

MINUTES OF THE 472nd MEETING OF THE BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD

held on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 10.00

Benjeman & Coade Rooms, 4th floor, Cannon Bridge House,
25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

Present:

Nick de Bois CBE (Chair)	BTA Board Chair
Dame Judith Macgregor DCMG LVO (JM)	Board Member
Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member
Beth Knight (BK)	Board Member
William Burton (WB)	Board Member
Lady Victoria Borwick (VB)	Board Member/VEAB Chair
Rebecca Norton Price (RNP)	DCMS (Observer) (online)
Stephen Leckie (SL)	Board member/VisitScotland Chairman (Ex-officio) (online)
Aileen Martin (AM)	Tourism NI (Observer)
Heledd Owen (HO)	representing VisitWales (Observer)
Kaveh Navid (KN)	Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)

In Attendance:

Patricia Yates (PY/CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Debra Lang (DL)	Director HR & Professional Services
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes (AS)	Director of VisitEngland
Robin Johnson (RJ)	Global Marketing Director
Henry Banks (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

Apologies:

Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS (observer)
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1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the board meeting. RNP was attending in place of DP. HO was representing VisitWales pending appointment of a new Wales representative. It was Tourism NI representative AM's last meeting. She would be succeeded by Karly Greene in January. It was also KN's last meeting and he would reflect on his involvement on the Boardroom Apprenticeship Programme later in the meeting.

1.1 Apologies for absence

2. Apologies had been received from DP.

1.2 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

3. As per the current register.

1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 24 September 2024

4. The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.4 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

5. Completed items were noted. There would be a verbal update on retail activity at the 28 January meeting as per the agreed review format. Members were encouraged to attend Showcase Britain on 23 January at Hampton Court Palace and the Annual Review in March (date TBC).
6. Ministerial engagement, the Minister's recently announced ambition of 50m visits to the UK by 2030 and the GREAT campaign would be covered in the CEO's report. The Minister had been invited to attend the 28 January Board meeting. No response had been received to date.

1.5 Chair's update

7. The Chair reported that on 22 November he and JM had attended a memorial event for former Visit Wales Board representative, Ian Edwards. It had been a fitting celebration of his life with contribution from the First Minister of Wales and warm references to Ian's involvement with BTA.
8. Regular evaluation of Board effectiveness was a statutory requirement and the next review would be undertaken in 2025. Given the changing landscape the Chair felt it would be a timely point to examine how the Board worked together and with the organisation and was keen to begin developing a brief. Responding to JM, he confirmed that the Board would be consulted, outside of the meeting, on review terms.
9. **ACTION: The Chair supported by HB to draft a brief for a Board Effectiveness Review taking in consultation with Board members.**
10. The Secretary of State had confirmed KS and PG's reappointments as BTA Board members both for a second term of five years (subject to final checks and validation). Whether JM could be reappointed for a third term had been explored but had not been approved. She would stand down on 1 March 2025. The Chair would consult the Board on the recruitment of a new Director after the meeting. VB advised that one VEAB member had been reappointed and two had had terms extended whilst a recruitment campaign was undertaken. Recruitment was expected to take over six months.

2.0 Strategic Matters for Discussion

2.1 Political update

2.2 CEO report/engagements/dashboard

11. The CEO ran through evaluated results for 22/23.
12. VB and the CEO had attended a meeting of ALB Chairs and CEOs in Leeds hosted by the Permanent Secretary. Spending Review (SR) timelines were set out. Messaging had included warnings around funding expectations. No clarity was provided on whether ALBs would be protected from NI increases.
13. Following discussion points included:
 - In response to JM's query around the 3-year horizon, RNP advised that DCMS was still making bids for future years and calculating the allocation to Tourism. Ministers had inherited projects that they had not instigated and hence needed to be brought up to speed.
 - Delegation letters are currently expected in early 2025 for next financial year. The settlements for the following time period (3 years activity, possibly 5 years capital) are anticipated in late Spring (May/June)
 - Concerns raised on timing of confirmation of funding for DDPs as a continued lack of clarity could cause some to have to consider staff retrenchment.

