



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

VISITOR ECONOMY ADVISORY COUNCIL

10:00 - 10:45, Thursday 10th April 2025

MINUTES

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Sir Chris Bryant MP	Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and Tourism (co-Chair)
Karin Sheppard	IHG Hotels and Resorts (co-Chair)
Andrew Leveson	Royal Shakespeare Company
Dame Irene Hays DBE	Hays Travel
Jeremy Rees	ExCel London
Jody Ford (online)	Trainline
Joss Croft OBE	UKInbound
Julia Simpson	World Travel and Tourism Council
Kate Nicholls OBE	UKHospitality
Kate Shane	Blackpool Council Leisure Portfolio
Ken O'Toole (online)	Manchester Airports Group
Neil Rami	West Midlands Growth Company
Patricia Yates	VisitBritain/VisitEngland
Paul Flaum	Bourne Leisure
Mayor Richard Parker	West Midlands Combined Authority
Dr Sarah Green OBE	NewcastleGateshead Initiative
Shaon Talukder	Geotourist

Observers

Name	Organisation
Nicola Hewer	DCMS
Duncan Parish	DCMS
Lata Mistry	DCMS
Maisie McNamara	DCMS (Council Secretariat)
Hamza Modi	DCMS (Private Office)
Genevieve Bach	IHG Hotels and Resorts

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Andy Harmer OBE	Cruise Lines International Association
Fiona Eastwood	Merlin Entertainments
Fiona Macconnacher	Booking.com
Sir Loyd Grossman CBE	The Royal Parks
Sean Doyle	British Airways

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

- Minister Bryant welcomed members to the second council meeting and for their time commitment to the Visitor Economy Engagement Forum, outlining how important it is to engage the wider sector in the council's work and the Visitor Economy Strategy.
- Karin thanked members for travelling to Birmingham. She noted that the sector is still grappling with rising wages and National Insurance Contribution costs, and that the latest news of VisitBritain's GREAT budget being cut was a disappointment for the sector, while acknowledging Minister Bryant's support in government budget discussions. Karin noted there is a lot to do, but that despite the challenges facing the sector, it still has great potential to drive UK economic growth and job creation.

Item 2: State of the Sector

- Karin opened to the floor to ask Council members for their insights on the current state of the sector. Key points were:
 - There's both a labour and a skills shortage. Once staff are in post, they can be upskilled rapidly, moving from entry-level to experiences in around 18 months.

- The cuts to the GREAT international marketing budget are disappointing; the sector is vulnerable due to reliance on pots of money across government.
- The Visitor Economy is an excellent sector for getting the economically inactive into work quickly and efficiently but there doesn't seem to be much government recognition of this.
- Cross Governmental collaboration is essential, and there needs to be one consistent message from industry and officials to demonstrate the value that the Visitor Economy can add. This includes in diplomatic visits, there should be a focus on tourism and the UK visitor economy offer.
- In light of current US trade policy, international visitor spend is one of the only exports that doesn't attract a tariff.

Item 3: Working Group Progress

- Paul Flaum presented an overview of the work that had been undertaken on the investment thesis since the last council meeting. He noted that Deloitte had been appointed to look at the compelling argument as to why and how investment should be made in the Visitor Economy.
- Sarah Green OBE *regional growth working group chair*
 - The regional working group is looking to focus on Domestic tourism and competitiveness.
 - The working group had determined that there is a long term market failure that will take long term solutions, but they had considered short term solutions too. As such, the working group had so far come up with four key recommendations:
 - For the Visitor Economy Strategy to be accompanied by a spatial plan so that it isn't place agnostic and contains a focus on strengths of local areas.
 - To introduce a standing interdepartmental working group to look at transport links
 - For government to commit to working with partners to recognise the domestic market
 - To use local growth plans to allocate business events.
- Joss Croft OBE, *international competitiveness working group chair*
 - Joss outlined the broad membership of the working group, with representatives from retail, sport, accommodation, airlines, cruise, tech/digital, VisitBritain, Tourism Alliance and Home Office.

- The group had pulled together terms of reference and decided to look at barriers to growth and global best practice with next steps to look at the story of inbound tourism and the competitive landscape.
- The group had also commissioned a piece of research which they should receive soon.
- Kate Nicholls OBE, *Skills, Workforce and Careers working group chair*
 - The group had focused on data in the first instance, and Kate noted that ONS doesn't have enough data to develop metrics on DCMS sectors which is a challenge when looking at skills and workforce shortages in the Visitor Economy.
 - The group has linked up with the skills working groups from the Hospitality and Food and Drink Sector Councils to develop a baseline.
 - The group were also focusing on common induction standards across the industry to show transferable skills and also on the SWAPs digital skills pilot.
 - Another area of focus is the perception of the sector, they are looking at ways to join up and collaborate in the development of Centres of Excellence.

Item 4: Next Steps for the Visitor Economy Strategy

- Duncan Parish outlined that the next meeting will be in late June/July. Drafting of the Strategy would then take place over summer months and be reviewed again by the Council in September, with a view to publication in late Autumn.

Item 5: Closing Remarks

- Minister Bryant thanked members for their time and their engagement.