

MINUTES OF THE 461st MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

Tuesday 9 September 2025 at 1030-1300

The Chapel Room, Gainsborough Bath Spa Hotel
Beau Street, Bath B1 1QY

Present: Lady Victoria Borwick, (Chair/VB), VEAB Chair
Fiona Pollard CBE (FP), Board Member
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW), Board Member
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member
Helen Bonser-Wilton (HBW), Board Member
Dr Sarah Green OBE (SG), Board Member
Laura Backhouse (LB), DCMS Observer (online)
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 (online)
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS), England and Commercial Director
Debra Lang (DL), Director of HR & Professional Services (online)
Anke Monestal (AM), VE Head of Regional Development & Engagement
Robin Johnson (RJ), Director of Global Marketing
Samee Mohammad (SM), Head of England Marketing
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

Apologies: Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director VE

1.0 Welcome and Opening Remarks

1.1 Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including LB, PY & DL who joined online. She thanked Kathryn Davis of Visit West for hosting her and AS's visit to Bristol the day before, supporting arrangements for the VEAB's day in Bath and for providing an informative introduction. The Chair welcomed new VEAB members HBW and SG to their first meeting and introductions were made. She noted that as part of the PM's Cabinet reshuffle Sir Chris Bryant had moved role and the position of Tourism Minister was currently vacant.

Post meeting note: Later in the day it was confirmed that Stephanie Peacock MP had been appointed as Tourism Minister.

1.2 Apologies

2. Apologies for absence had been received from LTS.

1.3 Register of Interests

3. Noted. The register had been updated on 5 September and included HBW and SG's declarations.

1.4 Minutes from the Last Meeting

4. After item 39 of the minutes of 3 June 2025 had been corrected to refer to *Cumbria Tourism*, they were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. **ACTION: JH to correct the minutes as requested and to post online.**

1.5 Action Tracker

6. LB clarified VEAB and VEAC's roles. VEAB advised VE on tourism issues in England and supported VE to deliver on its strategic and corporate priorities, the Chair feeding matters related to English tourism into the BTA board which has a statutory duty to advise Government on tourism policy. VEAC, a joint industry/Government body, was a sounding board, specifically focused on providing growth, and which had been tasked with devising a longer-term strategy for the UK visitor economy.
7. In response to a query from NW, PY explained that the Economic Value of Tourism Report, commissioned from Oxford Economics, was being finalised. The VEAC had commissioned a related report from Deloitte. There was an aspiration to align the two and publish together (currently under DCMS review). She expected that the VE report would be shared as part of the October joint boards' strategy day's pre-read pack.

1.6 Chair's Update & Diary

8. VB summarised observations from her summer visits across the regions: business remained tough (although some operators had benefited from the good weather); economic conditions resulting in reduced employment levels and ongoing closures; businesses working in survival mode; and some impressive innovating.
9. From discussions with ferry providers VB had made been made aware of the negative impact of some new environmental regulations. She advised LB that VE may make representation drawing the Government's attention to the unintended consequences of these regulations.

2.0 CEO's Updates

2.1 CEO's Report

10. PY advised that the appointment of a new Minister presented potential for change.
11. As part of the ongoing ALB review, in addition to data already provided, a comprehensive report on organisational resource and structure had been requested and submitted. Next stages were awaited. The business planning cycle was underway. Submissions had been made on 8 September, with the funding outcome expected in November (post the joint boards' strategy day).
12. **ACTION: JH to share the two papers drafted for the SoS with the draft minutes.**
13. Minister Bryant's ambition had been to publish the Visitor Economy Strategy at the World Travel Market in November. The new Minister's plans were awaited.
14. Interviews for NdB's successor as BTA Chair had taken place on 3 September. PY had fed back on informal online chats with all short-listed candidates. It was expected that the final decision would be made by the new Minister.
15. VE had been asked by DCMS to indicate if it was interested in taking on the role of scheme owner for the Short Term Lets Registration Scheme being planned for introduction in England. Planned for launch in April 2026, the scheme would be run on gov.uk and would require short term let providers to be registered. It was hoped that acting as scheme owner would provide access to data in an area that historically has lacked accurate metrics. A project group was

currently scoping and costing the opportunity, with specific attention to risks and their mitigation. (To be discussed further under item 3.1).

