

Notes of the UKEVENTS Advocacy and Government Relations Meeting.

12th February 2024

Attending: Michael Hirst, Chair, UKEVENTS; George Bacon, BADA; Paul Black, VisitBritain; Neil Brownlee, VisitScotland; Martin Fullard, TBOE; Paul Heath; PLASA; Kerrin MacPhie, mia; David Tremmil, beam; Heledd Williams, VisitWales; Clive Wratten, BTA.

Apologies: Nick, Morgan, UKEVENTS; Rachel Parker, EIA; Susan Tanner, NOEA.

1. The Group considered a slight revision to its **objectives**.

- Continue to **raise the Industry's profile**, making influencers and policymakers **more understanding of the Industry, its diversity and impact** and of the economic and social benefits from aligning the Industry's activities with the government's growth objectives.
- Working with Partners and other allied organisations, provide the **evidence to secure greater support** for the Industry through regulatory changes and fiscal incentives to boost growth in the Industry.
- Promote a **one team approach** across the UK Government to establish a standalone body that takes a policy lead on delivering a nationwide event strategy and to win new business for the UK.
- Maintain a **collaborative approach** across Industry bodies and government departments on issues that promote the interests of the Industry.

2. **Engagement with Ministers & Government Departments**

- a) DCMS continues to request Government Department contacts of Partners so they may better champion the Industry's causes across Whitehall..
- b) Publication of **Liberal Democrat Tourism Policy** with limited references to Events. UKEVENTS wrote to Baroness Doocey, Lib Dem spokesperson on Tourism to highlight role of events within tourism.
- c) Letter of thanks to **Sir John Whittingdale**.
- d) Letter to **Minister Julia Lopez, MP** highlighting role of Events and requesting a meeting – now fixed for the 27th February.
- e) Co-signed Tourism Alliance and Retail Industries letter to the Chancellor on **Duty Free Shopping**.
- f) Meeting with DCMS & DBT Officials to discuss further changes to **business visit rules and permitted paid engagements** after Home Office announcement of relaxation in rules primarily around conference speaker payments and all visitors may now undertake permitted paid engagements so business visits now on a standard visitor visa.
- g) **Budget submission on tax credits for new event productions** in line with TV & Film plus support for **more funding for the VisitBritain Business Event Growth Programme**.
- h) **Mia report on continued activity to raise sector awareness** with letters sent to Rushanara Ali KP, Shadow Minister Investment & Small Business Minister; Sarah Jones MP, Shadow Minister for Industry & Decarbonisation; Jo Churchill, MP, Minister of State for Employment and a meeting with Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region.

- i) **VisitScotland reported current changes in portfolio responsibilities between major events and business events**, which remain with Richard Lockhead MSP, Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade. Neil Gray previously Minister for Culture had now moved.
- j) **VisitBritain were engaging with DBT Services Directorate's creative industries team** to discuss international trade show and exhibitions opportunities.
- k) **BTA highlighted their campaign and lobbying to highlight increased drop-off charges at UK airports** and their forthcoming **EV charging White Paper** which would be circulated to Partners with requests to support. Meetings were being held with Bill Esterson MP, Shadow Minister for Transport and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Transport and are also participating in a roundtable to discuss the **White Paper on Railways** with Hugh Merriman MP, the Rail Minister. Meetings with the Minister responsible for Aviation would also take place.

3. Updates from committee members on current active issues.

- a) **Mia** is currently conducting another round of its **Insights survey** and focussing on **employment opportunities for 50s plus**, planning to work with Merseyside on this project. **Transport strikes** having an impact on business.
- b) **PLASA** reported good levels of business growth across all industry sectors and confirmed **vacancy levels easing**, however, recruitment issues around **lack of required experience and skills** posed training and health and safety issues. Currently doing further survey research which will be shared.
- c) **VisitBritain** highlighted early **IPS data** showing **drop in business event visits** from meetings & conferences, whereas trade show & incentive visits were increasing. However significant gaps in the data and further analysis needed.

4. Active issues.

- a) **Protect Duty Bill** – Further six week consultation by the Home Office with schedule of online briefings circulated to Partners.
- b) Changes in **the Immigration Rules affecting business visitors** had been introduced in December 2023. Although not entirely responding to UKEVENTS lobbying, these changes were positive and further discussion with DCMS & DBT are ongoing to secure more revisions to business travel rules and **permitted paid engagements**.
- c) Representations through the Tourism Alliance continue to be made regarding the application and cost of The EU Entry/Exit System (EES) and the EU Travel Authorisation System (ETIAS).