14. KS updated on the creation of the Visitor Economy Advisory Council as the successor to the Tourism Industry Council (TIC). Currently her understanding was that this group would have c. 16-18 members drawn from industry with a greater emphasis on members from the transport sector than before. It would form the key advisory committee with three working groups. Although not confirmed as yet, it was expected to have its inaugural meeting in January. Thereafter it was expected to meet four times each year and hold two larger stakeholder events. KS said she hoped the BTA would be given observer status, as had been the case with the TIC. In response, it was generally agreed that the BTA needed to engage with the Visitor Economy Advisory Council, understand its strategy and align its own to ensure compatibility.
15. **ACTION: PY to provide a verbal update (given the uncertainties of timings) at the 28 January Board meeting of position and possible changes to the current BTA Strategy to ensure it aligned with the Minister's ambition.**
16. Following introduction by JM, the CEO had engaged with organisers of the Government's Soft Power Council, due to launch in early 2025. It was expected that the new Council would include a member from the tourism industry from the BTA board.
17. The CEO reported on a recent visit to Bangalore, India, noting encouraging discussions with the new High Commissioner around policy, soft power activities, links to UK regional growth and campaign promotion.
18. The CEO advised that the broader GREAT campaign continued to be under Government review and the situation remained unsettled. Discussion followed and included the following key points:
 - RJ advised that GREAT funding was not expected to be confirmed until late January, following the completion of a three-stage process.
 - He explained as background that there were new Governance structures for Government communications and marketing with most going through the Mission Communications Board. BTA's GREAT funding was not part of this as we are not a Government Department so were Mission Adjacent. At present, RJ felt it correct to flag to members that it was possible that there could be a significant reduction in the Mission Adjacent fund, with a corresponding impact on BTA's marketing activity.
19. **ACTION: The Chair to write this week, on behalf of the Board to the GREAT Ministerial lead, flagging the importance to the BTA of continued GREAT funding and the value of the activity funded to the British economy. PY also to canvas support from/representation made by regional mayors about the GREAT campaign's positive impact on the regions.**
20. The dashboard was noted. The CEO reported on a positive meeting with DCMS's Director of Analysis, who would naturally be part of any DCMS review of digital/data bids. The Director reiterated the Secretary of State's focus on a sense of place and had a helpful discussion on modelling VisitBritain's delivery at a regional level focusing on specific areas and use of proxy data.

2.3 Update on joint boards' strategy day

21. Meeting notes acknowledged. The team was working up the strategic framework but given ongoing developments this remained iterative and would be further considered by the Board on 28 January.

3.0 Financial planning

3.1 Current financial situation

22. SJ took the paper as read and advised that planning meetings with Directors were taking place to confirm expenditure for the remainder of the year.

3.2 Medium-term financial planning

23. Financial projection for the medium-term in the current environment was difficult and what was tabled represented best-case estimates. A detailed discussion took place on ensuring the organisation was able to deliver effectively across its key stakeholders and marketplaces given the continuing pressure on budgets, including examining alternative strategies for revenue and spend.
24. The Chair flagged that work needed to be done to align the BTA's activities with the agenda of the new Minister and to demonstrate how to enthusiastically engage with the new agenda. RNP confirmed this was indeed the approach to follow and DCMS would be very happy to assist and facilitate as much as was needed. She cautioned that the Minister had a very wide portfolio so engagement needed to be planned and targeted, with that in mind it was unlikely any face-to-face meetings would be offered at present.
25. **ACTION: VisitBritain to develop narrative on how it could deliver on the Minister's agenda and share with DCMS. This will be a WIP discussion at January board meeting.**

4.0 Corporate updates

4.1 ARC update

26. WB advised that the Committee had set its meetings for 2025. It had confirmed that the triennial pension review was the crucial measure for determining the value of the pension scheme. A workaround had been found to replace an unsuitable module of the new finance system. A review of the 23/24 ARA production had concluded satisfactorily. A more thorough approach would be taken with internal audit action deadline forecasts. Some additional work was required in respect of procurement and grants management.
27. An update had been provided on two whistleblowing cases (the first in recent times). RPC Chair, JM, concurred that the process had run smoothly and suggested making formal reference to ARC and RPC communication points and prompt reporting to the BTA Chair and Board in Committee TOR.
28. **ACTION: HB to update the ARC and RPC TOR for review at the Committees' January meetings and final consideration by the BTA Board on 1 April.**
29. DL referenced a paper tabled to the ARC on Information Security and underlined that most of the audit board's asks had now been met. She was pleased to report the GIAA's positive comments on BTA's approach to diversity and inclusion.

