

MINUTES OF THE 458th MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

Tuesday 12 November 2024 at 1000

4th floor Boardroom, TAG
1-5 Poland Street, London W1 8PR

- Present:** Lady Borwick (Chair), VEAB Chair
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member
Fiona Pollard (FP), Board Member
Nigel Wilkinson (NW), Board Member
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member
Sarah Fowler (SF), Board Member
Rebecca Norton Price (RNP), DCMS Observer (online)
- 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
Trudi Wellbelove (TW), Deputy Director People and Workplace
Anke Monestal (AM) Head of Regional Development & Engagement
(for item 3)
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)
- Apologies:** Andy Wood (AW), Board Member
Debra Lang (DL), HR and Professional Services Director
Mel Harradine (MH), Boardroom Apprentice

1.0 Welcome and Opening Remarks

1.1 Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked the team at TAG for hosting the meeting.
2. SF, NT and AW's appointments as members of the VEAB were currently due to conclude before the next meeting in March 2025. All were thanked for contributions made over their tenures. An update on whether or not their applications for reappointment had been successful or not was expected very shortly from DCMS. Certainty in this area would help when allocating board members to sit on LVEP Accreditation Panels and other tasks.

1.2 Apologies for absence

3. Apologies were received from Andy Wood, Debra Lang and Mel Harradine.
4. MH's apprenticeship ended in December and this would have been her last meeting. The Board recorded its thanks to MH for her commitment and wished her well for the future. HB advised that he had sought assurance from the programme that future apprentices would have their employer's support to attend meetings around the country.

1.3 Register of Interests

5. At NW's request the register would be updated to reflect that Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership had ceased operating and as a result he also no longer sat on the Stakeholder Advisory Board of the British Business Bank's Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

1.4 Minutes from the last meeting

6. It was agreed that item 11 of minutes dated 10 September should be adjusted to reflect the reporting of similar information to the BTA Board (24 November). A name also required correction. Subject to these points the minutes were approved as an accurate record.

1.6 Chair's Update & Diary

7. The Chair thanked everyone who had hosted her on her regional visits over a busy, few months. She reiterated her confidence in the LVEP/ DDP structure as the framework for the Government to promote its visitor economy agenda. It effectively facilitated communication, support, resources and training for thousands of SMEs, showcased excellence and delivered and encouraged growth for communities across the country. She advised that an agile approach was required e.g. alignment with the creative industries, which could offer exciting opportunities.

2.0 CEO's Updates

2.1 CEO Report

8. Diary highlights included a trip to China with meetings with the Ambassador and Consul who understood tourism as drivers for both economic growth and soft power. She saw England being well-represented with region to region contact and in Red Book (China's Instagram) /Ctrip content. Ways to work further across these initiatives would be explored, possibly including advice for LVEPs on contributing to the Red Book.

[AL arrived]

9. The World Travel Market had taken place 5-7 November and had provided an opportunity for a range of mutually beneficial discussions with international partners. The CEO had opened the China Pavilion. The Minister had spent time on the UK Inbound stand on day 2. He had shown interest in skills and the planned Centre for Excellence in the North-East, had given media interviews and recorded some video content. Two Tourism roundtable sessions – on seaside regeneration and history and heritage had been held that afternoon in the House of Lords, attended by Members of Parliament and Lords, hosted by the Chair.
10. It was understood that a strategy on Tourism was being considered for next year and new Government working structures were in development with regard to departmental communications budgets and a central missions board.
11. The CEO underlined the significant challenges that funding uncertainty brought. The core roll-over funding outcome was expected in mid-December.

12. In response to item 10 above, RNP advised that the Minister was to deliver a keynote speech at the Tourism Alliance Conference on 26 November, which would include, inter alia, the launch of a Visitor Economy Council in place of the Tourism Industry Group (membership to be agreed, albeit the CEO noted in response that the BTA was expecting to have observer status).
13. The CEO reported, with reference to VB, that the GREAT mission had been subject to review and restructure. Through recent negotiation an amount of funding had been secured to launch the Starring Great Britain campaign. The GREAT review process continued and the CEO was due to give evidence to an expert panel in advance of further deliberation before Christmas. Given the reliance of VB on GREAT funding she was planning to ask the Minister to advocate for the continuation of GREAT.
14. **ACTION: RNP to raise the issue of GREAT funding with the DCMS and feed back to the CEO.**
15. Dashboard noted. Business Events proposals were down on forecast as it was understood that LVEPs had more capacity to handle Requests for Proposals themselves. The Chair would attend the IMEX trade show. Quality Scheme and targets would be considered under item 29-30.

