

MINUTES OF THE 475th MEETING OF THE BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD

held on Tuesday 23rd September 2025 at 11.00-14.30

Boardroom, BTA offices

Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B2 4AJ

Present:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Nick de Bois CBE (Chair) | BTA Board Chair |
| Peter Gowers (PG) | Board Member (online) |
| Karin Sheppard (KS) | Board Member |
| Beth Knight (BK) | Board Member (online) |
| Neil Rami (NR) | Board Member |
| Mary Walsh (MW) | Board Member |
| Lady Victoria Borwick (VB) | Board Member/VEAB Chair |
| 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 (online) |
| Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW) | Interim ARC Chair/VEAB member |
| Kendra Blumsky (KB) | Boardroom Apprentice (Observer) (online) |
| Laura Backhouse (LB) | DCMS (Observer) – until 13.20 |

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 |
| Julia Howells (JH) | Company Secretariat Executive (minutes) |

Apologies:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Karly Greene (KG) | Tourism Northern Ireland (Observer) |
| Duncan Parish (DP) | DCMS (Observer) |
| Henry Bankes (HB) | General Counsel & Company Secretary |

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. The Chair welcomed the BTA Board back to VB's Birmingham global hub office. He reported enthusiastically on his visit, the day before with PY and AS, to the Black Country Living Museum. The site had been a filming location for *Peaky Blinders* and the museum was benefitting from screen tourism. He thanked the museum and Becky Frall of WMGC for hosting their visit.
2. The Chair noted that this would be his last full Board meeting before stepping down. He would save formal comments until the joint Boards' strategy day and Annual Review in October.
3. Online joiners PG, BK, FP and KB were welcomed. New Board members MW and NR received a warm welcome and introduced themselves.

1.1 Apologies for absence

4. Apologies had been received from KG, DP and HB.

1.2 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

5. Were as per the register updated on 11 September 2025 which included MW and NR's commitments.

1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 17 June 2025

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

1.4 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

7. In addition to items concluded and those on the agenda, the Chair encouraged all members to attend BTA's Annual Review at BAFTA, London, on 21 October. DL offered to explore and report back on whether Anti-Bullying & Harassment training could be conducted online.
8. **ACTION: DL to update BTA members regarding online Anti-Bullying & Harassment training.**

1.3 Chair's update

9. **DECISION: The Board unanimously approved a minor adjustment to the ARC TOR (paper 7.4) to allow any member of the ARC to act as Committee Chair.**
10. **DECISION: The Board unanimously approved NW as Chair of ARC.**
11. NW was thanked for undertaking the role on an interim basis and for offering to stand for recommendation as the permanent ARC Chair.
12. NdB advised that the process to appoint his successor as BTA Chair was progressing well.
13. Referencing paper 7.5, the Chair was pleased to report on the early strong performance of the Starring Great Britain (SGB) campaign. He noted its ambition, exceptional paid/social media reach and the complex negotiations required to use film footage. The consequences of the significant cut in GREAT funding, included: VB pulling out of three markets; expected reduction in return on investment from 15:1 to 13:1; plus the halving of incremental spend, spend outside London and private investment projections. It had been positioned by Government as a one year cut and updates were awaited. Despite this SGB was generating more impact than previous campaigns. He congratulated the team for delivering well with less resource and encouraged the continued demonstration of effective use of GREAT funding. On behalf of the nations and regions, MB underlined disappointment as to how the funding cut affected impact outside of London.

2.0 CEO's Update

2.1 CEO's report

14. The CEO reported that Stephanie Peacock MP had been appointed as the new Tourism Minister on 9 September. Her portfolio also included Sport, Civil Society, Youth and Ceremonials. The Minister hosted a VEAC meeting on 17 September and would brief stakeholders (including PY) this afternoon. The current expectation was continuation of her predecessor's agenda to deliver on the target of 50 million visits by 2030, the VEAC's delivery of a Visitor Economy Growth Strategy and to support World Travel Market. Information on the appointment of a new GREAT Minister was awaited.
15. As part of the ongoing ALB review, in addition to papers and data already provided, a comprehensive report on organisational resource and structure had been requested and submitted. It was understood that the review was now in the hands of the Cabinet Office and next stages were awaited.
16. The business planning cycle was underway. Submissions had been made on 8 September and scenario modelling continued, with the funding outcome expected in November (post the joint Boards' strategy day). It was noted that following DCMS agreement to funding for BTA's transformation project, baseline capital costs had risen. SJ was currently in discussions with DCMS on additional capital funding. BTA had received an amount of funding from the Soft Power Fund to

be spent this year on the SGB campaign. This would enable us to go back into an additional market.

