

MINUTES OF THE 425th MEETING OF BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY

HELD AT 9.00AM ON THURSDAY 28 APRIL 2016 AT

VISITBRITAIN, 20 GREAT SMITH STREET, LONDON SW1P 3BT

Present: Christopher Rodrigues, CBE
Katy Best
Angela Bray
Lise-Anne Boissiere
Penelope, Viscountess Cobham, CBE
John Lindquist
Margaret Llewellyn OBE
Lord John Thurso
Steve Ridgway, CBE
Kevin Murphy, OBE

Apologies: Ian McCaig

In Attendance: Sally Balcombe, Chief Executive
Hazel Cunningham, Director of Business Services
Suneet Joseph, Secretary to the Board
Andrew Stokes, interim England Director (for England Matters only)
Suzanne Bond, VisitEngland Advisory Board Member (for England Matters only)
Patricia Yates (Political/Tourism Affairs)
Joss Croft (Marketing Plan 2016/17)
Joss Croft/Patricia Yates/Robin Johnson/Carol Dray/Andrew Stokes (Business Plan & Budget 2016/17)
Chris Foy (Business Visits & Events)

ENGLAND MATTERS

VisitEngland Action Plan

1. A draft of a working document titled “Summary Guidance and Criteria – Year One Projects and Pilots” relating to the Discover England Fund (DEF) was tabled for the Board to discuss alongside the latest version of the VisitEngland Action Plan (VE AP). The Board noted that a final version of the VE AP would be published in mid May timeframe on the DCMS website for the benefit of the wider stakeholder community (to inform their understanding of what would be specifically delivered in terms of activities for England).
2. Andrew Stokes provided the Board with an overview of the Year 1 Projects & Pilots, Project Categories, Funding criteria, eligibility of applicants and the application process. Sally Balcombe emphasised that the objective of the Year 1 programme was to test the ability of chosen products to get to market and not necessarily about achieving delivery of high volumes of products into the market.
3. The Board then discussed the importance of complying with all applicable laws and regulations, including those relating to State Aid and Procurement, in the management of the DEF. It was further noted that for private sector partners and consortia State Aid issues would not necessarily be within their scope of expertise in formulating and submitting bids. Sally Balcombe confirmed that in addition to the Summary Guidance document there would be a number of other guidance documents to provide applicants and bidders with more detailed guidance and advice on managing risks around State Aid and Procurement regulations.
4. It was noted by the Board that in relation to the DEF, a key objective was to meet the needs of the international visitor but in doing so, to also to benefit domestic tourism. The focus would not be on niche activities for a narrow audience but rather addressing activities with broader, more universal appeal. It was further noted that DEF should not be seen as a vehicle to solve longer term infrastructure or domestic transport issues. The Board then provided feedback and suggestions for consideration and/or inclusion in future iterations of the Summary Guidance document and the package of supporting documents for applicants and bidders.
5. Suzanne Bond left the meeting on completion of Board discussions on England only matters.
6. Margaret Llewellyn, Lord Thurso, Kevin Murphy and Katy Best joined the meeting for Britain and BTA Corporate Matters. Lord Thurso was welcomed by the Chairman to his first BTA Board meeting.

BRITAIN AND BTA CORPORATE MATTERS

Minutes of the Last Meeting

7. The minutes of the BTA Board meeting held on 16th March 2016 were approved.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

8. There were no matters arising from the Minutes of 16th March 2016.

Declarations of Interest

9. Lady Cobham declared an interest regarding her position as a Trustee for Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Market Update

10. Sally Balcombe provided the Board with an overview of key comments and/or priorities noting in particular:
 - The very challenging period leading up to year end for FY 2015/16 and the dedication and commitment of the Business Services team in this period
 - The ongoing focus to fill in vacant positions within the organisation as quickly as possible to enable the challenging programme of key activities for FY 2016/17 to be delivered within the stretching timeframes
 - Ongoing focus to drive a cultural change programme to transform ways of working within the organisation to deliver greater pace, a more “commercial” outlook and decision making at the appropriate level within the organisation
 - The ongoing work to consolidate London based staff from 6th floor onto the 8th floor and also the requirement to relocate the London office in September 2017 on expiry of the current lease (it was noted that all options relating to the relocation of the London office would be presented to the Board for review and approval)
 - Additional projects and activities that the organisation is being asked to support and/or lead on which are in addition to those set out in the Business Plan for 2016/17 by other stakeholders within Government (DCMS and/or Prime Minister’s office)
 - Ongoing review of which activities will need to be de-prioritised and/or stopped altogether given the new focus and priorities for the organisation identified in the current Business Plan for 2016/17

11. Sally Balcombe tabled the State of the Market Snapshot –April 2016 paper to provide the Board with an overview of recent Competitor activity, IPS Update, Connectivity news, Economic overview and domestic tourism survey results for 2015. On Competitor activity, it was noted that Australia continued to be proactive in streamlining its Visa application processes including use of Mandarin translation for the applicable forms. On Connectivity news, it was noted that many Middle Eastern airlines were targeting growth in regional destinations in Great Britain. The feedback from the organisation’s Berlin office was noted re the negative impact the ongoing national debate around “Brexit” was having in Germany causing an increased perception that visitors from Europe may not be warmly welcomed to Great Britain. The Board discussed practical steps that could be taken to mitigate such negative perceptions around “Welcome” including the training and deployment of “ambassadors” with European language skills to amplify the key “Welcome” messaging and communications targeted at visitors from Europe.
12. The Chairman provided the Board with an overview of his recent trip to the US and shared learnings and insights from meetings with WTTC, US industry stakeholders and other existing and potential partners.
13. The Tourism Trends papers were noted by the Board and Patricia Yates provided the Board with a brief update on Political/ Tourism affairs.
14. Lord Thurso left the meeting.

PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

Business Plan & Budget 2016/17

15. Hazel Cunningham gave a presentation to the Board on the Business Plan & Budget 2016/17 and tabled the slide deck of the presentation to the Board. The organisation’s mission and aims; key drivers; priorities for 2016/17; targets; and funding limitations were presented to the Board. In relation to funding, it was noted that maximising the availability of funding through commercial partnerships was something that Carol Dray, interim Commercial Director, was investigating as part of the ongoing review of partners. Each of the Directors gave a high level presentation Board about their respective areas.

Lord Thurso rejoined the meeting.

17. In relation to Marketing, it was noted that 85% of business tourism was non-discretionary with little opportunity for a national tourist board to influence decisions. In relation to the Business Plan, the Board discussed the benefits of initiating a supporting Communications plan to further enhance wider understanding of the organisation’s key objectives and goals. Sally Balcombe noted that the website would signpost users to further information on how best to engage with the organisation for any queries on the Business Plan. In relation to Business Visits & Events, Kevin Murphy noted the need for greater coordination amongst key BV&E stakeholders to ensure BV&E was looked at in the most holistic way. In addition to the Events Industry Board, it was noted that there were other low cost opportunities which

should be further investigated to achieve greater alignment and coordination in the BV&E sector.

18. In relation to the International Network of offices, the new structure was noted. Given the scaled down physical presence in certain countries, the Board discussed the importance of embedding a digital skillset within the organisation to drive agile ways of working. Katy Best noted that in Northern Ireland a training programme targeted at graduates in the digital sector had been very successful. Sally Balcombe emphasised how embracing digital working would always enable the organisation to “be present everywhere” outside of core markets in the most efficient and agile way to identify local opportunities.
19. In relation to the new Commercial Directorate, the priorities and delivery plan was presented by Carol Dray. The Board noted the existing portfolio of products advertised for sale through the online VB shop retail channel and acknowledged the need to feature a wider range of products which had more regional appeal (as opposed to the current product mix which was very London centric). At the same time, appropriate quality control should continue to be exercised when selecting products for sale via the VB shop.
20. In relation to Strategy & Communications, the priorities and delivery plan was presented by Patricia Yates. It was noted that commercial partner relationships fell within the ambit of the Commercial Directorate whereas public diplomacy partners fell within Strategy & Communications.
21. In relation to Business Services, the priorities and delivery plan was presented by Hazel Cunningham.
22. In relation to the England Division, the priorities and delivery plan was presented by Andrew Stokes. The Board discussed what Year 1 projects could look like at a high level. Andrew Stokes confirmed that successful Year 1 projects would be collaborative in their nature, involving “bookable products” and incorporating elements of integration. Sally Balcombe noted that some Year 1 products could also be chosen on a thematic basis and could also be amplified out into larger scale projects envisaged for Years 2 & 3.

Marketing Plan 2016/17

23. Joss Croft gave a presentation to the Board on the Marketing Plan 2016/17. The Board noted the importance of the # OMGB campaign aligning with the ongoing campaigns of the BTA’s strategic partners. Joss Croft reconfirmed the close working relationship between the organisation and the strategic partners to ensure campaign messages worked in harmony with each other. The Chairman noted that Joss Croft would leave the organisation shortly and expressed thanks to Joss Croft for all his valuable contributions and efforts for the organisation over the years.

Business Visits & Events

24. The Board noted that the topic of BV&E had already been discussed by the Board as part of other Agenda items and therefore discussion of the draft BV&E Paper should be rescheduled for the next Board meeting in June.

Pensions Strategy

25. Hazel Cunningham provided the Board with an update on the ongoing review of Pensions matters together with the options for consideration. Given the importance of this matter, it was agreed that further discussion on the detail of each of the options and/or any recommendations to the Board as to any of the options was warranted and a further meeting of the Board would be scheduled to address this (whether by conference call or at the next Board meeting in June).

VERBAL UPDATES

26. The Board noted that the topic of Partnerships Strategy had already been discussed by the Board as part of other Agenda items and therefore the verbal update on Partnerships Strategy should be rescheduled for the next Board meeting in June.
27. The Board noted that Sally Balcombe had already provided the Board with a verbal update on organisational change as part of other Agenda items.

PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

28. The Board noted the Papers for Information.

Any Other Business

29. No other business was raised.

Date of Next Meeting

30. To be held on 14th June 2016