16. PY reported that VE and the Liverpool LVEP would host a round table on Seaside Towns in Liverpool, chaired by Lord Bassam.

3.0 DCMS update

17. At the time of the meeting LB was unable to advise on who was to replace Minister Bryant. She paid tribute to the outgoing Minister and hoped his successor would bring the same level of commitment and energy. She advised that the new Minister's briefing was being prepared and expected that the VEAC meeting scheduled for 17 September would proceed as an opportunity to introduce the Minister.
18. LB expected that the Minister's early focus would include: the Visitor Economy Strategy/World Travel Market; Short Term Lets Registration Scheme; sustaining the DMO structure in the economic climate; and the BTA Chair appointment. SG highlighted concerns about DDP funding. LB responded that the DCMS recognised the importance of the DDPs but she was not able to confirm anything in relation to funding.
19. In response to NW's query about VEAB input into the Visitor Economy Strategy, he was reminded that a number of BTA and VEAB Board members were on the VEAC and a strategy session for LVEPs was planned.
20. SG commented that her understanding was that the VEAC's strategy may be more to create a framework for industry rather than a particular strategy.
21. **ACTION: AS to share details of the LVEP/VEAC strategy session with VEAB members.**

3.1 Short Term Lets Registration Scheme (STLRS)

22. AS introduced this item reminding members that VE had always been a supporter of such a scheme and that it was well placed to become scheme administrator. VE was now being asked to confirm its interest and was in the process of evaluating the resource required to become the scheme owner. Members expressed interest in the opportunity and asked several questions. Key points raised:

- PY advised that information on the scheme had only recently been received from DCMS and a comprehensive review of project scope, capability, cost and risk was being undertaken at pace. She confirmed that risk would be managed via the organisation's usual robust process. NW, as Interim ARC Chair, supported the approach being taken.
- FP underlined the positives of involvement and hoped that risks could be mitigated to a level to allow VE to reap the benefits.
- LB advised that launching the scheme remained dependant on the drafting and approval of secondary legislation, timeline TBC.
- Given the use of the Government platform, VB queried VE's ability to be able to market to scheme users, and about cost benefit.
- In response to queries about the principle of the scheme itself and whether there were any reputational concerns, PY explained that VE's role was expected to be administrative:

the maintenance of a register to provide transparency as to whom was operating a short term let, with enforcement being largely undertaken by local councils. It was noted that the scheme would not be VE branded.

- LB advised that a similar scheme already launched in Scotland had provided learnings and the England model would feature a lighter touch/self-service approach.
- If VE was not appointed to administer the scheme, it was expected that MHCLG would be appointed.
- Technology would be procured by DCMS via contracted third parties. It was expected that data access would be phased. Alpha testing had taken place and a year 1 soft launch was planned.

23. **DECISION: The VEAB supported VE becoming the Short Term Lets Registration Scheme owner, providing work to satisfy concerns about scope, capability, cost and risk was completed, and taking into account any views of the BTA board.**

24. **ACTION: PY/AS to lead the development of a Short Term Lets Registration Scheme paper to be presented to the BTA Board at its 23 September 2025 meeting. [Done]**

2.3 Strategy Day update

25. PY talked through plans for the 14 October joint boards' strategy day, highlighting: discussions based on fully formed options from the Executive team (as requested); the two Boards being involved in each other's strategic discussions and two external speakers (Expedia & Government Comms.). Given the funding position, a fundamental question would be the prioritisation of activities based on deliverables. A comprehensive pre-read pack would be issued. She asked new members to flag if they felt that they needed any further context information, once they had seen the pre-read pack.

