

**MINUTES OF THE 475<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE  
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD**  
held on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025 at 10.00-13.30  
Boardroom, BTA offices  
Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

**Present:**

Nick de Bois CBE (Chair)	BTA Board Chair
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member (online)
Lady Victoria Borwick (VB)	Board Member/VEAB Chair
Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member
Beth Knight (BK)	Board Member
Michael Bewick (MB)	Board Member/Wales representative (Ex-officio)
Stephen Leckie (SL)	Board member/VisitScotland Chairman (Ex-officio)
Fiona Pollard CBE (FP)	Interim RPC Chair/VEAB member
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW)	Interim ARC Chair/VEAB member
Karly Greene (KG)	Tourism Northern Ireland (Observer)
Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS (Observer)

**In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates (PY/CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Debra Lang (DL)	Director HR & Professional Services
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS)	Director of VisitEngland
Andrew Jackson (AS)	Stanton Marris (Observer and for item 5.2)
Suzy Faulkener (SF)	Deputy Director, Commercial (for item 5.1)
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

**Apologies:**

William Burton (WB)	Board Member
Kendra Blumsky (KB)	Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary

**1.0 Welcome and Introductions**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including FP and NW, Interim Chairs of the RPC and ARC, who had both been coopted to the Board whilst serving as Committee Chairs.
2. PG was joining online from the US. AJ, who was leading the Board Effectiveness Review was welcomed, and would present his interim report under item 5.2, and SF would join for item 5.1.

**1.1 Apologies for absence**

3. Apologies had been received from WB, KB and HB.

**1.2 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts**

4. Were as per the register dated 9 June 2025. PG was congratulated on his new role as Group Chief Executive of Busy Bees Global which would formally commence on 8 July.

### 1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 1 April 2025

5. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### 1.4 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

6. The Chair reviewed the action tracker. World Travel Market (WTM) would take place 4-6 November at Excel, London. BTA's Annual Review would take place on 21 October and it was hoped that the Minister would attend. Members to advise JH if they wished to attend either event.

### 1.5 Chair's update

7. The Chair reported on BTA Board member recruitment, advising that interviews had taken place and recommendations were currently awaiting approval. He noted a strong pool of high-level applications. DP added that of DCMS's ALBs, BTA/VEAB had received the highest number of Board applications. The Chair thanked DP for his support with the process. He also confirmed that BTA Chair recruitment was now live and encouraged Board members to share role details across their networks.
8. The Chair summarised correspondence dated 27 May from the Minister, acknowledging his letter regarding GREAT funding and welcoming the remarks on the potential new funding stream discussions taking place, and from Ellie Reeves MP on GREAT funding.
9. The Chair also highlighted a number of ALB review points made in a letter from the DCMS Permanent Secretary dated 23 April. These included proposals to drive Board diversity (including second term reappointments only in exceptional circumstances) and some expectations around expenditure. The Chair assured the Board that these requirements would be applied across the organisation.
10. **ACTION: The Chair to share letters from Government representatives with Board members.**

## 2.0 Strategic Matters for Discussion

### 2.1 CEO's Update (including item 2.2 ALB Review and 2.3 CEO Engagements)

11. In addition to her written report the CEO advised that, following an initial ALB review response the executive was working to reply to points raised by DCMS by the deadline of 19 June, further to next stage consideration by the Cabinet Office. DP advised the approach should focus on organisational evolution and the fundamental consideration of whether VB could be a commercial operation with some Government funding rather than a Government organisation with some commercial funding. The response would also consider strategic plans for VE. Colleagues raised a number of matters in respect of commercialisation and VB government led priorities.

The Chair thanked the team for their work on this key matter.

12. The CEO had also written to both the Minister and Ellie Reeves MP regarding the impact of cuts to GREAT funding. Conversations were ongoing on potential GREAT underspends. The CEO would attend a GREAT programme board on 17 July and feed into business planning discussions. She noted that VB's GREAT funding was now part of the Missions board and future spending reviews would be handled directly by DCMS Communications who would require careful briefing.
13. The CEO reported on Osaka Expo's UK Day (2025 - Wales Japan year) which had been supported by the Secretary of State and FCDO. MB flagged the importance of the event for Wales and partnership working across the nations' marketing/commercial teams. [A video of Expo's UK Day was shown].

