

## **MINUTES OF THE 460<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)**

**Wednesday 4 June 2025 at 1200-1500**

Renaissance Suite 1, Doubletree by Hilton Brighton Metropole,  
King's Road, Brighton BN1 2FU

**Present:** Fiona Pollard (FP), Board Member (in the chair)  
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member  
Nigel Wilkinson (NW), Board Member  
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member  
Laura Backhouse (LB), DCMS Observer  
Katie Panagou (KP), VEAB Boardroom Apprentice Observer  
Kendra Blumsky (KB), BTA Boardroom Apprentice Observer

**In Attendance:** Patricia Yates (CEO/PY), Chief Executive/BTA Accounting Officer  
Andrew Stokes (AS), England and Commercial Director  
Serena Jacobs (SJ), Finance Director  
Debra Lang (DL), Director of HR & Professional Services  
Henry Banks (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director VE  
Janet Uttley (JU), VE Head of Industry Development (for item 7.1)  
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

**Apologies:** Lady Victoria Borwick, (Chair/VB), VEAB Chair  
Sarah Fowler (SF), Board Member

### **1.0 Welcome and Opening Remarks**

#### **1.1 Welcome**

1. VB had asked FP to chair the meeting in her absence. FP welcomed everyone to Brighton ahead of the evening's VisitEngland Awards for Excellence. She thanked the team at the Hilton Doubletree Brighton Metropole for hosting the Board, noting the supportive terms offered, and confirmed arrangements conformed with the BTA's Gifts & Hospitality policy. She welcomed BTA Boardroom Apprentice KB who would attend the meeting as an observer.
2. SF's term would end on 5 July after more than 5 years' service on the Board. Members paid tribute to her wise counsel and significant contributions around sustainability and a range of other key matters.
3. Interviews for new Board members had now taken place and the interview report was currently with the interview panel awaiting clearance before going to Ministers.

#### **1.2 Apologies**

4. There were apologies for absence from VB and SF. Both would join for the Awards event.

#### **1.3 Register of Interests**

5. As per the current register of interests.

#### **1.4 Minutes from the Last Meeting**

6. The minutes dated 11 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

## 1.5 Action Tracker

7. There would be a deep dive into the Marketing Strategy at the September Board meeting. All members had confirmed that they had read the BTA Anti Bullying & Harassment policy and training would follow at a time to be advised.

## 1.6 Chair's Update & Diary

8. VB's engagement calendar was noted. Her level of industry and stakeholder engagement was commended.

## 2.0 CEO's Updates

### 2.1 CEO's Report

9. The CEO advised that the latest ALB review was currently with the Secretary of State, with, as yet no read out.
10. The CEO reported that the 10 April VEAC meeting had focused on the draft *Investment Prospectus for Tourism* by Deloitte. There had been mixed views in respect of the data and financial modelling used. It was understood that Deloitte would involve Oxford Economics in future work. VB/VE had partnered with Oxford Economics to draft its *Financial Value of Tourism* report, scheduled to be published in July. The next VEAC meeting would take place on 17 July.
11. A discussion took place around concern as to how the VEAC and VEAB's purpose and remit potentially overlapped. LB advised that the VEAC was sector-led and focused on developing the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. There were questions around: who was advising Government; where the nations fitted in; inefficiency of having multiple advisors; who the strategy's delivery vehicle would be; and where funding was coming from. VEAB asked that LB note the concern and requested she share that with DCMS, with a view to obtaining clarity.
12. **ACTION: LB to provide clarity around VEAB and VEAC's purpose at the September meeting.**
13. The CEO advised that the BTA had offered to write a *Future of Tourism* piece for the foreword of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. It would focus on broad trends and was due to be submitted by the end of June. Both BTA and VE Boards would see the piece, which would probably be a pre-read for the October joint strategy day.
14. She reminded all of the funding timeline: 11 June - outline of Government department budgets; November - outline of DCMS funding to VB/VE; February 2026 - GREAT funding announcement.
15. The Seaside Towns/Coastal Communities project was building momentum. VE was answering DCMS's questions on its summary document, MP support was growing and Liverpool's Combined Authority Mayor was keen for Southport to be considered as a pilot.
16. AS outlined that the 5-year vision for Southport (expected to launch in October 2025 to begin in January 2026) would be largely event-based, with public realm elements, a hotel study and retail strategy. Funding, including from No 10, had been pledged for a public family space (commemorating the victims of the Southport attack), plus a year-long festival to change the

perception of the town to an overnight destination. Southport appeared to be positioned as the first in a sequence of emerging north-west infrastructure projects. It was understood that VE's potential role could be around developing product via key partnerships, supporting engagement and status. LTS was chairing a cross-organisational group to lead on a prioritised response on what VE could achieve with the project.

