice.

9. An update was given on the ALB review in light of the General Election announcement.
10. DCMS anticipated that the Spending Review was expected to follow normal timelines: commissioned in the summer; fiscal event in September and conclusion by November.
11. DCMS was considering the transition from a Tourism Recovery Plan to a Tourism Growth Plan. However, any future focus would be dependent on the views of new Ministers. It was queried whether there was any risk to the LVEP model being rolled out post the de Bois Review recommendations and Government response. Given the short timeline for positioning to a new administration, discussions were in train with DCMS on investment priorities based on agreed strategy and additional information received at the VEAB discussion on 7 May.
12. Further suggestions from Board members included:
  - Prioritise RDLs/DDPs/LVEPs evidenced with punchy data-led narrative demonstrating impact and growth. Plus clear and succinct DDP messaging on why Government should invest.
  - Highlight transformation programmes (technology & AI) plus areas of innovation (product development), creativity, sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity
  - Respond to manifestos
  - Rebrand/new language
  - Prioritise domestic tourism
  - Evidence industry advocacy and support, presenting VE as a strong and effective partner that can deliver growth
  - A 100-day plan
13. Post-election, LVEPs would lead on the engagement/building relationships with local MPs. Resources were available on the website and a post-election workshop was suggested.

### **3.3 BTA Report**

14. No report was made.

### **3.5 Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)**

15. NW reported that the ARC had met twice since 12 March.
  - Key focus had been on completing the ARA (annual report and accounts) where good progress has been made under the overview of Interim Finance Director, Mark Wildig. The internal audit rating was moderate and a clean external audit report had been received.
  - An update was given on progress to commission a new cloud-based finance system which would provide additional mitigation against data protection risks.
  - The risk register had been reviewed and an update in respect of pensions and TXGB had been requested.

- Digital strategy remained a priority however the update paper had been deferred for the time being.

[VB, DL, MW joined the meeting in-person]

16. MW set out the updated process for the ARA's approval and certification working around the dissolution of Parliament. This comprised approval by the BTA board on 18 June and certification around 17 July. It was noted that there was some risk in respect of post-balance sheet events but this could be managed.

**DECISION:** The VEAB agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the ARC to sign off the ARA.

### **3.4 Remunerations and People Performance Committee (RPC)**

17. FP had not been able to attend the 30 April meeting. Her report was based on an update received from the Committee's Chair.

- VB/VE's inclusion in the Sunday Times Top 100 Place to Work awards was celebrated. Commendation had been received in respect of approach to diversity and inclusion. Award branding would be maximised.
- Recruitment of a new Finance Director would pause during the pre-election period

[RNP and MC joined the meeting]

- An update had been given on the next phase of the People Strategy
- The 2024/2025 pay remit has been delayed and any pay award would be back-dated
- An update was given on Building our Future; HR & IT operating models
- All GIAA (Government Internal Audit Agency) actions had been completed and succession planning has been incorporated into BAU
- There was an update on the work that the newly formed Pensions Committee was undertaking. It was noted that the Committee's primary focus is the US Pension Scheme and that this was a matter that would take some time to address.
- A license was in place with the Gambling Commission for VB/VE's Birmingham office. The organisation's global hub and spoke model was reiterated. The target for populating the Birmingham office was based on attrition assumptions with the majority of new appointments now being based at the site.
- Corporate branding/sense of place at Cannon's Bridge House (CBH) and Victoria Square House (VSH) was discussed. In both cases VB/VE were using locations on the Government estate under license from other ALBs. Use of branding was not permitted under the lease for CBH. The position at VSH offered more flexibility and was being explored, along with potentially refreshing some display bookshelves in the reception at CBH.

