

**MINUTES OF THE 479th MEETING OF THE
BRITISH TOURIST, AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD
held on Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 0900-1230
Grainger Suite, Maldron Hotel, 17 Newgate Street
Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 5RE**

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
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
Louise Bryce (LB)	Director of Commercial & Partnership
Saul Batzofin (SB)	Project Portfolio Director (for item 4.2)
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary (online)
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)

Guest Speakers:

Kim McGuinness (KM)	Mayor of the North East (online)
Adrian Pearson (AP)	Head of Mayoral Delivery, NEMSA
Rob Hamilton (RH)	Assistant Director of Economic Strategy, NEMSA

Apologies:

Jon Tippell (JT)	Board Subject Expert - Data & Digital
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0.0 Welcome

1. The Chair reflected enthusiastically on his visit to the North East. He welcomed all to the meeting, including PG and HB who were joining online.
2. PG would be stepping down from the Board due to work commitments. It was hoped he would remain connected in a new Chair's advisor role.
3. **ACTION: The Chair and HB to discuss a way forward around PG's advisory role and recruitment of his successor on the Board.**

1.0 Chair's Introduction and Preliminaries

1.2 Apologies for absence

4. There were apologies for absence from Jon Tippell.

1.3 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

5. Were as per the register dated 9 June 2026.

1.4 Minutes of the Meeting of 14 April 2026

6. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting and would be published online.

1.1 Chair's Introduction

In respect of governance matters, the Board made the following decisions:

7. **DECISION: The Board approved the updated terms of reference for the Remuneration & People Performance Committee (RPC) as recommended by the Committee.**
8. **DECISION: The Board approved the updated Gifts & Hospitality policy as recommended by the RPC.**
9. **DECISION: The Board approved terms of reference for a new Commercial Committee.**
10. **DECISION: The Board approved Commercial Committee membership as Mary Walsh (Chair), Beth Knight and Helen Bonser-Wilton (VEAB).**
11. **ACTION: The Chair and HB to agree a plan for the Q3 Board Effectiveness Review.**
12. The Chair advised that the Youth Council initiative was being paused due to political changes.
13. Noting that the Chair was attending other nations' Board meetings, MB confirmed that as Visit Wales did not have a Board per se, the Chair would be invited to the equivalent meeting.
14. The Chair spoke about his recent trip to the US, highlighting the huge potential presented by the market there and given the current funding position the need to take a creative approach. He commended the US team for its efforts and for hosting him.

1.5 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

15. Action tracker status noted.

2.0 Nations' Insight

2.1 Update on VisitEngland (VE) activities/successes/best practice

16. AS drew out the main highlights of the paper and VB talked through the recent VE SWOT analysis. Questions and comments included:
 - In response to queries about LVEP success measures, AS advised that as the structure had matured the LVEP monitoring and review process had developed, and included updates to the LVEP Awards Panel and VEAB. It was suggested that success measures be updated, specifically around assessing depth and quality.
 - As a national tourism board, VE had the unique ability to drive Government ambition through its national network with a cohesive and consistent approach, as well as supporting best practice, amplifying the sector and providing access to Business Events and the international network.
 - NR suggested more time be focused on thinking, with the support of DCMS, about VE's future strategy and value in respect of devolution and working with Mayors.
 - Noting the restructured Business Events function, MW queried whether the team was adequately resourced
 - DP sought more clarity (offline) on VE's updated strategy, prioritisation of resources and what was no longer being undertaken.
17. **ACTION: AS/VB to pick up key challenges and questions offline and table a short paper at the next meeting. A separate meeting to be arranged to discuss VE which will feed into either the September or December Board meeting.**

3.0 CEO's Update

3.1 CEO's report

18. PY was proud to report that VB's Starring GB campaign had won both the Global Marketing Excellence award and the Grand Prix at the Marketing Society Awards, beating entries by large commercial corporations, so a tremendous achievement. Given political resonance, the achievement had been flagged to DCMS and Government Comms.
19. Change programme consultation had concluded and the new structure was being implemented.
20. Following DCMS's withdrawal of ringfenced funds to support Business Events, this activity had been moved to the VE portfolio, under a smaller, focused team. DP outlined DCMS's pivot to major events, which fitted well with BTA's experience of delivering a tourism legacy to drive growth beyond a major event.
21. Confirmed funding for the Short-term Lets Registration project provided an opportunity, subject to skills, to redeploy colleagues whose roles were deemed at risk.
22. DCMS had provided VE with ring-fenced funding to launch a second extended domestic marketing campaign 'my coast has the most'. Preparation/advocacy had begun for an autumn roll-out focused on supporting the Great British Summer Savings initiative and regional growth. KS encouraged the team to forward pitch campaigns to Government.
23. Restriction of working to an annual budget was highlighted. Potential ETA visa income could offer reassurance around an amount of multi-year funding which would allow for longer-term planning.
24. Highlighting the link between visitor economy and investment, and playing into how the industry was elevated, VB had agreed to produce an annual national Visitor Economy Investment Prospectus and was talking to the DBT about involvement in the forthcoming Investment Summit.
25. The VisitEngland Awards for Excellence had taken place on 3 June. The event model would continue to be reviewed to keep driving it down to a cost neutral position.
26. The CEO reported on Greater Together LA. She commended the team for focusing on deliverables in a complex environment: a mini trade mission selling regional Britain; roundtables; thought leadership and the only consumer event of the expo.
27. The Chair thanked PY for her leadership during an exceptional period for the organisation. He encouraged members to promote VB content across their networks.

