

**MINUTES OF THE 477<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE  
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD  
held on Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 09.30-12.00  
Malmaison, 7 William Jessop Way, Liverpool L3 1QZ**

**Present:**

Harris Bokhari OBE (Chair)	Board Member & Chair
Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member (online)
Beth Knight (BK)	Board Member
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)	ARC Chair/VEAB member
Fiona Pollard CBE (FP)	RPC Chair/VEAB member (online)
Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS

**In Attendance:**

Patricia Yates (PY/CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS)	Director of VisitEngland
Robin Johnson (RJ)	Director of Global Marketing
Fiona Macdonald (FM)	Head of Strategy & Business Planning (online for items 4-7)
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

**Apologies:**

Debra Lang	Director of HR, Professional Services, Digital & Technology
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**0.0 Welcome and Icebreaker**

1. The Chair welcomed all attendees to his first meeting as BTA Chair, including PG & FP who both were joining online. He thanked all members present in person for attending a meeting with Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, the day before, which all agreed had been a productive and positive meeting. He handed to the CEO who led a short icebreaker activity.

**1.0 Chair's Introduction and Preliminaries**

**1.2 Apologies for absence**

2. There were apologies for absence from Debra Lang, Director of HR, Professional Services, Digital & Technology.

**1.3 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts**

3. Were as per the register dated 26 January 2026.

**1.4 Minutes of the Meeting of 2 December 2025**

4. The minutes dated 2 December 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. The Chair thanked KS for chairing this meeting in his absence.

## 1.1 Chair's Introduction

5. The Chair thanked all members for their service and generosity of time in the context of busy professional and personal lives. He paid tribute to the CEO, highlighting explicitly her exceptional promotion of the BTA and Britain on the PM's recent trade mission to China. The Chair expressed his gratitude to his predecessor Nick de Bois, the team for their patience as he settled into his role and to Tracey Edginton and Thomas Clues who were delivering his Liverpool social media programme.
6. FP would stand down as a VEAB member on 5 March and RPC Chair with effect from today and was thanked wholeheartedly for her contribution to the work of the organisation over 8 years. FP reflected positively on her involvement.
7. As set out in the Chair's notes (paper 1.1) and following consultation discussions:
8. **DECISION: The Board approved the updated RPC TOR (paper 9.6).**
9. **DECISION: The Board approved ARC membership as: Nigel Wilkinson - VEAB (Chair), Peter Gowers (Vice Chair), Mary Walsh, Victoria Borwick VEAB, Tim Hurdle (independent member).**
10. **DECISION: The Board approved RPC membership as: Beth Knight (Chair), Mary Walsh (Vice Chair), Karin Sheppard, Neil Rami, Helen Bonser-Wilton VEAB, Victoria Borwick (Observer).**
11. **DECISION: Following the approval of the new RPC Chair, the Board approved membership of the Pensions Advisory Committee as NW and BK.**
12. **DECISION: The Board approved the setting up of the following new Committees:**
  - Nations & Regions - which will meet on an annual basis
  - Commercial - which will meet on a biannual basis
  - A Youth Panel - which will meet 1-2 times a year
13. **ACTION: The Chair invited members to express their interest in joining any of these new Committees and said membership would be confirmed in due course.**
14. **DECISION: The Board approved the principle of co-opting individuals with specific experience/skills to the Board to address and consolidate skills gaps identified.**
15. **DECISION: Subject to para 17 below, the Board approved approaches to three named individuals to be co-opted to the Board for an initial term of 1 year.**
16. The Chair's expectation was that the co-opted members would be non-voting advisors and would have a one-year term. NW queried if there would be due diligence undertaken in advance of co-opting individuals.
17. **ACTION: Prior to any approaches being made, DP to confirm that DCMS agree the principal and manner of co-opting and that the proposed co-optees are approved by DCMS.**
18. **ACTION: Board members to volunteer to coach members of the executive team. The Chair confirmed that PG and KS had kindly agreed to mentor the CEO and PG also RJ.**
19. Underlining BTA's wish for greater regional presence and activity, future Board meetings would be scheduled around the country. These might comprise: engagement with the Mayor/regional representative, a stakeholder event and a Board dinner. Initial plans are for the 14 April meeting to take place in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and 16 June meeting in Birmingham.

## 1.5 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

20. **ACTION: A review of the Action Log to be undertaken at the April Board meeting.**

## **2.0 Nations' Insight**

### **2.1 Update on VisitScotland activities/successes/best practice**

21. The Chair introduced this as a new agenda item designed to ensure the nations had an opportunity to share insights and learning with the Board.
22. SL drew out some of the key highlights of his VisitScotland (VS) report. Discussion included the following points:
  - VS as a leader of the public sector reform process to drive efficiency.
  - VS looking to work alongside Scottish Government (SG) on their broader role as a demand generator across the wider economy. VS working with SG to ensure that VS leverage events to support wider policy objectives, with VS taking the lead role.
  - Visitor Levy: a complex situation.
  - Scotland/Lake District interdependencies: NW suggested a cross-border approach on the 2027 Tour de France.
  - PY & RJ spoke about strong executive partnership working across the nations' tourism agencies and confirmed a meeting on future sports events was scheduled.
  - SL confirmed broad support from Scottish communities for tourism as an economic driver - albeit there was some reticence around honey-pot destinations.
  - Challenges with cut through to Government due to the prioritisation of the Industrial Strategy, so VS focusing on increased exposure to senior decision makers, as advocated by the BTA Chair.
23. The Chair thanked SL and asked MB to update on VisitWales at the April meeting.
24. **ACTION: MB to provide an update on VisitWales at the April meeting.**