17. The CEO reported that fraud had been discovered in the Brazil office. Following due process, the ARC Chair, NAO, internal auditors and DCMS have been informed. The investigation was nearing completion; Legal power of attorneys were being updated and internal controls strengthened.
18. Regarding the Retail Review (paper 7.2), DCMS had approved the recommended next steps in relation to the VB Shop strategy and Nadine Thomson, VEAB member, had agreed to act as advisor.
19. The CEO reported on recent visits, including to the Toronto Film Festival where there had been a strong British presence and VB had taken part in panels on film locations and screen tourism. And a trade mission in Mexico where VB had taken more than 50 UK suppliers to meet buyers from Canada, US and Brazil. Despite political and economic uncertainties, buyers' responses around visiting Britain were positive. Encouraging feedback was also received on the SGB campaign as an effective way to talk about Britain.
20. The CEO reported on a negative interview about VB given by the North East Mayor, who chairs the Great North group, recently and the organisation's response. NR spoke about the complex and dynamic transition to regional devolution and advised that a broad and balanced view be taken to understand the varied positions. Core issues were funding uncertainty and the lack of a cohesive strategy for the sector. He flagged that Britain was slipping behind its competitors and the need for the VEAC to complete its work in making the investment case for Tourism. NR advised that a Government Regional Investment Summit would take place in the West Midlands on 21 October (the same day as the Annual Review). With key decision makers in attendance he felt that this, and similar events, could provide opportunity to lift the sector's presence. NR would explore what would be possible for the 21 October event.
21. Referencing recent visits and meetings, VB highlighted external expectations around what VE was able to offer to the regions/combined authorities in terms of funding/support. MB reflected how the Strategic Partner Framework had enhanced the Senedd's relationship with BTA and queried if this was a model that could be followed for devolved areas. KS highlighted the added issue of navigating the devolved landscape and engaging with Mayors in the midst of controversial issues of levies etc. Noting the significance of discussion points, the Chair reminded that operating in a devolved landscape would be a topic for the joint Boards' strategy day.

2.2 CEO's Engagements

22. Noted.

2.3 Dashboard

23. The CEO drew attention to KPI highlights: SGB and the consumer website were performing well; 75% of LVEPs now had international ready plans in place; stakeholder engagement was tracking well; and 19% of VB/VE staff had postcodes within a commutable distance to Birmingham (target - 18%). Business events saw a mixed picture: RFPs outside London tracking well to meet target but on the Business Events Growth Programme the value of the events was tracking behind the YTD target (difficult to directly influence as this is dependent on what events destinations are bidding for). As it stands, this is currently offset by the other strand of the Programme - International Delegate Growth. The Shop continued to perform below forecast.
24. In response to a query by MB, the CEO advised that work was currently being undertaken in respect of evaluating impact of campaigns at national/regional level. NR and MW commended the dashboard presented.
25. **DECISION: The Board agreed that the September 2025 BTA Dashboard could be shared with the VEAB for information.**