3.2 CEO's Engagements & 3.3 Dashboard

28. JT had advised on the redesign of the dashboard. Subject to any member feedback this template would be used going forward.

4.0 **Short-term Let Registration Scheme** [SB joined for this item]

29. The Chair acknowledged a difficult and moving landscape and thanked members for their input which was shaping BTA's approach to this complex matter.
30. Given the position the Board sought reassurance around BTA's proposed involvement. Key discussion points included:
 - General support for the approach being taken, the way a complex situation, with a range of unknowns, was being navigated and risk was being managed.
 - Had reputational risk around industry relationships been fully considered?

- More clarity was required around BTA's proposed involvement.

31. **DECISION: The Board approved continuing engagement to resolve these issues.**

5.0 Retail Review Update

32. There was general support for closure of the VB Shop on 31 October.
33. Negotiations continued with a potential license agreement for the Shop, with a number of areas of material difference still to be resolved. It was agreed that a deadline for concluding any licensing agreement should be set at 31 July 2026.
34. KS reminded that it had been agreed that the Board should review details of any licensing option. BK suggested that an update on the terms of current material difference together with a recommendation from the CEO be brought for endorsement to the Commercial Committee, supported by KS and PG (if they chose to be involved).
35. **DECISION: The Board agreed that on termination of the TfL contract on 31 October, the VisitBritain shop should be closed. The potential licensee should be advised of a deadline of 31 July to resolve any contractual issues. If these were not resolved by this date BTA would cease pursuing the option of brand licensing. On or before 31 July, the Commercial Committee would be consulted accordingly/updated.**

6.0 Finance Update

6.1 2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA)

36. NW thanked the Finance team for all their work in preparing the ARA. He advised that the ARA had been discussed and approved at the ARC meeting held on 9 June, the GIAA had awarded the BTA a moderate level of assurance, NAO had confirmed a clean external audit and the management letter had only included minor items. Hence, he was recommending that the Board approve the ARA.
37. **DECISIONS: The Board approved the 2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts. The Board approved the going concern assessment contained within the ARC Annual Report. The Board approved that the ARC Chair can approve non-material changes to the ARA arising after the Board meeting up to the date of laying before Parliament but that any material matters would also require Chair of the Board review and approval.**

Post meeting note: The ARA was certified on 6 July 2026.

7.0 Operational Matters

7.1 Pay Remit Recommendation

38. In response to PG's query, PY advised that within the standard pay award there was an aspiration to prioritise roles that sat lower in pay bands and only minor scope to issue non-consolidated awards or recognise performance. KS reported that RPC had previously explored the notion of performance related pay. BK confirmed that a Pay & Benchmarking project was taking place to develop an organisational Pay Strategy.
39. **DECISIONS: The Board approved that the team proceed with modelling the 2026/27 pay award as per RPC recommendation. The Board approved a 3% budgeted award to be distributed across the organisation.**

40. **ACTION:** The RPC Chair, working with the CEO and HR Leader, to consider future options for performance-related pay, informed by the pay benchmarking exercise currently in progress, with a view to shaping how this might be applied in future pay review cycles, and to bring any proposals back to the Committee.

8.0 Papers for Information

41. Corporate Risk Register: Updated to include Short-term Lets Registration Scheme in respect of financial viability. Reputational risk depended on interpretation of legislation and the Memorandum of Understanding with DCMS. VB suggested an off-line conversation re STL reputational risk.
42. RPC meeting note: BK advised that the RPC reporting framework was being refreshed and indicated that the new BTA Dashboard template might be used for the People & Places dashboard. Acknowledging the current change environment, this would feature a range of wellbeing and resilience indicators.