## **3.0 CEO's Update**

### **3.1 CEO's report**

25. PY reported that the 2026/27 core budget had been confirmed as flat, with an uplift in capital funding. The additional ring-fenced budget was being reallocated to support the Visitor Economy Strategy and work continued on how this would be managed.
26. GREAT funding was still to be confirmed by both the Minister and Mission Comms Board. This was proving extremely challenging in respect of planning and also securing related private sector funding.
27. Flat core funding meant that BTA would need to plan on reductions in staff of around 10%, and PY confirmed that the matter had been discussed at the RPC in January and planning was underway with announcements scheduled for early March.
28. STLR: Following the Board's recommendation for an agreement with DCMS, an agreement around the funding of roles had been received and recruitment of a team of up to 30 had started. Per DCMS, the expectation was that the scheme would launch in September with voluntary registration and mandatory registration coming into force from April 2027.
29. **DECISION: It was agreed that NW act as Board sponsor for the STLR project.**
30. Retail: It was updated that one bid to license the VB shop had been received on 30 January. Given the bid had only just been received, the team were still reviewing its terms, however, PY could confirm that it was for the digital only part of the shop, with that part related to the sale of physical goods excluded.

31. The CEO updated on the pilot domestic marketing campaign, promoting the coastal destinations of the North West. A build on Liverpool's ask to support Southport, the campaign would be sponsored by Tripadvisor and faced by Greg Rutherford. International marketing and the Starring Great Britain campaign were being boosted by the recent release of *Wuthering Heights*, featuring the Yorkshire countryside.
32. PY reported on a positive visit by the Minister to Fitur, the Spanish travel show. Supported by the Ambassador the Minister had met with the Spanish team and discussed VB's work in markets.
33. Discussions at a recent Major Events roundtable had taken a broader view of how Britain won events and maximised these to deliver a tourism legacy. It was agreed by the industry leaders present that an Events strategy and pipeline should be developed, with business events aligned with the Industrial Strategy and driven by DBT.
34. The CEO reported on her recent involvement on the PM's trade mission to China. She thanked DCMS for inviting her to join. The exceptional opportunity for political engagement had allowed conversations with the PM, his business advisors and Secretary of State for DBT (who sits on the GREAT Programme Board), including around GREAT funding. The Chair and CEO had related follow-up meetings scheduled.
35. DP advised that there was no further update on the ALB review.
36. SL and MB were thanked for their offer to support BTA in discussions with the Cabinet Office on GREAT funding.
37. **ACTION: The CEO/Chair to follow up with SL and MB on their offer to support in the discussions on GREAT funding.**
38. The Chair thanked the CEO, acknowledged the range of pressures the team was currently under and advised that the Board stood available to support as required.

### **3.2 CEO's Engagements & 3.3 Dashboard**

39. Noted

### **4.0 Overview of BTA Impact**

[FM joined for items 4-7]

40. The CEO introduced this discussion explaining that impact was measured in additional value brought to Britain. Approved evaluation measured this at c. 20:1 for VB's Starring Great Britain campaign. There was a drive to develop more outcome data for VE. Another strategic gap was regional/national evaluation data, and modelling, initially in respect of the US, was being undertaken by the Data & Insight Analytics team. The Starring Great Britain campaign was an effective vehicle in demonstrating national/international impact across multiple stakeholder groups.
41. The Board responded positively to the Chair's questions - *Are we confident we are making an impact* and *Are we confident we are getting maximum return for every £1 of Government money spent*. Subsequent discussion points included:
  - VB felt that communication of the impact made could be better. She recommended capitalising on VisitBritain's international network.
  - From a nations/regions perspective, although it could not be directly quantified, MB felt there was confidence around BTA's impact.
  - SL sensed a gap between BTA's perception of what it was doing to grow the visitor economy

and that of the decision makers.