4.0 Dashboard and Update on LVEPS

26. AS advised of a refreshed emphasis on measured outputs and improved scores. VE's new evaluation role would commence later this month.

27. In response to FP's point about engagement scores, AS advised that meetings with Mayors were currently going into the diary and a MP event for LVEPs was usually held later in the year. VB suggested that given the pre-election period this might be scheduled for January/February 2026.

28. **ACTION: JH to share the BTA Dashboard with the VEAB with the draft minutes. [Done]**

4.2 Update on LVEPS

29. AM was pleased to report that following work with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, the region was developing its application for LVEP status. It was considered a strong destination, especially in respect of business events. Combined Authority funding for the visitor economy was noted. In response to a question about approach, AM advised of generic mapping against Mayoral priorities and proactive outreach and engagement.

30. Following the announcement of the Universal Studios theme park, Bedfordshire was being shaped as a visitor economy area. VE was involved in discussions with DCMS, including Universal's potential support for the LVEP (as per other major developments). Progress was expected in Autumn/Winter.
31. Lincolnshire was the first lead LVEP to cease trading in May 2025, due to funding uncertainty. Lincolnshire County Council and Combined Authority were keen for the status to be reinstated and VE was working with the council on the process to reapply.
32. Go To Places, the commercial entity behind the Visit Kent and Visit Hertfordshire LVEPs, had gone into administration the previous week. Discussions had begun with Kent County Council on who might replace Visit Kent.

A full discussion on the future of the LVEP programme took place. Key points raised included:

- Commercial funding, in many cases, was not materialising as had been originally hoped and this, coupled with such things as the increase in NI employment costs was considered to be putting a number of LVEPs at risk. FP recommended that Government be appraised of the position and the various options explored to sustain the framework.
 - AS noted that those considered most at risk were those in areas where there was no devolved Mayor.
 - There were concerns voiced around the viability of any new, local authority-led replacement LVEPs.
 - NW spoke about the LVEP accreditation process. He queried whether given recent developments there should be a greater focus on the financial health of LVEPs. AM advised of regular engagement with and support for LVEPs, including review of management accounts. She recommended that any new approach be supportive to sustain the programme.
 - Referencing the strategic objectives of the LVEP programme, SG suggested re-evaluating the DMO framework in light of changed commercial, financial and political landscapes since the LVEP programme had started. VB suggested that this might be a topic for the forthcoming joint boards' strategy day.
 - Given the funding position, AL suggested consideration be given to scaling back, agreeing which areas to prioritise and/or consolidating and constructing LVEP partnerships.
 - VB flagged the value of the tourism sector in delivering regional growth and highlighted, in the devolved landscape, that support was needed to fund and maintain any delivery structure.
33. The VE team would update LB with regarding the current state of the LVEP programme. LB cautioned there was unlikely to be any additional DCMS funding available.
 34. **ACTION: The VE team to provide LB with a paper regarding the state of LVEP programme for DCMS. [Done].**

5.0 Regional Reports

35. NW re-emphasised comments made in June that the good weather was masking weakness in the market, citing data from both indoor and outdoor attractions in Cumbria. Business was challenging with increased costs, squeezed margins and a decline in investment. He highlighted concerns for the future and the need for policy to align with the aspiration for growth.
36. NT reported on developments in the technology space, including the move to AI to search for travel options and the decline in reliance on search engines in consequence.
37. FP spoke about her recent hosting of Swiss Tourism's visit to Bath. She highlighted that one Swiss canton had a greater marketing spend than the whole of England. The visitors had been impressed by VB/VE's Starring Great Britain film but surprised to find that funding for its distribution had been cut. She thanked the team for preparing her presentation for the event.
38. SG reported that after a good 2024, the North East had slipped back to 2023 levels. She felt this was due to a combination of: the impact of the cost of living; changes in underlying trends, including a move to shorter stays, fewer/larger events and a decline in corporate travel. SG highlighted business uncertainty post-Christmas. In response to comments, she was not convinced that all mayoral authorities provided an easy source of visitor economy funding and highlighted the significance of the Great North Mayors and being part of their conversations.
39. In response to SG's concerns about the validity of IPS figures, PY concurred that VB/VE were also finding inbound visitor numbers unreliable, noting that these were now published with a no assurance line.
40. HBW reported that Leeds Castle had enjoyed a good summer season based on a value for money proposition, strong take up of its year-round ticket and improved accommodation and wedding bookings. Feedback from a recent ALVA CEO's event painted a less optimistic picture of declines in group and international visitor numbers, inhibited investment, slow ticket sales, cancelled events and increased staff costs. She noted a move to driving automation to reduce overheads.
41. Reflecting on the challenging operating landscape, AL reported that advance bookings for 2026 were looking better than at the same point in previous years. He was surprised that the Rugby World Cup had not had as great an impact as expected for the South West. AL noted the cut-through that UK Hospitality messaging was making.

