

**MINUTES OF THE 476th MEETING OF THE
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD**
held on Tuesday 2 December 2025 at 10.00-13.00
Coade/Betjeman Rooms, Cannon Bridge House
25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

Present:

Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member (in the chair)
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member
Beth Knight (BK)	Board Member (from 11.00)
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)
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW)	Interim ARC Chair/VEAB member
Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS (Observer)
Kendra Blumsky (KB)	BTA Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)
Katie Panagou (KP)	BTA Boardroom Apprentice (Observer)

In Attendance:

Patricia Yates (PY/CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Debra Lang (DL)	Director for HR, Professional Services, Digital and Technology
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS)	Director of VisitEngland
Robin Johnson (RJ)	Director of Global Marketing
Louise Bryce (LB)	Partnerships Director
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

Apologies:

Harris Bokhari	BTA Chair & Board member
Karly Greene	Tourism Northern Ireland (Observer)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1. KS warmly welcomed everyone to the last meeting of 2025. Harris Bokhari had commenced his role as BTA Chair on 1 December but due to an existing commitment was unable to attend today's meeting and sent apologies. KS had been asked to act as chair in his absence. Introductory calls for Board members with him would be scheduled before the next Board meeting.
2. Directors RJ and LB would attend the full meeting and were welcomed. KB's last meeting as BTA Boardroom Apprentice would be marked at the end of the agenda.

1.2 Apologies for absence

3. Apologies for absence had been received from the new Chair and KG. DP and BK had both advised they would arrive slightly late.
4. Tourism Northern Ireland generally appointed their Observer on an annual basis and an update was awaited in respect of 2026.

1.3 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

5. Would be updated to include the new Chair's details and a change from BK (advised post-meeting).

1.4 Minutes of the Meeting of 23 September 2025

6. In response to a query from MB, KS advised of ministerial commitment to the Visitor Economy Strategy with the expectation it would be published in the new year. There was a VEAC meeting on 3 December which would focus on feedback on the Budget.
7. **DECISION: The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the last meeting.**

1.5 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

8. The action tracker was noted.

2.0 CEO's Update

2.1 CEO's report

9. PY reported that there had been no update from DCMS on the ALB review since the last meeting.
10. She advised that there had been no news on core funding for 2026-27 or when any decision would be made. If this were delayed beyond Christmas it would prove challenging in respect of business planning.
11. Following the significant cut to BTA's GREAT funding, the organisation had been offered the opportunity to deploy Growth Mission Communications Fund underspends before the end of this financial year. Although welcome, the short lead time made it much harder to drive the high returns that BTA could deliver with a planned campaign supported by commercial partnership. PY outlined expectations around GREAT's funding bid and VB's allocation.
12. On 4 December the Tourism Minister had been due to attend a meeting with the Great Northern Mayors to discuss how VB/VE could work with the Northern Group to drive visitor economy growth. DP explained this was part of an exercise to explore targeting potential growth areas and similar conversations were being held with other regions. There was an open question around how the Mayors might want to work with VB/VE.
13. The launch of the North West domestic coastal campaign had taken place in November. This included a year-long cultural events programme to be delivered in Southport under the custodianship of Liverpool City Region LVEP. PY reported that the campaign outline had received Cabinet Office approval (including choice of commercial partner) and noted the positive response to its announcement. The campaign had been launched by the Minister at the Tourism Alliance conference and would continue to be built up.
14. The CEO reported on the recent China trade mission, underlining VB's strong international network and compelling propositions to travel to Britain. She had enjoyed a series of meetings with the Counsel General, Ambassador and Deputy Ambassador who all saw tourism as part of their brief. PY highlighted the positive feedback received from buyers, the interest in regional British experiences, and noted that the premium Chinese market did not appear to be affected by any economic slowdown. As an SME owner, NW spoke enthusiastically about the China mission, underlining the unrivalled access VB/VE provided to international markets and the related return this brought.