14. Partner, Databricks, had hosted VB's stand at an AI summit in San Francisco. Attended by an audience of c. 22k from over 160 countries, VB was the only tourist board present and highlighting its embrace of AI.
15. Given the Minister's aspirations to host a programme of events around WTM, VB had reconsidered its position and would host a stand at the show. The stand would be funded from VB core budgets when it had previously been funded by GREAT.
16. BTA had queried some of IPS's provisional visitor figures for 2024 (points raised would be addressed before final numbers were issued in mid-August). As such BTA was currently communicating the data with a number of caveats. It was confirmed that core sector value measures (provided by Deloitte and Oxford Economics) remained, until they were superseded by the Economic Value of Tourism data later this summer.
17. The CEO reported that Transformation Director Liz Herridge, would leave the organisation in July as this work moved into a BAU Digital, Data & Technology (DDaT) programme. DL would lead the Digital team and she and DL would sit on the DDaT Programme Board. FP was thanked for her significant and ongoing contribution in this area.
18. Following encouraging responses to the recruitment campaigns, new India and Australia country managers had been appointed. PY and DL were pleased to advise that VB/VE had been included in the *Sunday Times Best Place To Work* list for the second year. The Chair congratulated the team and thanked DL for her efforts.

## 2.4 Dashboard

19. The June 2025 dashboard was noted. The CEO reported on strong progress in terms of the *Starring Great Britain* campaign and business events (inc. products outside London). The Chair queried how the current campaign compared to previous campaigns.
20. **ACTION: The CEO agreed to provide statistics on the *Starring Great Britain* campaign versus previous campaigns.**

## 2.5 Visitor Economy Advisory Council (VEAC) Update

21. As Co-Chair, KS updated on the VEAC. Recent activity included finalising the Investment Thesis being produced in partnership with Deloitte, noting that there had been some challenge in defining the scale of the sector. The three Visitor Economy Growth Strategy working groups (Regional Growth; Skills & Careers; and International) would report back on findings at the end of June. The BTA CEO is an observer member of the Council and the BTA is actively involved in all three working groups. Next steps would include: engagement with Mayors and across Government; a review point at the July VEAC meeting; the strategy drafted over August-September and published at WTM in November. DP highlighted pressures re. timeline/clearances and counselled around realistic expectations re. practicable deliverables and that the strategy would have to benefit the current Parliament. The Chair commended the VEAC's broad approach and thanked all involved.

## 3.0 Corporate Updates

### 3.1 RPC Update

22. FP updated on the 29 April RPC meeting which had reviewed the first draft of the new People Strategy and an update on the implementation of the new HR system.

The Committee had approved a limited scope pay and benchmarking proposal and had taken a deep dive into DDaT.

Board Effectiveness Review consultant, AJ, had attended the meeting as an observer.

### 3.2 ARC Update

23. NW reported that the 10 June ARC meeting had been focused on the review of the 2024/25 ARA which was progressing well. Internal auditors GIAA had issued their annual performance report with a *moderate* assurance opinion, as per the previous year. The Committee agreed to extend the completion dates of three procurement recommendations. ARC had also been pleased to receive reports of the successful implementation of the new finance system D365.
24. The Committee had considered the 2024/25 outturn and underspend, and the executive's lessons learned exercise and proposed action plan (inc. in paper 4.2). Consideration was given to the annual expenditure profile, the pressures in the final quarter of the financial year and potential mitigatory actions. In respect of any 2025/26 GREAT underspend timely confirmation and a level of nimbleness around procurement would be required to ensure effective delivery and ROI. DP said there was a drive in this DCMS business planning cycle to provide greater certainty for years 2 and 3. He suggested that a pitch could be made to DCMS to support VB with planned pre-approvals.
25. **ACTION: The CEO to consider raising the issue of planned expenditure pre-approvals with DCMS.**
26. ARC had undertaken a full review of the Corporate Risk Register (paper 7.3). As highlighted at the DCMS ARC Chairs' meeting, mitigation of cyber risk was a key concern for all organisations, and would be a focus topic at BTA's next ARC meeting.
27. **DECISION:** Following review of the scope and completeness of the identified risks, risk descriptions, existing mitigations, residual risk scores after mitigations and any further actions that should be planned to mitigate risk, the Board agreed the Corporate Risk Register as tabled.

## 4.0 Papers for Approval/Discussion

### 4.1 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) 2024/25 sign off

28. The Chair and NW both paid tribute to SJ and colleagues, including Nick Khinchikashvili and Fiona Macdonald, for ensuring a smooth process in getting the ARA to its current position. NW flagged that the going concern assessment related to the 12 months from the date of signing. He noted that NAO's Engagement Director had commented that the quality of the annual report was much better than last year. NAO had confirmed a clean unqualified external audit opinion, with no significant adjustments. The management letter had made two recommendations which were being addressed.
29. Due to the date the latest IPS figures had been published, final updates to the ARA and Tourism Landscape section had been issued on 16 June (paper 4.1a). Next steps included: Ministerial approval by 27 June and laying before Parliament on 17 July. The Interim Chair of ARC commended the ARA to the BTA Board for their approval.
30. Board members raised a number of queries and suggestions following scrutiny of the ARA. SJ noted on-going checking and asked that any final comments be forwarded to her directly. SJ thanked NW and ARC and Board members for their valuable contributions.
31. **DECISION:** The Board noted the contents of the ARC's annual report and unanimously approved the BTA 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts and the going concern assessment within the ARC report. The Board also unanimously approved that the Interim ARC Chair could approve all subsequent immaterial changes to the ARA up to the date of laying before Parliament and that material changes could be approved by the Chair of the Board.