9.0 Elevating Tourism

43. Continuing previous Board discussions, this session focused on elevating the tourism industry, which parts of Government to focus on and compelling messaging. Key points raised included:
- DP indicated that he would have preferred the paper to be written in coordination with DCMS, specifically around cross Governmental/Mayoral engagement.
 - NR felt that there was a real opportunity to offer Mayors a range of creative ideas to address current challenges, noting that strong ideas would attract funding. He highlighted the importance of securing ETA multi-year funding.
 - BK highlighted the importance of the Small Business Minister as the voice of the industry and recommended ranking opportunities, plus thinking about where the sector needed resilience and contingency.
 - KS noted that there were some very compelling arguments for tourism, which could be positioned for specific political audiences, but questioned how these might translate into tangible commitments around Government priorities.
 - DP felt that more clarity on current sector performance with narrative and comparatives would be helpful when soliciting for Government assistance.
 - NR recommended developing a number of strategic interventions and focusing on BTA being a country-wide trusted partner.
 - MB underlined the importance of social value, community impact and nation building (within an economic development framework) for the new Welsh Government. He also noted issues around the perception of the value of tourism and sector jobs.
 - SL talked about the challenge of political engagement. He recommended focusing on value for money, speed of return, wider economic impact, outcomes if investment stopped (inc. tax take), supporting MPs/MSPs to understand the bigger picture and the need to develop the sector.
 - PG queried whether BTA was adjusting quickly enough to the way politics works and different motivations? Was more precise targeting of key decision-makers needed? Suggested aligning behind 2-3 priorities that will make a difference and taking a more visual approach to supporting policy decision/creating moments.
 - NW spoke around underlining sense of place and how tourism can help deliver wider Government objectives.
 - MW recommended a more strategic approach on campaigning platforms be adopted, demonstrating economic growth and job creation, and the creation of an actionable plan.
 - DP reminded that the Government had already made a major investment in Universal Studios Bedford, noting that capital funding was often easier to secure. And highlighted that tourism offered careers/career development.

- The Chair spoke about: working with DCMS on an approach to HMT; the organisation exploring additional income streams supported by the Commercial Committee; the Creative Industries model for developing a path to success; and the development of an exciting vision for partners to buy into.
- The CEO thanked the Board for this helpful input which would feed into future discussions and pitches.

44. **ACTION: The Chair & CEO to develop a discussion paper for the September Board meeting around BTA priorities for the current Parliamentary term and for the December meeting: A long-term look at BTA - where do we want to be in 5/10/15 years.**
45. **ACTION: The Chair & CEO to provide an outline of Board and Executive focus and responsibilities.**

10.0 Any Other Business

46. BK advised that an increase was being seen around modern slavery/human rights risk in hospitality portfolios.

POST MEETING NOTE: BTA's Modern Slavery Statement would be tabled at the September meeting.

47. The Chair advised that to allow for fuller Board discussion, the expectation for future meetings was for presentations of no more than 3 minutes.

12.0 Guest Speaker - Kim McGuinness, Mayor of the North East

48. The Mayor was pleased to hear that the BTA felt that more could be done to promote tourism in the North East, both nationally and globally. The North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) had huge ambition to drive tourism: to double visitor numbers and tell stories in new and exciting ways. A fresh, holistic approach would be enabled by major investment, including in a single tourism agency Experience North East England (ENEE), supporting cultural and creative industries and developing new partnerships. The Mayor asked BTA to think differently around how it promoted the area and about a new kind of partnership which would allow the North East to be more instrumental in how tourism money was invested.
49. PY confirmed that constructive discussions had begun with ENEE around forming an international growth partnership, with the North East playing a role in decision-making and how BTA supported investment in and development of narrative for region. The positive impact of the 3-year funding deal was highlighted. She confirmed the BTA would work to Mayors' targets for growth and intended to form a Mayors' Council.
50. LB spoke about BTA's new ability to engage with the region to drive local development in a new style of partnership, highlighting BTA's offer around reach, network, relationships and marketing expertise, all with a contemporary approach.
51. KM and RH indicated initial support for a new style longer-term partnership. They advocated for a radical shift in mindset more broadly and for the North East, including around visitors not having to come into Britain via London, new inbound routes, targeted and exciting international marketing/promotion. And underlined that any partnership should reflect North East's sense of ambition and the scale of regional investment.
52. PY responded that BTA funds would be used where they would make most difference - driving regional growth. Partnership work with BTA would be wide-ranging and not solely marketing but include : supporting infrastructure investment including hotels, flight routes, and digital/influencer

promotion (which was effectively shifting the way the regions were marketed).

53. MB spoke about the commonality Wales had with the North East and the way its relationship with and confidence in BTA had developed due to good partnership working over a number of years.
54. Next steps were agreed as: following discussion with the interim CEO of ENEE, LB to work with the NEMCA on developing and agreeing an elevated strategic-level partnership proposal. Timings to be coordinated around the issue of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy.
55. KM thanked the Board and team for their time and open-mindedness.
56. **ACTION: LB to work with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority on developing and agreeing an elevated strategic-level partnership proposal.**

END

The next meeting will take place Monday 28 - Tuesday 29 September 2026
Venue: North Wales