

## **MINUTES OF THE 463rd MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)**

**Tuesday 3 March 2026 at 1000-1300**

Coade/Betjeman Rooms, Cannon Bridge House  
25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

- Present:** Lady Victoria Borwick, (Chair/VB), VEAB Chair  
Helen Bonser-Wilton (HBW), Board Member  
Dr Sarah Green OBE (SG), Board Member  
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member  
Fiona Pollard CBE (FP), Board Member  
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member  
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW), Board Member  
Laura Backhouse (LB), DCMS Observer
- In Attendance:** Patricia Yates (CEO/PY), Chief Executive/BTA Accounting Officer  
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS), England and Commercial Director  
Serena Jacob (SJ), Finance Director  
Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director VE  
Vicky Howells (VH), Project Manager, Contract & Enterprise Industry  
Development (for item 6.1)  
Saul Batzofin (SB), Project Portfolio Director (for item 6.1)  
Emma Wilkinson (EW), Deputy Director of Global Marketing (for item 9)  
Samee Mohammad (SM), Head of England Marketing (for item 9)  
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary  
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)
- Apologies:** Debra Lang (DL), Director of HR & Professional Services

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

#### **1.1 Welcome**

1. The Chair opened the meeting and thanked those who had travelled some distance to attend. It was AL & FP's final Board meeting and this would be marked at the end of business.

#### **1.2 Apologies**

2. There were apologies for absence from DL.

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

3. As per the register dated 26 January 2026. VB advised that she had submitted a Gifts & Hospitality declaration in respect of a recent visit to Loro Parque Wildlife Park when she accompanied her husband on a parliamentary trip in her capacity as his wife and not as Chair.

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

4. **DECISION:** Once item 49 had been updated to refer to the 'national' Enterprise Award, the VEAB approved the minutes dated 18 November 2025 as an accurate record of the meeting.

## 1.5 Action Tracker

5. Arrangements for a demo of the STLR platform were in hand with LB.
6. **ACTION: LTS would issue the LVEP Evaluation report that afternoon. [DONE].**
7. AS had issued a report on LVEP/DDP familiarisation trips. This was noted as a good example of VB/VE working together across the regions and that the trips were always well received.
8. **ACTION: AS to provide the VEAB with a summary of familiarisation trip impact.**

## 1.6 Chair's Update & Diary

9. Engagement calendar noted.

## 2.0 CEO's Updates

### 2.1 CEO's Report

10. PY reported that the 2026/27 core budget had been confirmed as flat, bar an uplift in capital funding. The additional ring-fenced budget was being reallocated to support the Visitor Economy Strategy and work continued with DCMS on how much of this remained available. GREAT funding was still to be confirmed. This was proving extremely challenging in respect of planning and securing related private sector match funding expected by Government. Flat core funding also meant that BTA would need to plan on reductions in staff costs.
11. An update on the Short Term Lets Registration (STLR) project would be provided later in the meeting. Although VE had been asked to prioritise the work, DCMS had yet to confirm project funding post April 2026 and a phased approach was being taken. It was hoped that any new STLR roles could be offered as options to colleagues affected by the change programme, subject to skills alignment. LB, on behalf of DCMS, supported the principle as best use of funds, subject to timings/process which were currently being worked on.
12. In response to SG's query about fit with VE strategy and the growth narrative, PY said that DCMS had advised VE that successful roll out of STLR would be advantageous to concluding the ALB review.
13. The North West domestic marketing campaign had recently launched and an update would be provided later in the meeting.
14. Downing Street was planning to hold a coffee morning in support of English Tourism Week.

### 2.2 Dashboard

15. A review of the dashboard took place. LTS noted key variances, plus developments since the report had been issued. Of the 30 KPIs, 10 had been exceeded, 13 had been met, 3 had not been met and 4 remained to be confirmed. Of the three that had not been met:
  - AccessAble technical upgrades and LVEP capacity meant that access guides had not kicked off until November. Evaluation was underway to ensure the programme dovetailed with revised VE priorities.
  - The quality scheme was delivered by the AA. 91% retention was expected by yearend, which was felt acceptable given the trading environment. SG suggested this rating now be updated to amber.
  - From a broad perspective social media was performing well. However, reach was down and there were challenges with specific channels.