## 4.2 2024/25 Final Outturn

32. The Board noted the lessons learned exercise which had taken place following review of underspends and the related action plan.

## 4.3 2025/26 Financial position update

33. SJ confirmed there were no major variances to plan. Three months into the year the staff vacancy savings had been achieved to date.

## 4.4 2025 Strategy Day planning

34. The CEO invited feedback on initial proposals for the joint Boards' Strategy Day taking place on 14 October at Cannon Bridge House. Timing of BTA's funding settlement and other political developments could influence the session's agenda and content. Key comments from Board members comprised:
- Support for the model used in 2024: e.g. formed proposals presented for detailed consideration.
  - Support for the four discussion topics proposed by the executive.
  - Plan to include draft Visitor Economy Growth Strategy/related reports as a topic, subject to timeline/approvals.
  - Growth/regional growth
  - External speakers to amplify strategic issues.
  - Positioning of GB compared to key competitors to help inform strategic approach.
35. **ACTION: The CEO/FM to agree the final agenda and pre-read with Chair. Board will be updated at the 23 September meeting. Aiming for final papers to be sent 1-2 weeks prior to Strategy Day.**

## 5.0 Items for Discussion and Decision

### 5.1 Retail Review

36. SF joined for this item. She and BK, who was acting as Board sponsor for this work, were both thanked for their contributions.
37. DECISION: After a comprehensive discussion the Board approved the recommendations as set out in the Retail Review paper, noting the wish for the recommendations to be completed in 12 months.
38. **ACTION: AS/SF to lead on the Retail Review. A further update to be given at the 23 September Board and each meeting thereafter.**

### 5.2 Board Effectiveness Review

39. AJ presented his draft final report. In summary, he felt the Board was effective and had increased its strategic focus since the last review. His recommendations were generally around better housekeeping rather than fundamental matters. AJ noted that the Board was currently in transition pending appointments, including that of a new Chair later in the year. Therefore, many of the recommendations would be for the incoming Chair's consideration.
40. DECISION: The Board approved the Board Effectiveness Review report as tabled, subject to some amendments to reflect input from the Scottish and Welsh members.
41. **ACTION: AJ to finalise and submit the Board Effectiveness Review report. Implementation plans to be considered at the 23 September Board.**

42. Following discussions with the nations' representatives as part of the Board Effectiveness Review, the Chair invited updates and sharing of nations challenges and opportunities in their current operating landscape, with a view to shaping some future Board discussions.

Key discussion points comprised the following matters, and a number of common issues were noted.

43. **6.1 VisitScotland**

- Close relationships with key Ministers and Scottish Government representatives. Open and honest conversations around fulfilling statutory obligations within funding envelope.
- Current challenges: declining domestic tourism market; increasing costs; short-term let legislation; expectations of the Tourism Levy outside of the capital.

44. **6.2 VisitWales**

- Sitting within Welsh Government - good access to representatives, excellent brand but some limited resource. [VisitWales *Feel the Hwyl* video was shown]
- International visitor numbers still behind 2019. Actions to address include: capital funding programme; driving USPs and perceptions around accessibility; work with VB/VE.
- Current challenges: friction between tourism investment and wider policy, e.g. housing policy impact on accommodation capacity; sustainability - aligning community and industry objectives.

45. **6.3 Tourism Northern Ireland**

- Sponsored by Department for Economy - New Minister following Feb 2024 restoration of NI government and new priorities including driving regional balance, increasing productivity, increasing good jobs and decarbonising the economy.
- Opportunities: working to promote NI in key international markets with Tourism Ireland and Visit Britain and the continued drive to welcome visitors from Rep. of Ireland and GB.
- Challenges: annual budgets and ability to plan ahead; skills & recruitment; impact of ETA; cost of doing business compared to the south; using technology to drive productivity.
- Suggested nations' partnership working, possibly around: data and demonstrating impact; shared advocacy messages.

46. **6.4 VisitEngland**

- Current focus: driving Government mission for growth for regions and local communities.
- Opportunities: robust delivery framework; strength of offer (cultural, hospitality, landscape etc); developing relationships with Mayors/unitary authorities.
- Challenges: uncertain operating landscape (1 LVEP ceased trading); funding; devolution re-shaping the way VE works; transport network; getting operators market ready.

47. The Chair, nations' representatives and AJ would meet for a subsequent discussion after the Board meeting on driving further value from the nations' involvement on the Board.

**7.0 Papers for noting/information**

48. Most papers had been referenced during the meeting and no further comments were raised.

**8.0 Any Other Business**

49. There was no further business.

The meeting was closed at 1330.

END