- DP felt that a strong return on investment was the expectation. He challenged around brand - had focus/metrics changed since the Labour government came to power? Where were the people/ places/additional value that would appeal to backbench MPs?
- MW recommended more effective, specific storytelling which resonated with individuals, regeneration, jobs etc., and effective communication.
- PG concurred, recommending an appraisal of strategic stakeholders and their needs/ motivations.
- FP suggested looking through a strategic v tactical lens at the best way to draw attention to the BTA.
- NR spoke about cementing the organisation's role as Britain's tourist board for the future: adopting a convener role; seizing on the principles of Visitor Economy Strategy and focus on place. Flagging the Government's co-investment model, he recommended a high-level, broad-brush approach to commercial investment e.g. global brands, financial services etc., and growing the stakeholder base, focusing on the private sector with a view to hosting an investment summit. NR reflected on how Creative UK had successfully repositioned itself using a similar model.
- NR also recommended taking an active role in the shaping of the Overnight Tourism Levy.
- KS underlined the need to clarify brand (BTA; VB; VE) to inform impact measurement criteria. She supported the notion of a convenor role and saw the Visitor Economy Strategy as a good anchor point for any repositioning,
- The CEO underlined enthusiasm for the approach set out by NR and the move to storytelling to support impact data.
- In concluding the Chair asked NW to lead an ARC review to provide assurance that the BTA was getting the maximum return for every £1 of Government money it spent and it was fulfilling the Secretary of State's priorities. The issue of cut through with Government would be addressed via DP and/or Board member support with perspective/contacts.

42. **ACTION: ARC to undertake regular value for money reviews.**

**5.0 Elevating BTA**

43. Elevation was driven via political influence, stakeholder positioning and media visibility. CEO spoke about political engagement welcoming the new Chair's aspiration to build meaningful relationships across departments. She felt industry advocacy required some finessing, but the BTA did well in attracting media coverage, both domestically and internationally, supporting campaigns and shaping policy.
44. The Board supported the current approach to elevating the BTA. Discussion points included:
- MB felt the BTA was now delivering well on Wales' behalf, especially in respect of international visitors, mainly as a result of strong working relationships, at officer-level, around shared priorities.
  - DP was content for the BTA to engage with different parts of Government, aligned and speaking with one voice, but cautioned around maintaining the role of trusted advisor.
  - He noted that Treasury were using different numbers when it referred to value of tourism and advised of the power of extended and tangible impacts.
  - NW spoke about the importance of the LVEP network in advocating for the BTA/VE in a devolved landscape.
  - With this in mind, NR advised not losing sight of the loss of the additional ring-fenced budget and recommended work on a narrative.
45. **ACTION: The Chair asked all Board members to consider ways to elevate/champion the BTA and its narrative within their own networks/stakeholder groups. Advising that the executive team could provide help and support as required.**

## **6.0 Finance**

### **6.1 2026/27 high-level budget**

46. SJ advised that the broad budget principles were to reduce operating costs and maintain delivery, which presented numerous challenges. In 2026/27 VB/VE staffing costs would be integrated to drive efficiencies; activity would be reported separately. At this stage there were a number of unknown risks including: retail and the impact on VAT recovery, inflation, staffing costs and pay inflation. NW acknowledged the pressures on the executive, and on behalf of the Board offered support where it was needed. KS reiterated RPC's recommendation to stand back and take a broad organisational view.

### **6.2 2025/26 financial position update**

47. SJ reported that the latest forecast was for a break-even position for 2025/26. She explained the careful balancing required to deliver to the Government's 1% tolerance target. NW felt that much had been learnt from the previous year but late settlement, VAT recovery, scoping of STLR and ARA timelines all added to the challenge of setting the new budget and concluding the current financial yearend.

## **7.0 Strategy Planning**

### **7.1 Corporate Priorities 2026/27 Sign-Off**

48. Introducing the paper FM highlighted the process undertaken to develop the strategy, dependency on the high-level budget, plus the need for refinement in respect of the Visitor Economy Strategy when published.

Subsequent discussion points included:

- Responding to KS's query, the CEO outlined that activity would be reduced to ensure VE was not delivering activity that was best done at a regional level such as 121 business engagement, VB business events, marketing was being refocused to target national/regional growth and rebalancing to fewer, bigger and better commercial partnerships.
- RJ addressed VB's point explaining that international demand would be driven by a multi-channel consumer campaign based on *Starring Great Britain*. B2B would take in trade missions, events and business engagement.
- Reflecting on the three key presentations, PG felt that as BTA's costs were staff activity, where was focus going to be altered? And what would success stories look like for our key stakeholders? He encouraged thinking about how this approach could drive a new narrative.
- PY said this was a helpful view. She advised of the shift to reflect Government principles; national/regional focus; bringing in more commercial skills and more funded partnerships.
- AS, advised of a unified viewpoint, e.g. VE's stronger alignment to support VB campaigns including enhanced product development, international readiness etc.

49. **DECISION: The Board approved the 2026/27 Corporate Priorities as tabled.**

## **8.0 Policy Update**

50. All new policies were tabled to the Board for approval and final ratification. HB confirmed that the new Volunteering Leave policy had been approved by the RPC at its 13 January meeting.
51. **DECISION: The Board ratified the Volunteering Leave Policy.**

## **9.0 Papers for Information**

All papers were noted.

52. In response to KS's question, AS advised that historically Q4 retail income was profitable. Despite this improved performance the overall yearend result would be a loss.

## **10.0 Any Other Business**

53. There was no further business

The meeting was closed at 12.00 and was followed by a working lunch with Liverpool City Region stakeholders.

END

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 14 April 2026  
Venue: The Natural History Museum, London