16. Other dashboard discussions points included, inter alia:
- In response to NW's query about London RFPs, it was confirmed that the dashboard only included data channelled through VE, whose focus was regional growth.
  - As part of the evaluation process, VE would agree its own Regenerative Tourism role before setting future targets.
  - MP/Mayoral engagement would be bolstered by English Tourism Week. Purdah period noted.
  - LTS confirmed that the process to populate the dashboard was manageable and the team found it valuable. Future reporting would focus more closely on growth and outcomes.
  - Including the date of the snapshot on future reports was suggested.
17. **ACTION: LTS to share a 2025/26 yearend dashboard summary with the VEAB when completed. The proposed 2026/27 dashboard template to be reviewed by VB and LTS and shared for comment at the June meeting. Dashboard reports to continue to be tabled at each Board meeting with a deeper dive at the November meeting.**

### 2.3 LVEP programme update

18. Paper taken as read with discussion points, inter alia:
- AS updated on Cornwall, Kent and Cambridgeshire/Peterborough's potential/developing application plans.
  - The various LVEP models were discussed and the performance review process outlined.
  - NW commended the team for proactively identifying areas of possible risk and inquired about any related support programme.
  - Given changes expected in the North East as the DDP fell away and the MCA implemented new plans, SG asked how the model would evolve.
  - Increased MCA funding brought with it the potential for a two-tier system and a disconnect with a unified national strategy.
  - NW spoke about Cumbria's success as a private sector membership body. Underlining that generally the LVEP's funding structure informed its priorities/deliverables.
  - LB felt that more collective work could be done to ensure the LVEP narrative reflected the value and impact delivered.
  - Given changes since the LVEP framework was established LTS suggested some reframing might be required. SG confirmed she would be happy to provide advice on operating in a devolved landscape as needed.
19. **DECISION: The VEAB endorsed the LVEP review process as recommended. It was agreed that the LVEP programme schedule would be updated and maintained as a live document.**
20. **ACTION: The LVEP award panel, at its next meeting (14 May TBC), to review the LVEP structure/framework in the context of the changing environment and consider options for the future.**
21. **ACTION: New members to be offered a training session on LVEPs.**

### 3.0 DCMS update

### 4.0 Visitor Economy Advisory Council update

22. LB reported that key focus was on delivery of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy which would be launched following the elections. Consultation on the draft outline strategy was currently

taking place around the country. Key feedback was around delivery as detailed policy proposals had yet to be written. In response to SG's earlier point she clarified that LVEPs would be key delivery partners.

23. Given engagement to date, LB did not feel that there should be any major issue in aligning VE's priorities with the Growth Strategy and suggested that a discussion on this point could be added to the agenda of the planned interim meeting. The CEO queried how this position sat in the context of the ALB review.
24. LB underlined that the Growth Strategy needed to work for a sector under pressure. The challenges of launching the Strategy around the same time as the overnight levy and in the context of a devolved landscape were discussed. Whether there might be a central mechanism for the levy to strengthen visitor economy growth across the regions, including via funding LVEPs, was suggested.

## **5.0 Corporate Priorities**

### **5.1 BTA Corporate Priorities**

25. The CEO outlined the BTA 2026/27 Corporate Priorities approved by the BTA Board at its meeting on 3 February. Adaptations to support working in a devolved environment and challenges around short-notice and limited period funding were noted. In response to HBW's question, PY advised that strategy and budget were flexibly positioned to respond to the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. The VEAB endorsed improved storytelling to underline the local/regional value of a national tourist board.

### **5.2 VisitEngland Priorities**

26. VE priorities as previously agreed were now presented with an indicative outline budget. In response to a query about quantitative segmentation, AS clarified that research was being undertaken around product market fit specific to each LVEP area/segment. Addressing SG's comment about success measures it was explained that evaluation would be considered at the June meeting.
27. **ACTION: VE's strategic evaluation framework to be tabled at the June Board meeting.**

### **5.3 English Tourism Week**

28. English Tourism Week (ETW) would take place 13-22 March. Board members were provided with marketing materials and asked to go out into their communities and promote the campaign. SG asked for a schedule that set out ETW roles in the context of a devolved environment.
29. **ACTION: LTS to share the ETW briefing note with the Board when complete. [DONE]**
30. The Chair suggested inviting a representative of the ETW Board to speak on campaign impact at a future meeting. HBW offered to speak about impact from a business perspective.
31. **ACTION: A representative of the ETW Board to be invited to a future Board meeting to discuss campaign impact.**

## **6.0 Short-term Lets Registration Scheme**

[SB & VH joined for this item]

32. SB provided an update on project set-up, including integrated working with DCMS. Preparation for launch of the voluntary phase in September/October 2026 would comprise finance system updates, staffing and the procurement of a customer service centre capability. Project risks were outlined, including: confirmation of DCMS funding/approvals; fee shortfalls; system functionality; capacity around recruitment.
33. Subsequent discussion points included, inter alia:
- There was pressure from Government to launch the product and develop it during the voluntary phase when numbers were expected to be low.
  - The STLR team would comprise c. 20-30 members, with a range of roles and contracts.
  - In response to SG's query, it was confirmed that the team was planned to be largely based in Birmingham.
  - LB answered HBW's point on future funding, advising that the expectation was that the STLR scheme would be handled separately and it would be self-funding.
  - SG queried how the scheme sat with the overnight tourism levy, noting this now presented two new asks for accommodation providers. She felt this could be perceived in some areas as being anti-tourism.
  - FP flagged the work and cost to integrate the new platform into the DDAT programme.
  - SG felt that it would be helpful to have a diagram illustrating STLR roles and responsibilities.
  - AL suggested that an industry sector consultation group be established to aid the implementation, if not done so already.