15. NR congratulated the team on work in China. On core funding he queried whether the position was related to the ALB review. DP said it was not. NR felt that the current uncertainty was not acceptable and recommended that the new Chair be asked to advocate to DCMS for timely funding information to allow the organisation to plan and deliver effectively. He felt the Board should be kept updated on the position and should be prepared to, or ask industry contacts to, make the case for support.
16. PY advised that managing year end finances was a careful balancing act. Some workstreams, specifically marketing campaigns, were pre-planned with an element of flexibility to respond to new funding. PG queried whether in the current context there might be alternative ways to use underspends to drive greater ROI (short lead time noted).
17. In respect of engagement with the Mayors, NR counselled on a planned and equitable approach across the country and ensuring decisions were based on strong, data-drive business cases.
18. The Budget had given England's Mayors the power to raise a Tourism Levy on visitors staying overnight in accommodation. Consultation would conclude in February 2026 with the expectation any scheme would be implemented in 2028. KS highlighted concerns from the industry and UK Hospitality on the Levy and wider Budget further exacerbating the tough economic conditions.
19. Short Term Lets Registration Scheme (STLRS): Further to discussions at the BTA and VEAB September meetings a recommendation in respect of the STLRS was tabled. A comprehensive discussion took place covering, inter alia: lack of fit with organisational purpose, objectives and skills; distraction; lack of clarity of scope; resource; risks (including financial, timescale and reputational); and alternative delivery mechanism options. DP reminded members that, notwithstanding those concerns, DCMS remained committed to the introduction of a national registration scheme.
20. **DECISION: The Board approved the recommendation that the Accounting Office and Board decline further involvement by the BTA at this time in the Scheme unless DCMS confirmed agreement to:**
 1. **Fund a dedicated project team in BTA to work with DCMS to finalise the role of the BTA in the Scheme.**
 2. **Underwrite the BTA's costs in becoming Scheme Owner and the accounting treatment of those.**

2.2 CEO's Engagements

21. Noted.

2.3 Dashboard

22. KS commended the team on the Starring Great Britain campaign's 20:1 return on investment (ROI) and the strong value generated outside London. In response to MB's point, the CEO explained that YTD business events results were mixed but not currently a cause for concern. It was noted that the People Strategy would launch today.

3.0 Finance Update

3.1 2025/26 Financial position update

23. SJ reported that a detailed half year review had been undertaken resulting in a reduction to the forecast overspend. At present, she was concerned that there was a likelihood of overspend, in part due to the settlement of the dilapidations claim for 3 Grosvenor Gardens taking place in this year and not last year and the support from DCMS for this not having carried over.

24. The VAT position was under review and professional advice was being taken to maximise recovery in this area.
25. The risk of Retail falling into a loss for the year was underlined.
26. Staffing costs were on track and as part of the supplementary process some DDAT capital funds had been handed back as costs had been lower than projected.
27. In response to a query from NR, SJ explained that there was a constant dialogue with DCMS on finances and throughout this year BTA had been advocating for additional funding to support the pressures. Overspend was not ideal; and ways to reduce costs in areas that would not impact negatively on activity were being explored.
28. DP commented that part of this year's challenge related to the previous year's underspend. He agreed the logic that DCMS should cover the dilapidation costs and encouraged further dialogue with DCMS Finance on that.
29. **ACTION: SJ to adapt the Finance report format to quantify each risk and opportunity.**

3.2 Modern Slavery Statement

30. SJ advised that it was a legal requirement to annually publish this statement approved by the Board. SJ responded to offline comments from BK on the document.
31. **DECISION: The Board unanimously approved the updated Modern Slavery Statement as tabled.**

4.0 Partner Income

32. LB spoke about how VB grew the value of in-kind support from a broad range of partners to drive ROI and national/regional growth. She outlined the forward partnership principle of *fewer, bigger and better* and talked through the partnership framework. Subsequent discussion included the following key points:
 - Current focus was on building up the second stage of the Starring Great Britain campaign, using learnings from the first stage.
 - MB commended the Gateway programme as an effective way to work across the nations and regions.
 - Impact to ROI, when focusing on regional growth, was highlighted. Related success measures might include: direct economic impact; product programming; product entering the market.
 - Mosaic research would guide effective matching of propositions and target partners, identifying product and audiences to drive regional growth.
 - Although most partnership income came from big, national players, there was a strategic/regional move to engage and build relationships with public sector and local businesses (working through LVEPs).
 - Mechanisms for dispersal would be key and preparatory work was underway in respect of the future railway infrastructure.

