

MINUTES OF THE 462nd MEETING OF THE BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD
 HELD ON TUESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 1000
 3 Grosvenor Gardens, London

Present:

Dame Judith Macgregor DCMG LVO	BTA Chair
Nick de Bois CBE	Board Member / Chairman of the VisitEngland Advisory Board
Carol Hui	Board Member / Audit & Risk Committee Chair
Karin Sheppard	Board Member
Ian Edwards	Board Member / Wales Representative (ex-officio)
Rt Hon Viscount Thurso	Board Member / VisitScotland Chairman (ex-officio)
Mark Taylor	London and Partners (Observer)
Laura Backhouse	DCMS (Observer)

In Attendance:

Patricia Yates	CEO/ Accounting Officer
Andrew Stokes	Director VisitEngland and Commercial
Gary Robson	Director Europe
Clare Mullin	Director of Transformation
Robin Johnson	Director of Marketing
Debra Lang	Director of HR and Professional Services
Henry Bankes	General Counsel and Company Secretary
Serena Jacobs	Director of Finance
Evelyn White	Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1.1: Apologies for absence

Robin Frewer	Board Member
Patricia Corbett MBE	Northern Ireland Tourist Board, (Observer)
Peter Gowers	Board Member
Duncan Parish	Deputy Director of Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy, DCMS (Observer)
Tricia Warwick	Director, APMEA, China and NE Asia
Shivah Jahangir-Tafreshi	Director of Strategy and Communications
Gavin Landry	Director Americas

1.2: Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

1. There were no declarations of interests raised.

1.3: Minutes of the Meeting on 21st June 2022 (For approval)

2. The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

1.4 Matters Arising / Action Tracker

3. Each action was updated and the action tracker update.

1.5 Chair's update

4. The Chair reported that there had been active engagement agenda since the last Board, notably the VB/ VE participation in the Commonwealth Games and accompanying commercial events, which had fostered a good relationship with Birmingham Council, the West Midlands Growth Corporation and a Day of Tourism at the UK House. The former DCMS Secretary of State had written to thank the BTA for a very successful contribution. It was hoped that this would now help enable new conversations on the economic value of tourism with the Department of Trade. Engagement remained a priority and would continue to evolve and develop once new Ministers were announced.
5. The Chair confirmed that the Joint BTA VEAB Strategy Event on the 17th-18th October would be in person and that the programme would include sessions on horizon scanning, the status of the tourism recovery, progress on sustainability, and focus on the implementation of our Strategy.

2.0 Matters for discussion

2.1: Political update

6. The CEO reported on the recent Cabinet reshuffle and the emerging focus of the new Government on economic growth. Plans were in place to engage with the new Ministers and demonstrate our alignment to this priority. The decision to reintroduce VAT refund for international visitors had been welcomed by the tourism industry, but it was unclear at this stage how or by which time this would be implemented. It was acknowledged that the direction of the Civil Service 2025 Efficiency Programme was under review by the new government, with no certainty on forward action.

2.2 CEO update & Dashboard

7. The CEO noted that it was 'World Tourism Day' before providing an overview of her activity; she drew attention to:
 - 7.1 A table to illustrate the CEOs recent and forthcoming engagements (with Board papers).
 - 7.2 An infographic, prepared by Rachael Farringdon, was designed to provide a snapshot elevator pitch for use with stakeholders and would be updated regularly.
 - 7.3 A summary of the dashboard was provided, with particular focus on;
 - Re-building International Visitor Value - a strong media and trade engagement was in train to support the Qatar World Cup and the next stage of GREAT activity in the US and Europe.
 - PASS approval was now confirmed for the full GREAT budget. A step-change has been requested in campaign creative execution for the next phase of GREAT campaigns. £800,000 of core B2C activity remained blocked. (The Board urged early engagement with Ministers to resolve this impasse and secure a longer-term solution to PASS delays.)
 - Transformation - the implementation of the CRM system was taking shape with a dedicated lead and a change agent in post to embed across the organisation.
 - Digital Customer Experience Programme (DCXP) - staff resource remained a key risk. Short term freelance contracts had been put in place but efforts to secure long-term resource needed to be maintained.
 - The DMO Review round tables were in motion, with some useful and constructive conversations achieved. Delivery of the pilot and accreditation scheme was still a key risk with potential for underspend.
 - Organisation Design – plans were being developed to introduce a Senior Leadership Team to enable Directors to focus better on driving the strategy and change.

ACTION: The Board welcomed the plans for the Infographic and regularly updated core script; these should be circulated as soon as possible.