17. Although it was felt a Seaside Towns project met Government priorities and stakeholder support was growing, DCMS had not yet approved the approach or confirmed funding. AL underlined the importance of tourism bringing disposable income to coastal areas and in the meantime advised continuing to develop project foundations and a strong supporter base.
18. The CEO had joined the Secretary of State's recent visit to India. She had enjoyed a short positive discussion with her and shown her the *Starring Great Britain* film. The Secretary of State had attended UK National Day at Osaka Expo, part of the GREAT campaign. Tourism Day took place on 5 June and featured a full supplier engagement programme. The CEO had given evidence at the Senedd on Wales' International Strategy which featured a strong focus on Japan this year.
19. Via DCMS, no 10 was seeking non-fiscal options to reduce the cost of domestic holidays for consumers. FP noted this ask reflected points raised in the Chair's letter to the Minister dated November 2024. The CEO invited members to make appropriate suggestions.
20. **ACTION: Board members to send the CEO suggestions of non-fiscal ways to reduce the cost of UK holidays and the CEO to respond to DCMS by 6 June. DONE.**
21. The CEO was pleased to announce that BTA had been listed for a second year in the *Sunday Times Best Place to Work* list, specifically around the Locate for Your Day initiative.

### **3.0 DCMS update**

22. LB advised that the team's priority focus was the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. Early stage work would comprise mobilising messaging, including for Mayors. With a planned launch in autumn, there was a challenging timeline - July: draft objectives for review, including at an LVEP roundtable (LVEPs/DDPs seen as delivery vehicles), August: draft available for review.
23. The Minister's plan was to announce the Strategy at the World Travel Market (WTM). The CEO advised that in light of the considerable cut to GREAT funding, non-ROI expenditure had been cut from the budget, including BTA's stand at the WTM. Conversations continued with DCMS given the Minister's plan.
24. Post meeting note: The CEO subsequently agreed the BTA would support the UKinbound stand at WTM as previous years with funding from the core DCMS budget.
25. The Minister was keen for an early launch of the Short-term Lets Registration Scheme. In response to NW's query, LB explained an impact assessment still had to be carried out and a decision as to who would be the administering body remained to be made.

### **4.0 Dashboard with updated KPIs**

26. Following discussions at the March Board meeting and call on 14 May, a new KPI dashboard had been drafted for review. LTS introduced the framework noting that it reflected VE's updated corporate priorities.

27. Initial Feedback included:

- Could there be greater perspective applied – i.e. rather than saying 300 SMEs had been trained, say out of a total target population of xx SMEs, xx% of these had been trained;
- Could KPIs be ranked so those considered “headline” were duly identified;
- Could it be checked and confirmed that all KPIs were matched to Government priorities.

Members were invited to provide any further feedback by email.

28. **DECISION:** The Board agreed the KPIs and targets for 2025/26. Noting the dashboard was an iterative tool it was agreed that it should be populated and reviewed at each future meeting.
29. **ACTION: LTS to lead the population of the VE KPI dashboard for tabling at the 9 September meeting.**

## **5.0 Regional Reports**

30. AL reported that the south-west market felt ‘warmer’ than at the start of the year, although the continuing trend for later bookings made predicting performance increasingly difficult.
31. NT noted that the Australian government was making substantial investment in state tourism marketing campaigns and hospitality and tourism apprenticeships. Tour Guides had been added to its occupational shortage list. Re. comms platforms, she advised that streaming services, such as YouTube, were now viewed more than broadcast television.
32. NW spoke about continuing challenges, including the considerable impact of increased NI and regulatory costs on the sector. He felt that the recent fine weather had masked the weak domestic economy. He did not feel there was value in marketing to Japan whilst flights could not travel over Russian airspace and the Yen was weak.

