

Tourism: Visit England

Summary

This paper provides background information to support presentations by Jenny McGee (Head of Strategy, Visit England) and Lyndsey Swift (Partners for England Manager) focusing on the development of Visit England and its future work with local authorities.

The paper also contains information about the creation of the DCMS Tourism Advisory Council, and the role of local government in it.

Recommendations

That members note the background information and presentations, and give a steer to Visit England regarding future joint working with local government.

Action

Subject to members' comments, officers to take agreed actions.

Tourism: Visit England

Background

1. The British Tourism Framework Review was published in February 2009. In its response the DCMS accepted the recommendation that it should, “Create a new English tourism lead body, create an English tourism strategy and agree processes for partnership with, and accountability to, stakeholders and appropriate performance metrics”.

Visit England and the LGA

2. Visit England was officially launched on April 1 2009. The Chair of VE, Lady Penelope Cobham addressed the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport conference in March and has met the Board Chair. She also met Cllr Margaret Eaton, Chair of the LGA, on 21 April. James Berresford (previously Director of Tourism at the North West Development Agency) was appointed Chief Executive of VE on 2 April. The Board have previously expressed their wish to meet either the new Chair or Chief Executive of Visit England, and officer hope to be able to action this request at a forthcoming Board meeting.
3. The Board have also been clear about the need to continue to promote the role of councils as key players in the visitor economy. **The LGA Group is working with Visit England on the following projects:**
 - A joint publication of case studies showing how councils can best promote the visitor economy locally, to be launched at the LGA conference; and
 - A workshop at the LGA annual conference to spread the message of Visit England’s role, and to promote the above publication and its messages.
 - The IDeA is also shortly to embark on work to bring Visit England and the tourism agenda closer in line with the delivery and principles of “A Passion for Excellence” – the culture, tourism and sport sectors national improvement strategy for councils.

Tourism Advisory Council

4. Another recommendation of the British Tourism Framework Review was for the creation of a Tourism Advisory Council to advise ministers and promote cross-government understanding of the needs of the tourism industry. At present, local government has not been invited to attend the council, a full list of the members of which can be found at http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/6126.aspx.

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5. The LGA is lobbying government to give councils access to key business partners represented on the new DCMS Tourism Advisory Council. The Chair recently wrote to Tourism minister Barbara Follett to make clear that councils see tourism, which is the fifth largest industry in the UK, as central to supporting employment, investment and skills development in the present economic downturn. A copy of this letter is enclosed at **Annex A**.
6. Local authorities also invest £120m per year in tourism infrastructure and support, and are therefore the largest public funder of the tourism in England. Councils also spend a significant amount on culture and heritage - £1.8bn in 2005-2006 - and support major cultural, business and sporting events, all of which are important attractions for tourists. This makes councils central to any joined-up conversation with industry.

Recommendations

7. In responding to the presentation from Visit England members may wish to develop the following themes:
 - How can the development of a tourism strategy for England best reflect the role of local authorities, and differences between local tourist destinations?
 - In a recent survey 84% of councils told the LGA that improving the quality and flow of information from RDAs about funding opportunities for tourism was the key to success. How can Visit England help RDAs and councils improve their working relationship on tourism?
 - The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are a once in a generation chance to unite the tourism sectors around a clear goal. It is estimated that 50 – 75% of the economic benefits of the games will accrue to tourism. How can the LGA and Visit England work together to ensure the approach to Tourism 2012 is joined up and responsive to existing work on tourism at all levels?

Financial Implications

8. Development of this work can be met from existing resources.

Implications for Wales

9. The WLGA will be engaged as appropriate in the Board's work on the tourism sector.

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**Barbara Follett MP
Minister for Culture, Creative Industries & Tourism
Department of Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH**

06 May 2009

Dear Barbara,

I welcome the recent launch of the Tourism Advisory Council, to provide regular contact between Government and the tourism industry. I am disappointed though that this regular and valuable contact has not been extended to local government, and that the LGA is not represented on the council.

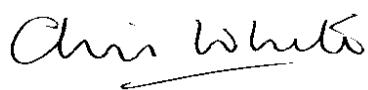
As the fifth largest industry in the UK, tourism is central to supporting employment, investment and skills development in the present economic downturn. The tourism sector is characterised by flexible employment patterns, and is likely to be one of the main beneficiaries of the £1bn local job creation fund announced in the budget; so councils would greatly value the access to the tourism industry that this group offers.

Six of the Advisory Council's members are public bodies, and it is right to avoid a false split between public and private sectors of the visitor economy. But without representation of local authorities, who invest £120m per year and are therefore the largest public funder of the tourism in England, a sizeable piece of the conversation will be missing.

Councils also spend a significant amount on culture and heritage - £1.8bn in 2005-2006 - and support major cultural, business and sporting events, all of which are important attractions for tourists; so they are key to having a fully joined up conversation.

The British Tourism Framework Review described local authorities as "the unsung heroes of British tourism". This view is echoed by my fellow elected members in councils that are trying to improve their tourism offer. I hope that, on consideration of these points, you will be able to invite a local government representative onto the new Tourism Advisory Council.

Yours sincerely,



**Cllr Chris White
Chair, Culture, Tourism and Sport board**

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Local Government Association