

**MINUTES OF THE 471<sup>st</sup> MEETING OF THE  
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD**  
HELD ON TUESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> September 2024 at 10.00  
Benjeman & Coade Rooms, 4<sup>th</sup> 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 (online)
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
Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS (Observer)
Marie-Claire Costley (MC)	representing Visit Wales (Observer)
Kaveh Navid (KN)	Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)

**In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates (CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Debra Lang (DL)	Director HR and Professional Services
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes (AS)	Director of Visit England
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

**In Partial Attendance:**

Trudi Wellbelove (TW)	Deputy Director People and Workplace (from item 3.3)
Fiona Macdonald (FM)	Head of Strategy & Business Planning (for item 4.3)

**Apologies:**

Ian Edwards (IE)	Board member/ Wales representative
Stephen Leckie (SL)	Board member/Visit Scotland Chairman (Ex-officio)
Aileen Martin (AM)	Tourism NI (Observer)

**1.0 Welcome and Introductions**

1. The Chair welcomed all attendees, noting that JM was joining online. SJ was welcomed back to her role with BTA. It was agreed to flex the agenda order to support flow of discussion.

**1.1 Apologies for absence**

2. Apologies had been received from Stephen Leckie, Aileen Martin and Ian Edwards. IE was represented, in an observer capacity by Marie-Claire Costley.

**1.2 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts**

3. As per the current register with the addition of PG's new role of Advisory Panel member for Awesome Experiences.

### 1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 18 June 2024

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

### 1.4 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

5. An update was provided on each item and it was agreed that sharing the Engagement Calendar and the Review of Retail Activity would remain on the tracker.
6. **ACTION: Board members to advise JH if they wish to attend/be involved in any events listed on the Engagement Calendar which would be reshared with draft minutes.**

### 1.5 Chair's update

7. The Chair reported that since the new government had taken office he had met the Secretary of State at an ALB event in Manchester. The Minister's early interest and energy were noted and the Chair, VEAB Chair and CEO looked forward to a meeting with him in October.
8. As part of its Creative Steering Group, the Chair continued discussions with the department lead for Expo 25. The Chair was able to visit the Expo site in Japan after his recent trip to Australia.
9. There had been no update on Board member reappointments. It was noted that any further delays would result in a tight timeline for any new appointments.
10. The Chair reported on his recent three city trade mission to Australia. It had been intensive and productive, involving a large delegation of over 400 buyers, strong support from the High Commissioner and good media coverage. He paid tribute to the VB organising team. There remained a healthy appetite for UK travel, with particular enthusiasm around screen tourism; however competitor activity was strong and Australia's shifting demographic signalled new trends. Increased competitor activity/spend was also flagged during trade events in Japan.

## 2.0 Strategic Matters for Discussion

### 2.1 Political update

11. DP provided an informative update on the new DCMS top-level structure and departmental priorities. Key relevant missions were the Growth and Opportunities missions, plus a focus on soft power and international engagement. Skills and apprenticeships would be part of providing opportunities in the sector. The addition of the Visitor Economy as a DCMS growth sector, specifically around regional growth, was a positive change. The Secretary of State's focus included: communities/places across the country; people; and helping people tell the stories that they would otherwise not be able to tell themselves. Tourism Minister, Chris Bryant, had a broader portfolio than his predecessor, however his ambition and enthusiasm for driving tourism growth were already apparent. Focus on the regions and the strength of regional Mayors' voices was noted.
12. **ACTION: The Chair/CEO/DP to liaise with the Minister on his involvement in future VB missions/comms.**
13. DP stated that the position on the ALB review remained to be confirmed.

## **2.2 CEO report/engagements/dashboard**

14. The CEO felt that VB/VE activity resonated well with the new government's messaging. She was pleased to advise that following review the tourism strand of the GREAT campaign had been signed off by the Cabinet Office and was progressing as planned.
15. Report highlights included: the ongoing development of the England strategy, including the switch from Sustainable to Regenerative tourism (exemplified by the North East's recently announced framework) strong international engagement to support the North East and related discussions with the new Swedish Ambassador. The CEO noted two VE round tables, hosted by its Chair, taking place at the House of Lords, one focusing on seaside towns (another government area of interest) and the other on history and heritage.
16. Dashboard highlights included: awards to the India and Business Events teams, the latter around regenerative events; GREAT campaign out-reaching awareness and consideration targets; strong business events performance and some creative and impactful social media to engage with GenZ audiences. Finally, she reminded members that the organisation was in the midst of the migration to Microsoft 365.

## **2.3 Spending review**

17. Earlier in the meeting DP had reminded the Board of a two-stage spending review; year one which is being dealt with now is largely a roll-over process (to be announced in the October budget). Any new funding would be considered centrally by the Treasury with a very high bar for new spending, generally seed-funding to make a difference in years two and three. The GREAT bid which would go in through the Cabinet Office had not been discussed post the communications review.
18. The CEO highlighted the pressure the organisation's small capital budget was under, particularly in respect of on-going transformation. A case would be made to DCMS for this to be increased.