## **6.0 Review of the North East DDP & summary reports**

33. An independently verified review of the north-east DDP pilot would be published shortly. LTS talked through its key findings. It was generally felt that the north-east DDP provided an excellent template for other regions, based on the following features: strong outputs around economic growth, fit within the devolved landscape, alignment with mayoral agenda, early stakeholder engagement and collaborative working, plus robust policy and evidence base.
34. The VEAB felt that the report’s outcomes were impressive. Other points included:
- AL felt that there was a very credible story to tell on VE/VB’s core role in generating rapid ROI and hoped that some punchy headline messaging could be developed;
  - LB introduced some caution reminding all that HMT would view the findings on the basis of was it displacement and would it have happened anyway;
  - The CEO queried whether Deloitte should be offered the report as a case study for its developing *Prospectus for Tourism*.
35. **ACTION: LTS to circulate a restricted copy of the final north-east DDP review to Board members when it becomes available. DONE.**
36. **ACTION: LB to explore sharing the north-east DDP review with Deloitte for the Prospectus for Tourism, subject to the timings of both pieces of work.**

## **7.0 VisitEngland Awards for Excellence**

37. JU joined to discuss her paper on the 2026 Awards for Excellence. At its March meeting the Board had agreed that the 2026 awards had to be cost neutral. A number of options had been explored, with two options now being brought to the Board for consideration. FP flagged the Chair's view that the value of the awards went beyond the event itself and wider impact including media coverage should be taken into account.
38. JU advised that following discussions at the March Board meeting, there was a new focus on sponsorship, efforts had been made to reduce budget where possible and selling tickets had been successfully trialled. It was hoped that this could be maximised further in 2026. She felt confident that she could develop a model for the future that moved towards a cost neutral position within a couple of years.
39. Key discussion points included:
- A large-scale event preceded by a sector business event would be more impactful and attractive to sponsors;
  - In response to NT's query, it was confirmed that the commitment to LVEPs and the regional awards came under a separate budget which had also been reduced for 2025;
  - NW suggested following the model used by Cumbria Tourism and license the event to a professional organiser who could source funding;
  - The CEO confirmed that she supported option 5 with a caveat around avoiding any financial risk;
  - DL raised concerns about external perception of the event given the current economic environment. LB concurred from a DCMS perspective, supporting a self-funded model.
  - FP suggested implementing a stage gate at which to review the position to ensure that the significant sponsorship target could be assessed;
  - JU requested support from the Board with suggestions for sponsorship;
  - JU was commended for her efforts and wished the best for the evening's event.
40. **DECISION:** After discussion, the VEAB agreed that VE should proceed moving towards a cost-neutral Awards for Excellence event based on option 5. There would be a review point in October/November 2025 to agree whether the funding position would allow the event to progress.
41. **ACTION:** The Board to be kept updated on the 2026 Awards for Excellence with a formal review at the November Board meeting.

## **8.0 Finance update & deep dive**

42. SJ confirmed that the VE outturn for 24/25 had been an underspend slightly over DCMS's tolerance criteria. The Directors had met to consider lessons learnt and how forecasting could be improved. A review of the BTA shop/e-commerce would take place at the 17 June BTA Board meeting.
43. SJ ran through the VE budget for 2025/26 compared to the previous year's budget. AS explained that England brand work would be completed in 2025/26 and comprised domestic audience research and profiling for use across the country. He advised that any savings from the 2025 Awards would be channelled into the Seaside Town project.

## **9.0 Corporate updates**

### **9.1 ARC report**

44. NW, as interim Chair of ARC, reported that the 25 March meeting had been largely focused on the ARA, which was progressing well. Internal auditors GIAA had issued a satisfactory report and the National Audit Office had issued a clean report. The 10 June ARC meeting would finalise the ARA for review by the BTA Board on 17 June and subsequent laying before Parliament. The Committee continued its oversight of risk, noting additional resource was being allocated to mitigate against cyber risk.

### **9.2 RPC report**

45. 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 benchmarking exercise and had taken a deep dive into Digital Data & Technology (DDAT). Focused DDAT KPIs would be tabled at the September meeting. FP indicated that it was likely an interim RPC meeting would be required to consider any pay award settlement. She also advised that Board Effectiveness Review consultant, Andrew Jackson, had attended the meeting following up positively in respect of both Board and executive contributions.

## **10.0 Visit England's Potential Role in Coastal Communities**

46. This item had been covered under item 15-17.

## **11.0 Papers for Noting**

47. There were no comments in respect of these papers.

## **12.0 Any Other Business**

48. AS updated on the positive response to the recently published report on the *Social Value of Tourism*. The report's key message - tourism enhances community pride, wellbeing and social cohesion across the UK.
49. The report was available on the website, had been shared via social media and LVEPs and would be embedded within VE's Regenerative Tourism work. It was a useful piece of work to share locally as a reminder of tourism's broader benefits to local economies/communities. In order to demonstrate the report's impact the number of downloads (inc. via LVEPs) would be tracked.
50. A briefing was provided ahead of the evening's Awards for Excellence.

The meeting concluded at 15.00

The date of the next meeting – Tuesday 9 September 2025, in Bath

END