2.4 Short Term Lets Registration Scheme (STLRS)

26. The CEO advised that VE had been asked by DCMS to indicate if it was interested in taking on the role of scheme owner for the STLRS 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, providing transparency as to who was operating and where. It was understood that acting as scheme owner would provide access to data in an area that historically has lacked accurate metrics. A cross-departmental project group was currently scoping the opportunity, with specific attention to risks, their mitigation and the impact on other key priorities.
27. AS advised that VE had been a supporter of such a scheme for some years and that it was well placed to become scheme owner subject to resource. A consultation process had been undertaken and it was understood that the industry broadly supported the development of a registration scheme. The VEAB had considered the option at its 9 September meeting and had supported VE taking on the role providing full scoping was completed and taking account of the BTA Board's views.
28. A full discussion took place. Key points raised included:
 - KS felt this was something VE would be well positioned to undertake but felt there needed to be assurance that the work would not distract from other priorities and that all costs were recoverable.
 - MW advised of careful consideration of any potential reputational risks and the need for clear communications even though the scheme would not be VE branded.
 - Re. costs - the scheme would initially be run on a cost recovery basis. LB advised that Treasury still had to respond on the funding of enforcement, which had been identified as an additional cost.
 - It was currently understood that VE as scheme owner would be able to access and manipulate the data and share it with tax authorities, partners at Government/local authority level (based on systems security criteria and GDPR) but not further.
 - LB advised that data sharing was proving a highly complex area which was still being finalised. She indicated that there might be some flexibility around sharing data at macro levels.
29. **DECISION: The Board supported VE's approach to become scheme owner of the STLRS as set out, but agreed that if there was any risk that cost recovery was going to be compromised the matter should, in the first instance, be returned to the VEAB.**
30. **ACTION: AS to coordinate any further discussions on the STLRS and report back to the Board.**

3.0 Board Member Updates

3.1 VEAC Update

31. KS provided context to the Visitor Economy Advisory Council's work. A recent development was the completion of Deloitte's report/investment thesis to assess the wider impact of the Tourism industry. The report also noted that Britain was losing competitive share and illustrated what increased investment or an incremental swing from international to domestic might look like.
32. On the development of the Growth Strategy itself, DCMS was finalising the overall vision, objectives and outcomes. The Regional Growth, Skills & Careers and International working groups had delivered a prioritised set of proposals. The Council's second review of the work had been postponed due to the appointment of the new Minister.

33. On 17 September Minister Peacock had indicated her support for the VEAC's approach and the development of a Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. Given the changing landscape/priorities and tight timeline, the BTA Board queried whether the November launch date would be reassessed. KS suggested that the Regional Growth workstream findings might be used to sharpen VE's priorities.

3.2 Soft Power Council Update

34. PG provided context to the Soft Power Council. To date the Soft Power strategy had been collected but not published. He outlined the main campaigns aligned across the different focus areas. PG reported that, following the first draft review, he had been instrumental in ensuring Tourism had been included in the UK Together campaign and recommended alignment between the Soft Power Council and DCMS.
35. UK Together included a calendar of prioritised, strategic events, with proposed additions of a British Biennale and Royal Garden Party for soft power influencers. It was suggested that VB might be offered as a partner to own the calendar of events, highlighting the strategic link to GREAT. He also noted the creation of a small Soft Power Fund to support related initiatives.
36. PG felt that future success would depend on ministerial support. He highlighted challenges around defining criteria, due to the breadth of the topic and as audiences and their objectives/levels of focus had yet to be refined, however he felt it was an important forum for VB to be involved in. In response to MB's query, he explained that although the Soft Power Council was designed as a full UK outbound voice there was focus and representation on and from the nations and regions and dispersal was one of the key arguments for the inclusion of Tourism in the campaign. The next meeting would take place on 9 October and would centre on the creative industries and technology.

4.0 Finance Update

4.1 2025/26 Financial Position Update

37. SJ reported that the 3 Grosvenor Gardens dilapidations settlement remained an open item albeit there were discussions with representatives of the Landlord taking place. If the matter was settled, the sum was included as an overspend and a case would be made to DCMS for funding support. If DCMS were not able to provide support, it was expected costs could be covered by identified savings.
38. SJ confirmed that the organisation was currently in a relatively good position, with vacancy savings available to cover the pay award.
39. SJ advised that work to integrate finance and planning systems had concluded, ready for a review in October with Directors to re-examine budgets to minimise any underspend. She would also be submitting supplementary estimate returns to DCMS in October, which provided the opportunity to seek support in specific areas. A full balance sheet review is being undertaken.
40. Following work with DL, SJ confirmed that a plan was in place to utilise the ringfenced capital funds for cyber security.
41. SJ welcomed any feedback from Board members on the finance report format and content and offered new members any further information they required around finance matters.
42. Retail income had been reforecast down to a break-even position, due in part to changes in platform suppliers. BK queried whether this new position would have any impact on the strategy for Retail. As mentioned by the CEO earlier, it was confirmed that the Executive team had the mandate from DCMS to proceed in line with the recommendations approved at the June 2025 Board meeting.

