



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

VISITOR ECONOMY ADVISORY COUNCIL

10:00 - 12:00, Monday 20th January 2025

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Sir Chris Bryant MP	Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and Tourism (co-Chair)
Karin Sheppard	IHG Hotels and Resorts (co-Chair)
Joss Croft OBE	UKInbound
Sean Doyle	British Airways
Fiona Eastwood	Merlin Entertainments
Paul Flaum	Bourne Leisure
Jody Ford	Trainline
Dr Sarah Green OBE	NewcastleGateshead Initiative
Sir Loyd Grossman CBE	The Royal Parks
Andy Harmer OBE	Cruise Lines International Association
Andrew Leveson	Royal Shakespeare Company
Fiona Macconnacher	Booking.com
Kate Nicholls OBE	UKHospitality
Ken O'Toole	Manchester Airports Group
Neil Rami	West Midlands Growth Company
Mayor Richard Parker	West Midlands Combined Authority
Jeremy Rees	ExCel London
Kate Shane	Blackpool Council Leisure Portfolio
Julia Simpson	World Travel and Tourism Council
Shaon Talukder	Geotourist
Patricia Yates	VisitBritain/VisitEngland

Observers

Name	Organisation
Nicola Hewer	DCMS
Duncan Parish	DCMS
Lata Mistry	DCMS
Maisie McNamara	DCMS (Council Secretariat)
Ethan Wroe	DCMS (Private Office)

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Dame Irene Hays DBE	Hays Travel

Item 1: Opening Remarks from the Visitor Economy Advisory Council co-Chairs

- Karin Sheppard welcomed members to the inaugural council meeting, and thanked them for volunteering their time and expertise to help the council drive economic growth and job creation in the sector.
- Karin noted that the sector is grappling with rising wages and National Insurance Contribution costs, an impending end to business rates relief, as well as increasingly strong competition for tourism spend. Despite this, tourism is the UK's 3rd largest export, employing 3.4 million people indirectly and directly.
- Minister Bryant thanked Karin for agreeing to co-chair the Visitor Economy Advisory Council, and for her work on the previous Tourism Industry Council. He outlined that his main priorities are to drive growth in the sector, for the Council to co-produce a Visitor Economy Strategy, and for the Working Groups to facilitate evidence-based policy development.

Item 2: Sector Performance and Measures of Growth

- Duncan Parish introduced the item, welcoming views from council members on how the sector is performing, and which metrics would be useful to determine a baseline against which the council can monitor progress. Council members agreed:
 - The sector has changed drastically since 2019, so the narrative needs to move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and a new baseline needs to be created to measure the sector against.
 - More data is needed around investment in order to understand what sort of investment is needed and where it would be best directed.

- The Visitor Economy is uniquely positioned to help the economically inactive get back into work but it was noted that there is very little data on how much growth getting the economically active to work in the Visitor Economy could provide to the UK economy as a whole.
- There could be better data for domestic tourism and customer behaviour. For example, domestic tourism spend isn't captured as well as it could be.
- There is a plethora of data available, it's important to determine a singular narrative for the Visitor Economy with everyone using the same datasets. There is also an opportunity to use real time data and AI to enhance our understanding and create predictions for the sector.

Item 3: Council Objectives and Visitor Economy Strategy

- Karin Sheppard led a conversation on which key areas of focus should be included in the Visitor Economy Strategy and what the Council's Objectives would be:
 - Making the case that the Visitor Economy is a fundamental part of our economy and worth investing in. The UK has consistently performed well but there is a risk that we will lose market share to competitors that are investing more in the sector.
 - Business travel is starting to pick up while leisure travel is dropping, there needs to be more attention given to business travel and how it can be leveraged to increase leisure travel.
 - Extending the tourism season could combat some of the seasonality and productivity challenges that the sector faces, which could be done through events and products pushed outside of peak summer season. Expanding the domestic season and increasing inbound tourism outside summer could appeal to different demographics and draw in additional visitors, which is being seen in countries such as Spain and Italy.
 - The skills, workforce and career challenges that the sector faces are of great importance, many noted that with the right investment and collaboration between government and industry these could easily be tackled.
 - The end-to-end visitor experience of the UK is an area that requires focus, as there are many points of friction such as visitor welcome and arrivals, domestic travel, and visitor awareness of what the UK has to offer outside of London.
 - Tourism has a major flow through impact on creative and cultural industries, high streets, and many other growth sectors.
 - There is a need for a better foundation of up to date and real time data to drive growth.

Item 4: Working Groups

- Minister Bryant introduced this item, asking members to propose areas of focus which would be the most useful for developing the sector strategy and tackling the key challenges outlined previously. Three working groups were agreed:
 - **International** to focus on increasing the number of visitors drawn to the UK and understand what brings them here.
 - **Regional** to focus on driving visitors and spend across the UK and addressing seasonality and SME business support.
 - **Skills, Workforce and Careers** to tackle labour and skill shortages, the sector's reputation and raising the profile of Visitor Economy sector careers.
- Three cross cutting themes were also identified, and council members agreed they must be included in the work of all working groups. These were:
 - **End-to-end visitor experience**, from arrival to departure
 - **Business events**
 - **Small and Micro Enterprises**
- It was also agreed that a piece of research into **Investment in the Visitor Economy** would be undertaken before the next meeting, to gain data, insights and benchmarking into what types of investment are needed and where.

Item 5: Closing Remarks and Next Steps

- Minister Bryant thanked members for their time and outlined the timeline for next steps, agreeing that Working Groups would be set up before the next council meeting in April.