### **4.0 Deep Dive – Transformation & AI (artificial intelligence)**

18. The Chair had invited LH to attend and give a presentation made to the BTA Board updating on the Building our Future (BOF) programme, including an overview of AI and how it is being deployed through the organisation. Key points from the presentation and following discussion included:

- Based on the Tourism Recovery Strategy, internal transformation programme impacts and outcomes were directly linked to supporting a thriving tourism industry.
- Key workstreams of Digital, Data and Systems were tracked by the Building Our Future and BTA Boards against KPIs.
- The internal programme concluded in March 2025 and planning for the external stages of the programme was in hand.
- AI benefits/risks and their mitigations were discussed. An AI Council had been established and an AI policy had been approved by the ARC.
- Resulting support for tourism businesses could come in the form of: a more efficient service; improved VE website content; quicker insight and improved data for decision-making; training/innovative ideas-sharing sessions for regional partners.
- DCMS supported the ongoing harnessing of technology to encourage growth and productivity across the sector.
- The huge opportunity in this area was discussed. FP cited some examples including a competitive green tool which might be of use to small businesses for calculating carbon footprint.

**ACTION: LH to convey VEAB's congratulations to Satpal Chana and the team for being selected to present at the next global and AI summit in San Francisco for the work on using LLM (large language models) and AI to create traveller insights.**

## 1.6 Chair's update and diary

19. VB thanked the various colleagues and groups who had hosted her visits and for their insight which would be helpful when planning future strategy. She had recently seen for herself the many challenges being faced by operators outside of cities, including getting staff to work with limited local transport networks and visa issues. VB would resume her fact-finding visits following the General Election.

## 5.0 Papers for noting

### 5.2 LVEP Funding Mechanism

At the Chair's request AS presented additional information on this topic.

20. The Comprehensive Spending Review (see item 10 for timing) would determine future investment in the LVEP and DDP landscape, enhanced by support from other sources e.g. other Government departments and local authorities.
21. The growing number of ABIDs (Accommodation BIDs/charge per room per night/visitor levy) was noted and the impact of the various schemes were outlined. Board members expressed their views on these funding models which included:
  - How to ensure funding would be directed strategically to support the visitor economy?
  - Whether the levy (when compounded with VAT) would impact on global competitiveness?
  - Why introduce this for a sector already under pressure?
  - What is driving the need for this in each region? Is it industry and SMEs or political?
  - A potential selective approach? – the levy may work in cities but it is likely to negatively affect rural/coastal areas/independent operators.

**ACTION: VB/VE to develop a paper with advice for Government on ABIDs and visitor levy models to ensure they support visitor economy growth and competitiveness locally and globally.**

**ACTION: VE to discuss LVEP funding models and how to support the development of longer sustainable sources with the LVEP Awards Panel on 25 June 2024.**

### **5.1 Corporate Risk Register**

22. Noted.

**ACTION: JH to circulate the Corporate Risk Register as updated by the ARC on 4 June.**

### **5.3 Election Planning**

Much of this paper had already been discussed earlier in the agenda.

23. PY reported on a successful LVEP Parliamentary reception on 21 May which had involved 30 LVEPs and 52 MPs. There had been some good levels of engagement and it was suggested that those who had successfully attracted contacts might share best practice. Repeating the event in the future was recommended. Board members were thanked for their attendance and Rachael Farrington's excellent organisation was commended.

## **6.0 Any other business**

### **6.1 VEAB dashboard update**

24. Following a useful online meeting on 7 May (meeting notes attached paper 6.1a) a new VEAB KPI dashboard framework, based on the BTA model, had been shaped. The expectation being that the dashboard would form part of the quarterly VEAB meeting pack. LTS shared an initial version, populated with the first two months' results, for the Board's consideration. Dashboard development would be an iterative process with some further work required around future targets, outcomes and impacts. Early results across SME growth, stakeholder engagement and communications were discussed.

Initial feedback included: targets to be shown more clearly in the visuals; fonts to be adjusted; link KPIs to the overarching England strategy in the future approach (from 2025 onwards).

**Action: JH to circulate the VEAB dashboard to Board members for review. Board members to forward comments to LTS.**

25. FP was thanked for her excellent and efficient chairing of the meeting at short notice.

There being no further business to discuss the formal part of meeting was closed at 1420

## **7. Closed session**

Unminuted

The date of the next meeting is 10 September 2024

END