5. Tax Structure Working Group.

- a) A number of areas for tax simplification and/or reduction were highlighted by the Tax Structure Working Group at its meeting on the 31st January..
- b) Whilst the **proposal made in the UKEVENTS Spring Budget submission for tax credits for new events was favourably considered** and was seen as something unique to the Events sector and well aligned with government priorities to increase productivity and spread regional prosperity, it did not necessarily outweigh the other considerations of **small business support; local authority funding, revision of TOMS, increased funding for bids and the BEGF, reduction in VAT, business rates relief, and apprenticeship funding**.
- c) A proposal to add **another funding pillar to the BEGF** to support destination bidding and target events to satisfy specific periods and regional priorities was suggested.

- d) Members felt there should be **continued support of lobbying by other organisations** on common issues.
- e) The proposal for the Events Industry to have a **standalone strategic body** was still considered key in delivering positive policy changes and the example of UKSport, which might be an existing vehicle, which could embody a wider remit for other types of events, was cited as a potential solution.
- f) **Partners are asked to consider whether more work should be undertaken in consideration of a bespoke scheme being proposed to the Treasury?**

6. An Events Industry Exhibition in Parliament.

- a) George Bacon reported a site visit would take place on the 28th March.
- b) **The current bid was for a Monday to Thursday in a week between April and July and the event would be in the Upper Waiting Hall, adjacent to Committee Rooms.**
- c) The week would be segmented into a **daily focus on Industry sectors** and Partners representing would be invited at their cost to attend on those days.
- d) **An infographic** on the size and scope of the Industry was provided as a reference document of display material to be used at the exhibition, alongside industry fact sheets for distribution to MPs. **VisitBritain confirmed assistance** with production of materials. **GB to liaise.**
- e) It is hope **the UKEVENTS Manifesto** would be available in time for the Exhibition.
- f) **TBOE would assist with invitations and data on constituency focus on event product. GB to liaise.**

7. UKEVENTS Manifesto.

- a) An outline paper previously agreed was recirculated.
- b) **John Gallery had now been given approval to co-ordinate the production of the UK Events Report, which would include the UKEVENTS Manifesto in full** as separate chapter headings. These would be an **abridged version for presentation in a separate Manifesto document.** Discussions with Martin Fullard of his involvement in scripting the narrative are to be held.

8. Business of Events Policy Forum.

- a) **A regional event in the North of England** was being planned.
- b) There would **be no Policy Forum main event in the Autumn** due to the General Election possibly taking place at this time.
- c) **A policy paper would be produced prior to a General Election.**

9. APPG activity update.

- a) **Current activity limited** due to MPs preparing for a General Election.
- b) **Verbal and written questions to Ministers can still be tabled.**
- c) **AGM to take place in mid-April.** Several MPs identified for potential membership of the Group.
- d) **A review of potential executive positions** will need to be made post any General Election and Ministerial appointments.

10. Tourism Industry Council update

- a. Meeting held 7th February 2023 attended by the returning Minister for Tourism, Julia Lopez MP.
- b. Working Group updates.
- c. **Sustainability** now led by VisitEngland with a new lead person appointed. Large number of schemes in operation to be rationalised under a hallmark.
- d. **Accessibility** toolkits issued.
- e. **Skills and apprenticeship update** given from the Hospitality and Skills Board.
- f. **International Group** reported on duty free shopping lobby, visa simplification and youth mobility.
- g. **Events Industry Board Working Group** shared paper on **International Trade Shows and Exhibitions** providing case studies and trade opportunities from upcoming events aligned to economic priorities, highlighting potential government department support. Suggested follow up with similar paper on Association Meetings and Conferences and another on Outdoor events.

11. Tourism Alliance update.

- a) Current focus on **tax free shopping; short term lets and accommodation registration; introduction of ETAs, ETIAs, and EES impact on inbound and outbound travel, impact of government contracts on available accommodation capacity.**

12. Power of Events update.

- a) No update given, however expectation of an initial use of the app for survey purposes was thought to be imminent.
- b) Continued focus on sign ups to the app, career information and school visits in the East of England.

13. Any other matters.

- a) **PLASA** is due to carry out another survey which will be shared.
- b) **Live** is carrying out a **salary survey**.
- c) **VisitWales** reported on the current **election status of the First Minister**.
- d) **beam** reported its intention to have a more robust advocacy voice and conduct research on its sector.

14. Date of next meeting.

11.30 -13.00 Thursday, 9th May 2024.