4.2 VEAB update

30. VB reported that VEAB continued to oversee delivery of the de Bois review. The Board's focus was around the similar concerns of strategic delivery of Government priorities/ambition and funding uncertainty. She thanked RNP for her ongoing support and insight. VB had attended World Travel Market and IBTM shows in London and Barcelona respectively. She had been impressed with the teams' performance selling Britain, its towns and cities, but felt that there was a need to reframe the offer to further drive impact around local and regional growth. VB suggested adding business events to the 2025 Forward Plan.

5.0 Discussion topics

5.1 A review of the GREAT campaign and impact on VisitBritain's strategic priorities

31. RJ introduced the GREAT campaign as a consistent and crucial part of VisitBritain's marketing over the past decade. GREAT provided the majority of funding for the organisation's activity. Activity which had amplified since the pandemic delivering robustly around: return on investment; new ways to attract private sector investment; reimagined partnerships; innovative use of technology and award-winning creativity. As previously discussed, GREAT was changing and VisitBritain was ready to embrace any new approach.
32. Despite the current uncertainty, VisitBritain remained committed to excelling, optimising funding, providing value to stakeholders, driving growth and value from visitors, and in January would launch its most ambitious marketing campaign yet. "Starring Great Britain" would capture attention positioning the country as the home of high-end film and TV locations, a growing motivator in travel decision-making.

[The Board were shown, in confidence, a near final version of the long-form campaign video.]

33. Board members wholeheartedly congratulated the team on a very impressive video and more generally on an excellent job delivering the brief. RJ confirmed the campaign was due to launch in early 2025.

5.2 Regenerative Tourism – Board Leadership

34. Following discussion at the Joint Boards' Strategy Day it was proposed that the BTA Board and VEAB adopt certain key principles of regenerative tourism in their approach to administration of their meetings. These would be embedded in the Board Travel & Expenses (T&E) Policy in respect of: means of travel; catering and meeting papers. The approach had been approved by VEAB on 12 November.
35. **DECISION:** The BTA Board endorsed adopting the principles of regenerative tourism and that they should be included in the redrafted T&E Policy. The revised policy would be reviewed by RPC on 14 January and brought back to the Board for final approval.

5.3 Reflections on the UK Boardroom Apprentice Programme

36. KN spoke about his time as the 2024 BTA Boardroom Apprentice. He had found it a rewarding and engaging experience which had provided him with a strong understanding of what it meant to serve on a public sector board. He felt that the sponsor system worked well and thanked JM and others for their insight and guidance. His main challenge had been around the time commitment in attending both the programme training days and the Board meetings and he had fed back to the programme on whether the number of training days could be reduced. He suggested that the BTA on-boarding process could be more structured and include broader context earlier on. He thanked all involved at BTA and the Board and executive team wished him well for the future.
37. The Board was pleased to continue in its support of the programme, its drive to encourage new and diverse board candidates and the opportunity for reflection it provided. HB reported that the two 2025 apprentices had just been appointed and he would put both in touch with their sponsors and connect them with their predecessors. The sponsors would address KN's feedback on the onboarding process.

Post meeting note: BK offered to act as the 2025 BTA Boardroom Apprentice sponsor.

6.0 Papers for noting/information

38. No comments were raised.

7.0 AOB

39. All 2025 Board meeting dates and venues had been confirmed. After rotating around the regions, the Chair said that the 21 October 2025 Joint Boards' Strategy Day would likely be a one-day event in London.
40. He thanked Board and executive team for their efforts over a demanding year, wished everyone a Happy Christmas and he looked forward to regrouping in 2025.

The meeting was closed at 1245.

END