## **4.0 Papers for approval**

### **4.1 Financial position update**

19. SJ presented a summary update on the current financial position, providing reassurance that budget gaps were closing and forecast costs, including the proposed Pay Remit, were affordable. The Board recognised the current position and work undertaken, including risk analysis, and welcomed further updates between meetings as required. DP confirmed that if the dilapidations claim for 3 Grosvenor Gardens remained unsettled at year end, then DCMS would most likely agree that the provision for this could roll over into the next financial year, subject to confirmation that it remained unspent.

### **4.2 Retail update**

20. AS presented the retail update. The year-on-year position, although below target, was showing positive growth, despite the pause for the pre-election period and social unrest in the UK over the summer. Key discussion points included:
  - Defining the shop's purpose and understanding broader benefits e.g. external profile; support for regional stakeholders; diversification of income; VAT position.
  - Current disruptions acknowledged. From a longer-term perspective what would have to change to generate more meaningful contributions? e.g. margin, meeting market failure/need, product mix, marketing?
  - Future focus as Transport for London (TfL) products were expected to evolve.

- Shipping and WorldPay card issues were both in hand. BK was thanked for her support of retail activity.

21. **ACTION: AS to provide further detail of the geographical spread of products sold by retail and the value of the VAT contribution from retail (with SJ's support) in the December meeting's retail report.**

### **3.0 Corporate Updates**

#### **3.3 RPC Update – including pay recommendation for approval**

[TW joined the meeting]

22. The paper on this was taken as read. JM confirmed that a detailed discussion had taken place at the Committee's 3 September meeting and the paper reflected the input from those discussions. On behalf of the RPC she therefore felt able to endorse the pay remit recommendation.
23. She highlighted that the recommendation was based on the approach mandated by Treasury – firstly a budget of no more than 5% of the current wage budget, and secondly an affordability test as to whether that budget was affordable.
24. **DECISION: Following full consideration the Board approved the pay remit for 2024-25 as recommended by the RPC.**
25. Other items considered by the Committee included a deep dive into Staff Survey results and recommendations and an Employee Value Proposition initiative highlighting the non-financial benefits of working for VB/VE. The Committee had requested further focus on Succession Planning and Places for Growth at its January meeting. JM advised that there had been two whistleblowing cases reported recently both of which were in process of being investigated. She confirmed that both had followed due process in terms of reporting.

#### **3.2 ARC update**

26. WB reported that the main purpose of the Committee's September meeting had been review of the new International Audit Standard which he was pleased to confirm BTA was compliant with.

#### **3.1 VEAB update**

27. VB asked that her report be taken as read flagging that it marked the end of her first full year as Chair. She thanked the team for their welcome, support and hard work. She had undertaken a full programme of meeting LVEPs across the regions (as tasked by DCMS), noting the increase from 7 to 34 in the last 12 months. She highlighted VEAB ambition to ensure LVEP coverage across the country and the support that brought around partnerships, access, regenerative tourism etc, ultimately building prosperity for local communities. She paid tribute to VEAB members for their continued support.

#### **4.3 Board Strategy Day update**

[FM joined the meeting]

28. FM took the paper as read. Suggestions for further shaping the agenda were made by members and FM undertook to review the agenda taking account of this input.

### **ACTIONS:**

29. FM to feed suggestions into Joint Strategy Day planning.
30. FM & JH to issue pre-read information in two batches (final batch on 8 October).

[FM left the meeting]

### **5.0 Deep Dive – Staff Survey – outcomes and recommendations**

31. DL's paper was taken as read. Key discussion points included:
  - The Board supported the four focus areas, with an emphasis on workloads. The executive team would delve into this aspect to ensure strategic focus and understanding across the organisation, specifically around process and deliverables.
  - Time would be created to reinvigorate networks and further embed EDI across everything we do.
  - Particular attention would be focused on bullying & harassment where results, including non-disclosure and non-reporting, had given cause for concern.
  - Locate for your Day was regarded as hugely successful by the teams and the initiative had been shortlisted in the Civil Service's 2024 Smarter Working Awards. The CEO's leadership was commended and she was congratulated on generating some excellent results early in her tenure and over a challenging period for the organisation.

### **6.0 Papers for noting/information**

32. The revised DCMS BTA framework agreement, which set out how the two organisations operated together, was noted. There were a number of advantageous updates, demonstrating DCMS's confidence in the organisation, including the extension to 2027 and increases in the value of what could be procured without DCMS approval.
33. The updated layout of the BTA Dashboard and Tourism Trends paper was endorsed.

### **7.0 AOB**

34. There being no further business to discuss, the formal part of the meeting closed at 13.10 and the Board was joined by members of staff for a sandwich lunch.

END