The Board supported the Partnership approach outlined and thanked LB for her presentation.

5.0 ARC update

5.1 ARC report

33. Referencing the meeting minutes dated 22 October, NW advised that a case of fraud had been

identified in Brazil. In response a lessons learned exercise had been carried out and a review of all overseas offices was underway to check the necessary processes and procedures were all in place. ARC would be updated on this review at its January meeting.

34. On internal audit, an indicative opinion of *moderate assurance* had been received, the Missions programme had an overall assurance of *moderate* and the Communications audit results were TBC. DL had provided an Information Security update, confirming that the BTA's Security Operations Centre (SOC) would be fully implemented by the end of December. The Committee had also noted additional steps put in place to manage this year's pay remit.
35. The STLRS was not included on the Corporate Risk Register due to timings.
36. The new Chair was to be consulted regarding Committee membership. To mitigate any quoracy issues, ARC ideally required an additional BTA member. SJ suggested that the Committee's TOR might be updated to state minimum membership. PG and KS concurred that Committee involvement was a great opportunity to be exposed to relevant content and to learn from experts. BK volunteered to be considered for ARC membership, subject, if accepted, to standing down from the RPC.
37. 5.2 Delegation of Authority policy: SJ advised that ARC had endorsed changes to the policy in October and these had been implemented as they were mandated by DCMS. The substantive change was that BTA no longer had any delegated authority regarding losses. Discussions were taking place with DCMS on how currency exchange losses would be handled.
38. In response to KS's query about Overseas Finance Managers' authority, SJ advised that there were various controls in place to mitigate risk. This would remain under review, along with Country Managers' delegated authority (following the issue identified in Brazil). NW highlighted how helpful PG's international experience had been in navigating this matter.
39. **DECISION: The Board ratified changes to the Delegation of Authority policy as tabled.**

6.0 For discussion & decision

6.1 Quarterly Retail update

40. **DECISION: The Board noted the progress made and confirmed its support for the approach outlined in the Retail update paper.**

7.0 Papers for noting/information

41. Support was reiterated for future meeting discussions with the nations, and possibly some regions, focused around topics of mutual interest, as recommended by the 2025 Board Effectiveness Review.
42. **ACTION: HB to discuss focused Board meeting discussions with the new Chair and Andrew Jackson, as part of their planned Board Effectiveness Review conversation.**
43. Competitor trends paper: Drops in the UK's brand index, specifically around 'welcome', were noted as a concern.
44. Referring back to Conrad Bird's session at the Joint Boards' Strategy Day, VB suggested a future deep dive into reframing tourism and VB/VE communications to align with Government policy.

8.0 Any Other Business

45. KB reflected on her year as BTA Boardroom Apprentice and thanked all who had supported her for their willingness and openness. She had found it an invaluable experience, providing great insight, which was already shaping the way she thought and worked. KB felt an extended term programme would be more beneficial and offered to support any future cohorts.
46. HB advised that the programme would not run in 2026. The Board supported his suggestion, subject to the views of the new Chair and capacity, to explore the creation of an in-house Boardroom Apprentice scheme. BK suggested a possible link with Treasury's Public Appointments Diversity Scheme.
47. **ACTION: HB to consult with the new Chair on scoping out an in-house Board apprentice programme. If supported, DL to discuss with the Directors.**
48. KS thanked all involved for their contributions, the management team for their hard work over the year, and wished everyone a relaxing festive break.
49. KS was thanked for chairing the meeting.

The meeting was closed at 12.30.

END

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 3 February 2026
Venue: Malmaison, 7 William Jesspo Way, Liverpool L3 1QZ