2.3: Finance update

8. Serena Jacobs spoke briefly to her paper and took the Board through changes from quarterly to monthly forecasting and plans to streamline the delegated authority process. The Board focused on plans to absorb a higher underspend at the six month point than budgeted. Serena Jacobs explained the delay was due primarily to staff vacancies and difficulties in realising spend because of PASS constraints. The Board encouraged plans to absorb the potential underspend taking into consideration constraints and barriers, which were also noted on the Risk Register. The Chair asked about plans to progress the BritRail Pass Project. Laura Backhouse (DCMS) explained that funding stage two of the BritRail project was paused (but ringfenced) until research had concluded which would inform the future direction of the business case.

2.4: DCMS Board Apprenticeship

9. The Chair raised taking forward the Board apprenticeship scheme, which was a move championed by the DCMS on the back of a successful programme in Northern Ireland. It would entail the candidate to attend Board Meetings for one year; to be assigned dedicated mentoring by Board Member(s), and to undertake relevant training. Patricia Corbett, who had joined a meeting to promote the scheme, recommended this for consideration. Lord Thurso shared his experience of a similar programme at VisitScotland which had proved incredibly valuable. The Chair encouraged this initiative at BTA Board and also received endorsement from the VEAB Chair to host an apprenticeship at their Board. All Board members agreed to join the scheme.

ACTION: Henry Bankes to submit an application to the DCMS apprenticeship, to request a candidate for the BTA and VEAB Boards, and to seek volunteers for mentors (from both Boards).

3.0: Corporate updates

3.1: VEAB update

10. Nick de Bois, VEAB Chair, summarised discussion at the last VEAB meeting and ongoing activity:
 - 10.1 Feedback received from DMOs reflecting on summer activity and business levels were mixed. There was reportedly a welcome increase in shorter stays, but still also a tendency to late bookings and cancellations, while the outlook for the autumn also appeared quieter. This was thought to be linked to the downgrade of secondary spending and the cost of living crisis, while labour shortages and service delivery remained generally problematic.
 - 10.2 Nick de Bois reported that the VEAB had recently facilitated a deep dive on sustainability which enabled knowledge sharing and a sense of direction to the developing strategy. There was also an update on Business Events 'Meet England Programme' which had seen 22 events confirmed since April. The next VEAB had scheduled a deep dive on TXGB, where growth was being recorded year on year but an increase in tempo would be desirable
 - 10.3 Taking England to the World Programme – this was an ongoing training and support programme that had seen progression.
 - 10.4 The restored VE Awards Event, hosted in Birmingham earlier in the summer, had been a genuine success and attracted a high press coverage of some 300 articles.
11. Andrew Stokes shared a presentation on the DMO Review implementation which was now underway with five DMO round tables scheduled for October across the country with registration already of 100+ DMOs. Proposals would be shared at these groups and the feedback fed into the accreditation scheme. The formal business case to release the funding allocation was now with DCMS for decision before further progress could be made on the development of toolkits and the pilot scheme.

12. Board Members welcomed this update, and despite concerns at the limited funding available, recognised the benefit of a pilot project to demonstrate the proof of concept of the De Bois proposals and establish compelling data. Stakeholder engagement was also being addressed in conjunction with the Feedback Consultations.

3.2: ARC update

13. Carol Hui shared the minutes from the recent Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and provided an overview of ARCs activity:
 - 13.1 GIAA internal auditors – a progress report had been received and reflected no major changes to the plan, but emphasised the need for continued momentum on delivery. GIAA had proposed a three-year internal audit strategy that would be tabled at the next ARC. The Committee received a lessons learnt paper on the Annual Reporting Accounts 2021/22 which identified areas where further improvement could be made.
 - 13.2 Compliance update – the RAG status was reported as green. The top issues were related to the India subsidiary which were being addressed by management but this matter would take time to resolve.
 - 13.3 IT Compliance programme – the RAG status was reported as amber. The ransomware audit recommendations were in progress and the ARC would continue to monitor the cyber security risk closely.
 - 13.4 Risk register – there were no significant risk increases, but Carol Hui noted the concern of achieving the correct level of staffing and training to implement transformation satisfactorily.
 - 13.5 Functional Standards deep dive – Carol Hui had requested this deep dive for the ARC so that the Committee was equipped to understand better the assurances from management that there was compliance with the standards (where applicable).
 - 13.6 Review of policies – management had a system in place to review policies and had removed certain policies from ARC and RPCs review, on the basis that the policies would be escalated to them if substantial changes were made. ARC had asked for a reinstatement of its oversight of two policies: Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption, and Gifts and Hospitality. The Chair noted that RPC had also asked for reinstatement of oversight of three policies within its remit (see para 15.4).
 - 13.7 Carol Hui noted that consideration was being given to how the ARC could further support the Board and the Accounting Officer and she would be discussing with ARC members areas for the Committee to focus on.

14. Henry Bankes reported that Nigel Wilkinson, the new VEAB Member, had attended his first meeting in September and details of his CV and experience had been shared with the BTA Board earlier. Carol Hui sought approval from the Board to appoint Nigel as an ARC Member. The Board gave its approval.