SB & VH were thanked for their succinct paper and contribution to the meeting.

Members approved the approach being taken towards the STLR project.

34. **ACTION: The Chair to work with LB on an agenda for an interim online VEAB meeting (8 April) to include: welcome for the two new VEAB members; explanation of LVEP programme (for new members benefit); STLR platform. Suggested that the STLR demo might be followed by a separate opportunity for questions.**

## **7.0 Regional Reports**

35. AL spoke about a sector in need of hope. He reported on a mixed picture in the South West of reasonable early bookings but also low investment and businesses closing.
36. HBW updated that the recent ALVA meeting had reported a strong Christmas period, however the start of this year had been tough. She too spoke of a mixed picture and challenges in maintaining profit margins. Despite lower staffing levels, costs continued to increase. She highlighted other threats including the predicted impact of the US/Iran war on energy prices and, for her business specifically, regional water supply issues.
37. In reporting on the tech/digital space, NT suggested exploring the potential offered by Reddit in influencing travel planning, noting synergy with VE's strategic approach. Now the third largest global online platform it had recently concluded a deal with Google around search content.
38. NW, citing data from his own business, talked of despondency across the sector at the lack of recovery to 2019 levels and constantly increasing in costs. He underlined frustration at the absence of an overarching view around policy to support the growth agenda.
39. FP spoke about the overnight levy resonating with locals and the perception that it might be used to improve services. She noted the reopening of the Fashion Museum in Bath and the drive for national interest in this major investment, Bristol's bid for City of Culture status and early discussions with universities around community partnerships to support the day visitor economy.

40. SG spoke further about proposed plans for the North East. Subject to approval, the MCA would make a three-year investment creating a framework to promote the North East's visitor economy, including new regional coordination and infrastructure, commencing May 2026. Background details, including impact on LVEP and partnership structures, were still to be addressed. There would be a strong regional focus on jobs, skills, and revitalising areas, plus large-scale events. She felt this approach was indicative of the position forming across other MCAs.

## **8.0 Corporate Reports**

### **8.1 Finance update**

41. SJ confirmed there had been no variations since the finance report had been issued and a yearend break even was still expected. The Chair thanked SJ for her work on both finance and STLR scheme matters.

### **8.2 ARC report**

42. NW advised of ARC's focus on the yearend outturn, external audit, ARA preparation, internal audit assurance plans for 2026/27, information security, business resilience and disaster recovery. He underlined that the STLR project sat on the corporate risk register as previously discussed, reiterating the risk around DCMS funding. The Committee's next meeting took place on 10 March.

### **8.3 RPC report**

43. FP provided her last RPC report advising that she would be succeeded as Chair by BTA member Beth Knight, and HBW would represent VE. January's meeting agenda had covered: People Strategy implementation; a limited scope Pay & Benchmarking project; and People Survey results and action plan. RPC had reviewed and commented on the proposed target operating model to reduce payroll costs.

## **9.0 Marketing Update**

[EW & SM joined for this item]

44. EW took the paper as read. She highlighted how the pilot North West coastal campaign linked with and built on Government communications around local communities' pride in place providing further opportunity for VE to shape and influence. In response to questions, it was explained that a robust evaluation framework was being put into place and success measures included a ROI of 5:1, positive feedback, data targets and creation of long-term legacy. Demonstrating impact to Government was discussed and being able to counter against displacement was recommended.
45. New domestic audience segmentation exercise and brand frameworks were being undertaken for the first time in over 10 years. Both items would underpin and enhance all future marketing activity. EW & SM were thanked for their contributions.
46. **ACTION: JH to share the Marketing update deck with NW. [DONE]**
47. **ACTION: Brand Strategy and Toolkit to be shared with the VEAB when available.**

## **10.0 Papers for Noting**

48. SJ confirmed that there was no change to the BTA Corporate Risk Register since the paper had been issued.
49. It was confirmed that the next Board meeting, plus LVEP conference and Awards for Excellence, would take place on Wednesday 3 June in Bristol.
50. **ACTION: JH to contact VEAB members with arrangements for 3 June events and overnight accommodation. And to also issue 2027 meeting date placeholders.**
51. **ACTION: Papers 10.4-10.5 to be brought forward as a deep dive at future meetings.**

## **11. Any Other Business**

52. This was FP and AL's last meeting as their second terms of office came to an end on 5 March. The Chair, PY, AS and other members of the Board, paid tribute to both of them for their support and commitment over 8 years and a small presentation was made.

The date of the next meeting – Wednesday 3 June, 0845, Venue: Clayton Hotel, Bristol

It was hoped that the VEAB meeting would coordinate with an LVEP conference and the National Awards, timings would be circulated to members, but please be aware that there will be an overnight stay on 3 June, and possibly 2 June.

END