



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

VISITOR ECONOMY ADVISORY COUNCIL
11:00 - 11:45, Wednesday 17th September 2025

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Stephanie Peacock MP	Minister for Sports, Tourism, Civil Society and Youth (co-Chair)
Karin Sheppard	IHG Hotels and Resorts (co-Chair)
Joss Croft OBE	UKInbound
Fiona Eastwood	Merlin Entertainments
Paul Flaum OBE	Bourne Leisure
Dr Sarah Green OBE	NewcastleGateshead Initiative
Andy Harmer OBE	Cruise Lines International Association
Fiona MacConnacher	Booking.com
Kate Nicholls OBE	UKHospitality
Ken O'Toole	Manchester Airports Group
Jeremy Rees	ExCel London
Kate Shane MBE	Blackpool Council Leisure Portfolio
Shaon Talukder	Geotourist
Patricia Yates	VisitBritain/VisitEngland

Observers

Name	Organisation
Genevieve Bach	IHG Hotels & Resorts
Laura Backhouse	DCMS
Sam Hanford	DCMS (Private Office)

Nicola Hewer	DCMS
Ann Kanari	DCMS
Maisie McNamara	DCMS (Council Secretariat)
Lata Mistry	DCMS
Harriet Somers	DCMS
Duncan Parish	DCMS

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Sean Doyle	British Airways
Jody Ford	Trainline
Sir Loyd Grossman	The Royal Parks
Andrew Leveson	Royal Shakespeare Company
Dame Irene Hays	Hays Travel
Mayor Richard Parker	West Midlands Combined Authority
Neil Rami	West Midlands Growth Company
Julia Simpson	World Travel and Tourism Council

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

- Minister Peacock opened the meeting by thanking members for their time and flexibility. She also thanked Sir Chris Bryant, previous Minister for Tourism for his work in championing the Visitor Economy and his passion for the work the Council had begun.
- Minister Peacock noted that it is an exciting time to take on the Tourism portfolio as a sector with huge potential for growth, as well as being a sector which brings such joy and excitement to people's lives.
- Karin Sheppard welcomed the Minister and thanked her for making the time to meet with the Council so soon after taking on the brief, as well as also thanking Sir Chris Bryant for his enthusiasm and support over the past year.

Item 2: State of the Sector

- Karin introduced the agenda item, highlighting the value of the Visitor Economy to the wider economy as well as having strong spillover into local economies, adding economic and social value.

- The sector is facing challenges; the key future challenge is losing market share to other countries as they are proactively focusing on growth in their tourism sectors.
- The Council Working Groups were highlighted as a key element of the Council and the work it had undertaken so far, particularly in ensuring broader engagement with the sector. Karin handed over to the Chairs of each working group to provide an overview:
 - **Skills & Workforce, chaired by Kate Nicholls OBE**
 - The Visitor Economy is uniquely placed to get the economically inactive into work, and it represents one of the most geographically dispersed, flexible, and accessible parts of the labour market. Where the 8 key sectors of the growth plan are not present, tourism and hospitality always are.
 - The group has started mapping out how the sector can move people from welfare to work, including a 90-day induction training program that provides a digital skills passport.
 - The sector can drive productivity by focusing on common transferable skills, bringing together leading academic voices, and using AI to ensure the sector offers a career of choice with good quality jobs, careers, and continuous professional development.
 - **Regional, chaired by Dr Sarah Green OBE**
 - The Visitor Economy is key to place-making and an enjoyable visit can lead to greater investment in an area. However, one of the main challenges is raising awareness of what different regions have to offer and drawing visitors to those areas. 56% of international visitors are unaware of what is available outside of London.
 - It was noted that business events, linking attractions and making sure the Visitor Economy is a key factor in local growth plans are all essential to the success of the sector across the country.
 - Domestic Tourism was highlighted as needing to be as much of a focus as inbound and outbound tourism since regions are heavily reliant on domestic tourism.
 - There are many opportunities but all rely on improved infrastructure and close collaboration with transport, which is often fragile or strategically lacking.
 - **International, chaired by Joss Croft OBE**
 - The Visitor Economy is the UK's fifth largest export sector, larger than both the automobile and pharmaceutical. The UK is the 7th most visited country in the world and ranks 5th for overall perception but 113th for price competitiveness and 18th for welcome.

- Engagement with other government departments will be essential for the success of the sector.
- Karin Sheppard then opened up the conversation to the wider group:
 - Members of the Council voiced their support and pride in being a part of a group whose focus is to help grow the Visitor Economy and the UK's economy, creating jobs and boosting careers.
 - It was noted that the sector is under significant pressure but with the right conditions could be the answer to some of the challenges facing the country.
 - Members also mentioned that Cruise and Aviation are two major drivers in the Visitor Economy. 90% of international visitors arrive by plane, more than twice the figure of some of the UK's main competitors such as France and Italy. Cruises bring in 2.2 million people each year, many of whom are spread geographically across the country.
 - New air routes to Canada and Asia as well as increased visits from Europe have created a huge sense of optimism about next year.
- Karin thanked members for their contributions and handed back to Minister Peacock to close the meeting.

Item 3: Closing Remarks

- Minister Peacock thanked members again for their time, thoughts, enthusiasm and kindness. The points made about the impact on the economy, society and regions are salient, as are the points about connectivity - something she is particularly aware of from a constituency perspective.
- Minister Peacock emphasised the desire to get out and about to see in practice what the sector is facing and to continue championing the Visitor Economy and the work the Council has been doing.