



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport

## VISITOR ECONOMY ADVISORY COUNCIL

11:00 - 12:00, Thursday 17th July 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                                                     |
| Fiona Eastwood      | Merlin Entertainments                                         |
| Paul Flaum          | Bourne Leisure                                                |
| Jody Ford           | Trainline                                                     |
| Dr Sarah Green OBE  | NewcastleGateshead Initiative                                 |
| Andy Harmer OBE     | Cruise Lines International Association                        |
| Dame Irene Hays DBE | Hays Travel                                                   |
| Fiona Macconnacher  | Booking.com                                                   |
| Kate Nicholls OBE   | UKHospitality                                                 |
| Ken O'Toole         | Manchester Airports Group                                     |
| Jeremy Rees         | ExCel London                                                  |
| Kate Shane          | Blackpool Council Leisure Portfolio                           |
| Shaon Talukder      | Geotourist                                                    |
| Patricia Yates      | VisitBritain/VisitEngland                                     |

### Observers

| Name         | Organisation |
|--------------|--------------|
| Nicola Hower | DCMS         |

|                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Duncan Parish   | DCMS                       |
| Lata Mistry     | DCMS                       |
| Harriet Somers  | DCMS                       |
| Liam Broom      | DCMS                       |
| Maisie McNamara | DCMS (Council Secretariat) |
| Hamza Modi      | DCMS (Private Office)      |

## Apologies

| Name                 | Organisation                     |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sean Doyle           | British Airways                  |
| Andrew Leveson       | Royal Shakespeare Company        |
| Sir Loyd Grossman    | Royal Parks                      |
| Neil Rami            | West Midlands Growth Company     |
| Mayor Richard Parker | West Midlands Combined Authority |
| Julia Simpson        | World Travel & Tourism Council   |

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

- Karin Sheppard thanked members for joining the meeting and for the work that had been carried out by the working groups.
- Karin noted that the primary aim of this meeting was to discuss the investment thesis, working group recommendations and a potential framework for the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy, with a focus on prioritising asks, as it will be difficult to progress without agreeing on what is most important for the sector as a whole.

## Item 2: Investment Thesis

- The investment thesis, while it may still have gaps, demonstrates how large the sector is and its potential for growth. Members agreed that it is helpful to have an independently verified document that can be used as the basis for the next stages of strategy development, although some council members flagged the need for it to be tied in with the industrial strategy.
- Some council members encouraged greater mention of aviation, skills, data, technology and the disparities between the regions and London.
- It was noted that while the thesis could certainly be developed further, it was a starting point and has served well to highlight what is key for the strategy and may not be the best use of resources.

- Council members acknowledged the need to get behind key growth initiatives to transform the sector from being great to being even greater, with the hope that there will be a focus on their specific interests in the long term.

### Item 3: Working Group Proposals & Visitor Economy Strategy

- Duncan Parish (Deputy Director, Visitor Economy) introduced the item asking for feedback from council members on what they believe the direction should be for the strategy and what the sector actually wants to achieve?
- It was noted that the strategy should create a narrative with energy behind it that people can get excited about, pulling on already established brands and creating a buzz.
- Council members discussed:
  - **Regional growth to complement not rival:** There must be a focus on regional, but sight shouldn't be lost of London as one of the primary reasons visitors come to the UK. The aim is to play on the diverse strengths of each region; the UK is a competitive destination against other countries, not between regions and London.
  - **Focus on the end consumer:** The strategy must look at the end consumer and what makes this exciting for visitors. Too much cost pushed on to the consumer will drive the consumers away.
  - **Marketing:** the UK has many brilliant offers, how do you get these in front of potential visitors? There's a risk with the creation of Great British Rail that much of the domestic marketing done by train companies will cease.
  - **Measuring success:** There needs to be a clear baseline for all of the objectives and measures so that progress can be tracked.
- Cross government collaboration was raised as a key factor for both developing and delivering the strategy:
  - Early awareness of changes to legislation or regulation which may counteract or derail some of the initiatives in the strategy would allow for better mitigation by the sector.
  - Some of the proposals put forward for the strategy have policy levers held by other departments.

### Item 5: Closing Remarks and Next Steps

- Minister Bryant thanked members for their time and contributions, noting that the council would next be meeting in September.