SJ would keep the P&L position under careful scrutiny and a further update would be provided at the next Board on both items.

43. **ACTION: AS to ensure a paper updating the Board on both items is provided at the December 2025 meeting.**

5.0 Corporate updates

5.1 RPC Update, including Pay Remit recommendation for approval

44. FP reported on the 2 September RPC meeting. The People Strategy had been given final approval, its bottom-up approach noted. BK was thanked for her support of this piece of work. The policy update included approval of a Neonatal Policy. Places for Growth KPIs were noted (see item 23). As part of the AI pilot, CoPilot had been tested at the meeting with a view to creating efficiencies around drafting minutes.
45. The main agenda item had been consideration of the Pay Remit. Key principles comprised employees receive a % increase in pay based on local inflation in their country and targeting workforce anomalies and individuals paid below the band average for their role. After full deliberation the RPC had unanimously approved an approach for recommendation to the BTA Board. DL advised that since drafting the paper BTA had been notified of mandatory settlements for Spain and France. Following the issues with the 2024 pay award, she advised that a related assurance report would be made to ARC.
46. Noting DL's points that the Pay Remit varied each year and was always subject to affordability, the Chair queried how sustainable the current approach was from a longer-term perspective, specifically in respect of impact on activity.
47. **DECISION: The Board unanimously supported the RPC's recommendation for the Pay Remit as tabled.**

[LB left the meeting].

5.2 2025 Strategy Day Update

48. PY talked through refined plans for the 14 October joint Boards' Strategy day, highlighting: discussions based on fully formed options from the Executive (as requested); the two Boards being involved in each other's strategic discussions; focus on areas where there was still work to do and two external speakers (Government Comms & Expedia). A comprehensive pre-read pack would be issued.
49. The Chair was pleased to hear that Conrad Bird, Cabinet Office Director, Campaigns & Marketing, had been engaged as a speaker. PG suggested, given the current position and industry/funding challenges, that thought might be given to landing some key messages to external speakers, and to ways to increase VB's involvement/influence on critical decision-makers' agendas. The Chair agreed this could be initially addressed in his opening remarks. KS suggested taking a real-world approach to framing choices/areas of focus that have cut through. MB advised of thinking more about commercial partnerships to bring more resource to campaigns and around funding coming from the regions rather than centrally. The Chair recommended a flexible approach to support any forthcoming Government plan.

6.0 For discussion & decision

6.1 Board Effectiveness Review Action Plan

50. The majority of the Review had been approved at the June 2025 meeting and the Board noted the

status of the recommendations made. It was agreed that the Skills matrix be updated to include MW and NR's details.

51. **ACTION: HB to update the BTA Board skills matrix to include MW & NR's details.**

6.2 Nations Engagement with BTA

52. A key change for the future was to optimise the relationship between the Board and its nations' representatives for the mutual benefit of both parties, and a number of recommendations had been made around proactively focusing on areas of common interest. MB supported the approach. SL felt that there was a lot that could be learned from each other's boards in terms of what worked well and what each were proud of. He suggested engaging/lobbying governments around protecting and encouraging growth via Tourism as a potential discussion topic.
53. MW spoke about the importance of the Board/Executive relationship and the practical support and skills Board members could bring to help the Executive team drive the agenda.
54. **DECISION: The Board noted the content of the paper and agreed the approach outlined on slides 5 & 6.**

7.0 Papers for noting/information

All papers noted.

55. The Chair suggested the Board consider whether the Trends papers (7.1a & b) still provided the information required to support its deliberations.

8.0 Any Other Business

56. NW corrected the date of the next ARC meeting, as detailed in the Engagement Calendar, to 22 October 2025.

The meeting was closed at 1400.

END

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 2 December 2025
Venue: Coade/Betjeman Rooms, BTA Offices, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London, EC4R 2YA