MINUTES OF THE 464th MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

Wednesday 3 June 2026 at 0845-1045
Albion Room, Clayton Hotel
35-37 Broad Street, Bristol, BS1 2EQ

Present:	Lady Victoria Borwick, (Chair/VB), VEAB Chair Helen Bonser-Wilton (HBW), Board Member Richard Morsley (RM), Board Member Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member (online) Rachel Walter (RW), 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 Director Serena Jacobs (SJ), Finance Director (online) Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director VE Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)
Apologies:	Dr Sarah Green OBE (SG), Board Member

1.0 <u>Welcome and Opening Remarks</u>

1.1 <u>Welcome</u>

1. The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming all. It was RW and RM's first full Board meeting and introductions were made. She outlined the plan for the day which included the LVEP conference and the evening's VisitEngland Awards for Excellence.

1.2 <u>Apologies</u>

2. There were apologies for absence from SG, who had sent in notes which would be fed into discussions.

1.3 <u>Register of Interests</u>

3. Were as per the register dated 5 May 2026.

1.4 <u>Minutes from the Last Meeting</u>

4. The minutes dated 3 March 2026 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.5 <u>Action Tracker</u>

5. A number of actions featured on the agenda. Brand Strategy and Elevating the BTA were on the planner to be brought forward.

1.6 <u>Chair's Update & Diary</u>

6. Noted.

2.0 CEO's Updates

2.1 CEO's Report

7. Following expected flat funding for the next three years, the organisation had undertaken restructure with the objective of: driving impact; strengthening commercial and data capabilities; removing duplication; and empowering the regional network. With the recent conclusion of consultation the new structure had been announced and was being implemented. HBW acknowledged the impact on the team and commended all involved for their professionalism.

8. Senior team changes included Director of HR & Professional Services and International Director roles being made redundant. Louise Bryce had been appointed to the new role of Commercial and Partnerships Director which would lead commercial activities and the international network, with strengthened Deputy Director support. Recruitment of a new DDAT Director to address skills gaps would begin shortly. Concern was expressed about senior capacity and level of responsibility, specifically around the CEO and Director of Finance, Projects & Procurement's remit with the addition of Short-term Lets responsibilities.

9. It was noted that some VE functions (e.g. commercial/partnership, digital and data) were now integrated into the wider VB operation.

10. **ACTION: AS/LTS to share an org chart for the restructured VisitEngland team with VEAB members (or VE roles flagged on a VB chart).**

11. Following the removal of ringfenced Business Events Growth Programme funding the team had been streamlined, moving this to an England-funded activity, with specific focus on getting destinations to international platforms and supporting the regional Ambassador Programme. DCMS has been supportive of this change and had responded to stakeholder correspondence confirming its full backing. Proactively AS had attended IMEX Frankfurt and briefed our Industry Advisory Group to reassure partners there and was in discussion with Visit Wales regarding potential joint initiatives.

12. VE was aligning with DCMS's move towards a Major Events programme and were on the related roundtable alongside the Department of Business & Trade.

13. Following positive response to the North West domestic coastal campaign VE had been asked by DCMS to scope rolling out an extended coastal campaign 'our coast has the most' to promote coastal locations over this summer and tie in with the Government "Great British Summer Savings Scheme". Funding provided by DCMS and private sector partners. LB indicated that timing was strategic around visibility of Government support for a sector under stress. Further stimulation of domestic demand was welcomed, especially in respect of rural economies.

14. **ACTION: Board members to be provided with key messaging so they could support the campaign.**

15. The CEO updated on the Greater Together LA (GTLA) trade expo, part of the GREAT programme. VB/VE had taken out a trade mission, comprising nations, LVEPs and commercial partners, and contributed to thought leadership forums and roundtables. There had been positive feedback including from LVEPs around engagement opportunities.

16. Product market fit research had been received and was being reviewed by the Research team. PY thanked members who had contributed to VE's evidence to the DCMS select committee's inquiry on tourism.

17. As part of the Visitor Economy Strategy, DCMS were considering an annual investment prospectus for England/Britain highlighting regional opportunities.