6.0 Deep Dive: VE Marketing Strategy & Seaside Towns Campaign

42. RJ took the paper as read and explained that it was provided as an update and for feedback in advance of the joint boards' strategy day to test thinking about approaches to deliver the biggest impact. Deputy Director of Global Marketing, Emma Wilkinson, would present the Marketing Strategy at the strategy day.
43. He highlighted, in particular, the Seaside Towns campaign: a test and learn project addressing market failure, with a scalable pilot to explore where an incremental difference can be made (Q4). RJ advised that VE was currently in market for a partner, with real understanding of the product, to support this work. In response to AL's point, Levelling Up investment around England's coasts could be used for leverage. The challenge of seasonality was noted.

RJ and SM were thanked for their contributions.

7.0 Corporate Updates

44. FP reported on the 2 September RPC meeting. The main agenda item was the endorsement of an inflationary-based Pay Remit, which would be recommended to the next BTA Board. The People Strategy had also been given final approval, its bottom-up approach noted. The policy update included approval of a Neonatal Policy. During consideration of VB/VE's Places for Growth return it was confirmed that 50% of the organisation's workforce was now based outside of London, with 19% commutable to Birmingham. FP advised that as part of the AI pilot, CoPilot had been tested at the meeting with a view to create efficiencies around drafting minutes. It had been Nick de Bois' last RPC meeting, and he had been thanked for his support and input to the Committee's work over the past three years. The VEAB also paid tribute to NdB.
45. NW reported on the 10 June ARC meeting. The final outturn for 2024-25 showed a larger underspend than forecast and a plan to strengthen future forecasting had been shaped. The Committee noted the annual internal audit opinion for 2025 from GIAA, which had an overall rating of moderate. The Committee approved the content of the 2024-25 Annual Report. This had subsequently been approved by the BTA Board on 17 June, before being laid in Parliament. The Risk Register had been updated to reflect the completion of the DDP pilot and a new risk inserted around the uncertainty for VE and DDPs. NW in his role as Interim ARC Chair had offered to stand as permanent Committee Chair. This would be considered by the BTA Board on 23 September. NW was thanked for his interim involvement.

8.0 Papers for Noting

46. VEAB Engagement Calendar: VB encouraged all members to attend and feed back on local events. She highlighted the new Chair of English Tourism Week's aspiration to drive the initiative to wider audiences and urged all members to get involved with campaign events in their regions in March 2026. She advised new members that there might be occasion when they could be asked to attend and speak at events on behalf of VE (support would be provided).
47. The next key events would be the joint boards' strategy day on 14 October and BTA Annual Review on 21 October. AM confirmed that following the latter there would be a 2-hour meeting of LVEP Chairs which VEAB members were welcome to attend.

9.0 Any Other Business

48. There was no further business.
49. The Chair thanked all attendees for their input across a full agenda and closed the meeting at 13.10. The VEAB and team welcomed members of the Visit West Board for a working lunch. Discussion topic: Current activities, opportunities and challenges.

The date of the next meeting – Tuesday 18 November 2025, Coade/Betjeman Rooms, Cannon Bridge House, London

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