1.5 Action Tracker

16. (30.1) SF had been in touch with a specific app developer. She felt that it was a helpful tool but not one for strategic investment at this time. AL concurred that it was something that might be signposted to.
17. (42) RNP advised that there were no updates from across Government on planning use classes and package travel regulations consultations.
18. Members raised substantive concerns about the health of the domestic tourism sector and uncertainty around VE/VB funding. After full discussion it was agreed that urgent action was required to draw attention to a critical situation and make a clear ask to Government, before the Minister's key-note speech on 26 November. The Chair would write to the Minister, in VEAB's role as Government advisor, with the following key messages:
 - Voice industry concerns with real-life frontline case studies from around the regions
 - Impact/unintended consequence of new legislation (e.g. planning, taxation, national living wage)
 - The positive impact of the LVEP landscape as a generator of growth, specific reference to the flagship DDP programme, and the risk presented by lack of certainty around future funding
 - A clear ask for funding for the roll-out of four DDPs and the Centre of Excellence
 - Prioritising rural and coastal communities
 - Outbound tourism not a priority focus
19. It was also suggested that LVEPs make a case to their Regional Mayors and MPs. Messaging to be agreed.
20. **ACTION: The Chair to write to the Minister within the week setting out concerns about the health of the sector with an ask for assurance on funding. VE team to issue agreed messaging for use by key stakeholders.**

3.0 Deep Dive – England Visitor Economy Strategy

21. AM outlined the strategy development process to date and welcomed comments from the Board. Key responses included:
 - Include the voices of less well-resourced SMEs and ensure the strategy benefits this group
 - Include transport, planning and housing under key challenges and opportunities. On transport focus on the essential issue of getting visitors and workers to destinations.
 - Include reference to segments: rural; coastal; urban; metro
 - Regenerative tourism should run as a thread throughout the strategy's framework
 - In 'how' the strategy is delivered reference LVEPs/DDPs and devolution
22. In response to NW's question around VE's ability to influence in respect of visitors' and the visitor economy's needs, AM explained that a wide range of stakeholders were involved in the strategy's development and some actions would be allocated to them.
23. SF volunteered to help with the regenerative tourism element; FP on investment; NW on infrastructure/transport; NT on marketing. The Board was encouraged by developments to date and thanked AM for joining the meeting.
24. **ACTION: AM/LTS to circulate details of the Marketing roundtable to members.**

4.0 Strategic Matters

4.1 Regenerative Tourism and Board Leadership

25. Following discussion at the Joint Boards' Strategy Day it was proposed that the BTA and VEAB Board Travel & Expenses (T&E) Policy should be updated to embrace the principles of regenerative tourism in respect of: means of travel; catering and meeting papers. It was suggested that what was being proposed would also be mirrored in the principles of the staff policy which was also subject to a general review.
26. **DECISION:** The VEAB endorsed the proposal to include the principles of regenerative tourism in the redrafted T&E Policy, subject to any further comment from the BTA Board on 3 December.
27. **ACTION: HB to update the proposal for recommendation to the BTA Board at its meeting on 3 December.**

4.2 Proposals for Areas of Focus

28. As agreed at the Joint Boards' Strategy Day the team was asked to prioritise options for areas of strategic focus.

29. Despite being provided by a partner, Quality scheme delivery was labour-intensive. Media value and net contribution were noted however volume continued to decline below initial minimum viability levels. It was felt a similar service could be delivered by an alternative provider.
30. **DECISION:** The VEAB agreed to an extension of 1 year (from April 2025) on the current Assessment Service's (AA) contract whilst the team evaluated the best way forward.
31. The proposal for refocusing training was discussed. There was support for training in areas of leadership, specialist expertise and where a difference could be made, some in-person activity, plus signposting to other sources. NT advised that return on investment and evaluation of impact should be key considerations. SF supported working through LVEPs and use of technology to maximise reach.
32. **DECISION:** The VEAB approved the proposal to refocus the training offer guided by the principles recommended.

6.0 Discussion Topic – England for Excellence Awards

33. The awards are the largest annual event run by VE and are embedded across the sector and calendar with cycles of regional heats. Scheduling, cost, sponsorship, stakeholder engagement, industry awareness and Marketing/PR value were all discussed.
34. **DECISION:** The VEAB agreed that adequate time should be allocated at its March 2025 meeting to enable a deeper dive into future options for the Awards for Excellence programme and showcase event.

5.0 Corporate Matters

5.1 Finance Update

35. SJ, noting September 2024's minor overspend, reported that the October 2024 position saw VE back in balance. Half year reviews were taking place with all Directors to ensure robust activity and expenditure plans for the rest of the year. Reporting continued to strengthen around staff costs (VE's biggest cost).
36. **ACTION: RNP to explore the Government's commitment to protect the public sector from National Insurance increases; whether this applied to ALBs and if not, why not?**

5.2 ARC report

37. NW advised that the main purpose of the Committee's additional September meeting had been to review the new International Audit Standard and he was pleased to confirm BTA was compliant. Feedback was also received following the yearend audit – with nothing material to report. The Committee's next meeting took place following this meeting.

7.0 Any Other Business

7.1 2025 Board Meeting Calendar

38. AS ran through plans for 2025.

39. **ACTION: JH to update members' calendars as meeting venues are confirmed.**

7.2 Engagement Calendar

40. Attendance of regional events was encouraged. To ensure members have advance information and for best use of resources it was agreed to issue the calendar, with clear asks to members, on a monthly basis.
41. **ACTION: LTS/JH to liaise re issuing the engagement calendar, with clear asks to members, on a monthly basis.**

7.3 Board Apprentice Programme

42. HB advised that the details of the two 2025 apprentices (BTA and VE) should be known by the end of the year. Placements were made by the programme based on requirements fed in. FP and NT were thanked for offering to continue to act as VE apprentice mentors.

The meeting concluded at 12.35.

The date of the next meeting – 11 March 2025, venue – Shildon, County Durham.

END