3.0 DCMS update

18. LB advised that the team was preparing for publication of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy, w/c 6 July. The document was close to ready but there were some reservations around timings of supporting policy decisions. The Strategy was likely to feature domestic targets: inbound visitors of 54m by 2035, with an overnight stay value of £125m; a strategic shift to regional ambition/decision-making; with a hub & spoke model to push visitors from urban to rural.

    VB reflected on how VE's work resonated with the Strategy's key principles, especially around skills, technology and young people's careers. LB and AS spoke about how the Strategy would encourage broader geographical partnership working.

19. LB reported that the STLR project was progressing but there was a delay to the laying of legislation.

4.0 Strategic Update

4.1 25/26 VisitEngland Year-End Dashboard

20. LTS updated on the 25/26 year-end dashboard. Results were broadly positive with 15 targets being exceeded and no major concerns. Successes included: Business Event RFPs outside of London; political/Mayoral engagement; marketing; LVEP engagement. KPIs that had not been met included: social media reach for English Tourism Week, due to a change in approach/ process limit which the Chair felt was regretful given it was a key campaign (noting Tourism Superstar metrics were double target); and SME facing activities, which had moved to being run by LVEPs.

21. **DECISION: It was agreed that RW would be the VEAB's representative on the English Tourism Week Steering Group.**

22. **ACTION: AS/LTS to follow-up on RW's appointment to the English Tourism Week Steering Group.**

4.2 26/27 KPI Framework & VE Evaluation Programme Update

23. VE strategy and business plan had been revised to reflect Government priorities and the move to an outcome impact model. The Board noted progress made in developing logic models and evaluation framework across VE's key programme areas and the early impact reported. There was general support for the approach being developed for 26/27. Key discussion points included:

    - Given strategic focus, evaluation was broadly geared towards MCAs/LVEPs.
    - Recommendation to focus on the difference being made, with an agile approach to allow for future development and to align with the imminent Visitor Economy Growth Strategy.
    - The Chair highlighted the importance of investment to support communities and of learning from others e.g. Awards for Excellence winners.
    - Support for using tech to streamline data collection throughout. Ensuring partners have the ability to do this and feel that it is worthwhile exercise.

- Travel trade: working with VB Partnerships around developing a clear model for England to reflect where investment was being made.
- Access and inclusion: Expectation that this area would evolve. Some challenge around collecting data around driving growth.

24. **ACTION: AS to share Manchester hotel accessible rooms case study with draft minutes.**

25. Comments on the proposed 2026/27 KPIs:

    - KPIs were driven by VE Strategy, an element of the wider BTA Strategy approved by the BTA Board.
    - Revised VE dashboard to be tabled at each meeting from September.
    - Short-term Lets was a new metric. KPIs to be agreed.
    - Assurance that long lead time results, e.g. Business Events, are captured in the dashboard.
    - Product development would be a key focus for the year - the exact strategy and KPIs were still to be agreed (likewise Accelerator Fund KPIs). A nimble approach would be required in respect of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy.
    - Quality scheme was provided by the AA under license. Although no longer a Board KPI, stretch targets were in place to focus delivery.
    - Effort to collect and marshal data was acceptable given reduced resource. It was hoped that the process could be further streamlined with tech/AI.

26. **ACTION: AS/LTS to table the revised dashboard comprising VE KPIs at the September Board meeting.**

    4.3 LVEP Programme Update

27. Discussion points included:

    - There was no expectation from DCMS that every geographical area would have LVEP status and organisations could have a variety of structure, focus and activity.
    - Encouraged that Cambridgeshire & Peterborough LVEP had been accredited on 14 May.
    - Coventry & Warwickshire were exploring becoming part of the larger West Midlands LVEP.
    - Now funded by the North East MCA, NGI had rebranded as Experience North East England to lead in-bound activity, product development, strategic events and partnerships. Transition had resulted in a complex structure and a light-touch review against criteria, was planned.
    - NW highlighted the impact the Visitor Levy could have on some LVEP funding models.
    - The evolution of the LVEP Panel and RDL's role as the framework matured was noted, including the new partnership approach and move to more regular LVEP reviews, around regional growth targets. Outcomes to be discussed with the LVEP Panel and more strategic matters escalated to the VEAB.