3.3: RPC update

15. The Chair provided a precis from the recent RPC meeting:
 - 15.1 People Strategy – progress was on track. The several work streams would now fold into the impending change determined by the organisational design exercise. The structures of the People Strategy would act as a conduit for valuable information back to the senior team.
 - 15.2 Culture workshops – once these had concluded, the learnings would create a realistic benchmark to measure real change in performance and team work.
 - 15.3 Pay Policy – thinking on staff pay proposals were currently being modelled against the Treasure Pay Remit guidance; HR would report back to the RPC in due course.
 - 15.4 Review of policies – as reported under 3.2 ARC update. The RPC had requested oversight of three policies; Pay Remit; Travel and Expense; and, Conduct and Diversity policies. (The Chair noted the RPC had previously also overseen a revision of the Gifts and Hospitality policy now being reviewed by the ARC).
 - 15.5 Estates Programme – this was looking at the movement away from London. Debra Lang, Director of Professional Standards, and the VB Strategy Team had now determined a shortlist of criteria to determine the best areas/ cities that best matched our needs for a Hub Office, with spokes to other regions, including London. Criteria reflected cost, transport accessibility, local authority support and available staffing/ talent. A shortlist of areas was currently being explored and Debra Lang would report back to RPC and the Board in due course.
 - 15.6 VB/VE Pensions Schemes – fresh evaluations were due in March 2023.

- 15.7 US pensions – Mercers had been commissioned to review the current scheme and provide options for potential modifications.
- 15.8 Organisational Design – this would be addressed in more detail at the Strategy Day.

3.4: ALB review

- 16. Wendy Watson and Joey Rowlands from the Public Body Review Programme at DCMS were invited to provide a brief on the next stage of the ALB Review (although this had not yet agreed by Ministers, it was anticipated BTA would move into a Stage Two of the Review). It was advised that an independent Lead Reviewer, appointed by Ministers, would identify and consult on the scope of the terms of reference, which would be followed by evidence gathering from stakeholders. Assurance was provided that this would be an open process with regular consultation with the BTA and the final draft would be shared for comment/ feedback before being sent to Ministers, and thereon recommendations published. The Lead Reviewer would be heavily engaged with the Board and organisation throughout this process, which it was anticipated would take some four months to conclude.
- 17. The Chair thanked the DCMS representatives for their explanation of the outline structure of a Stage Two process. She underlined our readiness to work with the Review Programme at every step to deliver recommendations that would enhance our objectives. As stated previously, we looked to the Review to: consider the BTAs funding levels and model; the length of the arm of our ALB; and, the structure and level of funding for VisitEngland.

4:0 Deep Dives

4.1: Europe

- 18. The Europe Director, Gary Robson, shared a paper on the opportunities and challenges across European markets and the progress of recovery in the UK visitor economy. Observations noted by Board Members were as followed:
 - The importance of being data led to understand relevant drivers and motivators, and links to marketing components.
 - Positioning against other European tourist board and levels of collaboration.
 - Consideration given to learn from smaller countries where they have successfully raised their profile and increased tourism numbers – even without huge injections of extra resource.
 - The growth of TXGB across European market was seen as a tool that could boost delivery and should be accelerated.
 - The strategy to promote high value was paramount.
 - Continue to seek greater government engagement; share more detail on our competitiveness and contribution to growth and articulate comparison against other markets.

4.2: Marketing

- 19. The Marketing Director, Robin Johnson, shared a paper on the progress of VisitBritain sales and marketing priorities, which were last reviewed in September 2021, and sought advice on the sense of direction that should now be pursued. Observations noted by Board Member were as followed:
 - Balancing strategic direction; protecting different audiences and making decisions led by data.
 - Building on a pre-event and successive approach to sustain interest and deliver optimum incremental visitors.
 - The need to apply tactical ability and flexibility on campaigns, to prove impact and enable financial support.
- 20. The CEO summarised that both deep dives reflected the evolving trends in international tourism and the new governmental focus on growth. The development of the CRM was critical to better secure reliable data led decisions.
- 21. Board Members were very encouraged by this approach and agreed that agility and speed were key behaviours, and that the quality of service delivery needed to be coordinated and overarching across the markets.
- 22. The Chair thanked both Directors for excellent papers and agreed that the 2023 Coronation and Eurovision Song Contest

offered excellent opportunities to grow tourism from across the world with the fresh creative approach suggested by GREAT.

5:0 papers for noting

23. The Chair noted these papers and no comment was brought for discussion at the meeting.

6.0: Any other business

24. No Further items were presented. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as the BTA and VEAB Joint Strategy Day on 17th-18th October.

The meeting closed at 1400.