28. **DECISION: The Board endorsed the Regional Development teams' focus change to partnering with the LVEPs to support regional growth now that they are established, rather than 'overseeing' their set-up.**

    ACTION: AS/LTS to ensure that all Board members have met their regional leads.

5.0 Regional Reports

29. HBW reported that ALVA members were generally experiencing a slow start to the year (9-10% down YTD). Leeds Castle's performance had been variable over April and May with concerns

about the summer. Accommodation was up due to new product; retail and catering on budget; hospitality good, but 2027 was not looking as strong; some recovery of adult groups (impact of cruises, as opposed to traditional markets). Local water supply and Dover traffic issues were challenging.

30. RW updated on the National Trust's position: performance was under budget; Pokemon-themed initiative driving business; membership stable. Holiday bookings were above budget and reflecting the industry trend of later booking. Concerns around cost control, regulations, Visitor Levy etc.

31. RM reported that at Chatham Historic Dockyard: visitor numbers were down 5% on forecast; retail and catering were holding well; hospitality was strong due to new product and travel trade was performing well. The Visit Kent team has been re-established by Kent County Council and Medway County Council, they were developing a local destination management plan, had a new website and had submitted an expression of interest to become an LVEP.

32. NW talked about comparable trends in Cumbria. The recent good weather over May half-term meant that volume was down 9% YTD as forecast (23% down on 2019). Cost pressure was being experienced across the board. The Government's short-term reduction in VAT for sections of the market and reduced red diesel costs were welcomed. A drop in Japanese visitors continued but the Chinese market, and PY's comments on the American market, were encouraging.

33. The Chair said discussions during her visit to Dorset and Somerset the previous day painted a similar uncertain picture.

34. **ACTION: The Chair to share Dorset and Somerset figures with the draft minutes.**

35. Reporting on digital and tech, NT noted some international push back on paid for AI services, as users considered value for money.

6.0 Corporate Reports

6.1 Finance Update

36. For new members SJ provided a high-level outline of how public funding was managed. She advised that the total 25/26 year-end had concluded within the DCMS's 1% tolerance. VE's 2.8% underspend had offset VB's small overspend.

37. On the 26/27 budget, it was explained that given flat funding, the timing of its arrival and re-priorisation, outturn was compared to prior forecast as opposed to budget (total funding allocation). This was the same metric that DCMS measured against.

38. NW noted the VE budget allocation for Business Events (including income from LVEPs).

39. **ACTION: AS/LTS to provide VEAB members with key messages around Business Events.**

6.2 ARC update

40. NW explained the Committee's structure and purpose for new members. The Committee's next meeting on 9 June would be focused on the 25/26 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA), which would be recommended to the BTA Board on 16 June for approval and laid in Parliament before recess. He commended the document as a helpful tool for understanding the wider

organisation. GIAA had awarded BTA a moderate level of assurance and NAO had confirmed a clean external audit. The meeting agenda would also feature a Procurement deep dive.

41. **ACTION: JH to share future ARC meeting dates with RM and RW with a view to them joining in an observer capacity. [DONE via ARC Secretariat].**

7.0 Papers for Noting

42. The Corporate Risk Register and Forward Look were noted. A number of meetings would take place in the regions with the opportunities for visits and stakeholder engagement. With reference to the Engagement Calendar the Chair reminded members to attend events in their local area and to feed back on any relevant activities.

8.0 Any Other Business

43. JU joined the meeting to provide final updates on the evening's VisitEngland Awards for Excellence. It was JU last year producing the Awards and the meeting paid tribute to her for all she had achieved in her time at VE and wished the very best in her new role as CEO of the Short-term Accommodation Association.

44. The meeting closed at 10.45 and attendees left to join the LVEP Conference at Bristol Watershed.

END

Date and venue of Next Meeting: 15 September, World of Wedgewood, Barlaston, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST12 9ER