

Board Meeting 26 April 2018

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE, TITANIC QUARTER
ON THURSDAY 26 APRIL 2018**

Present:

- Mr Terence Brannigan (Chairman)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Mr Colin Neill
- Mr Michael McQuillan
- Ms Michele Shirlow
- Mr Geoff Wilson
- Mr Terry McCartney

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Jill McKee, Director of Finance
- Mr Dave Vincent, Chief Digital Officer (Item 1)
- Mr Brian Gillanders, IT Services Manager (Item 1)
- Ms Claire Cromie, Digital Officer (Item 1)
- Ms Jackie Henry, Deloitte (Item 7)
- Ms Stacy Bonar, Deloitte (Item 7)
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

Apologies:

None

1. Introduction and Digital Programme Update

1 (i) Introduction

The Chairman welcomed those present and reminded attendees that minutes of the Board Meeting would be published. He asked if any persons present wished to declare interests in relation to agenda items. No declarations were made.

1 (ii) Digital Programme Update

Tourism NI's Chief Digital Officer Dave Vincent presented an update to the Board on progress with workstreams in the digital work programme originally outlined to the Board in June 2017.

An early indication of Tourism NI's increasing influence in the digital sphere was noted to be the inclusion of tourism initiatives amongst the key projects identified in Matrix NI's recently published creative cluster report. Updates were given on a number of key digital infrastructure projects including managed services, connectivity for Tourism NI's Dublin office and upgrades to IT equipment and mobile assets.

The presentation also highlighted collaborative projects with partners in local government such as smart city challenges, with potential to significantly enhance visitors' experiences and provide them with inspiring real time information while they are here in Northern Ireland. This would not simply allow Tourism NI and partners to better connect with visitors but to aggregate data, connect with the industry and inform better policymaking. A tourism data hub would be required in order to effect this. The approach represents something not previously attempted in such a joined-up way and challenges remain in respect of delivery which require the Board's wholehearted support to surmount.

Commenting on the presentation Members remarked favourably on the progress achieved to date. Members suggested that in order to fully understand the potential of the digital programme and the requirement for resources to build visitor-centric functions, the Board should hold a workshop that would allow a practical demonstration of one or more of the immersive technology initiatives and inform discussions with sponsor departments about Tourism NI's resource needs to support digital ambitions. **(ACTION: DV)**.

The Board noted that the digital programme represented one element of an evolution in Tourism NI's capabilities that would determine the successful delivery of strategic objectives. The other element was a restructuring of the organisation and it was agreed that a further workshop should be convened so that the Board could give detailed consideration to the outworkings of PA Consulting's report on structures **(ACTION: JMcG)**.

1 (iii) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – Awareness Session

In preparation for GDPR coming into full enforcement on 25 May, Tourism NI's IT Services Manager Brian Gillanders delivered a presentation setting out the main points of the regulation. This outlined Tourism NI's obligations on matters of data security and the Board's role both in managing the security of information that they receive themselves, and in monitoring the implementation of the rule. It was agreed that reports on GDPR implementation and any possible breaches should form a regular item within the Chief Executive's report. Future Board Meeting papers would be shared by means of a secure web application, and a training session to familiarise members with this will be delivered at the start of the June Board Meeting. The Board noted the content of the presentation and asked to be provided with an aide memoire setting out the key points **(ACTION: BG)**.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

2 (i) Minutes of Last Board Meeting

Minutes of the Board meeting held at Rademon Estate in Crossgar on 8th March were approved as an accurate record and signed.

2 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

An update was given on actions arising from the previous meeting with updates given as follows:

Belfast Destination Hub (a major cultural and visitor destination in Belfast) – a presentation will be given to the Board at its June meeting.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) – The Chief Executive reported that he had met NILGA's CEO to arrange a meeting with Tourism NI's Strategic Partnerships Committee.

VisitBritain – Katy Best had been due to attend and give an update on VisitBritain activity. However, it was agreed that a more comprehensive update could be given at the June Board Meeting, following a joint VisitBritain / Tourism Ireland meeting scheduled for the end of May.

Game of Thrones – **This minute is non-disclosable under the 'Section 43 – trade secrets and prejudice to commercial interests' exemption of the Freedom of Information Act (2000). This exemption is subject to a public interest test.**

Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) - The Board was advised that the next set of tourism statistics is due to be published on 7 June. As the milestone target of £1bn tourism revenue target could potentially be reached around then, Members asked that appropriate plans should be put in place to secure recognition of this significant milestone for the growth of the tourism sector (**ACTION: SB**). It was suggested that an Annual Review should be prepared in order to capitalise on this milestone achievement and to highlight other tourism successes throughout the past year including the Lonely Planet accolade for Belfast and the Causeway, the Irish Open and Titanic Belfast's ongoing successes.

3. Governance

3 (i) a. Quarter IV 2017-18 Reports – Operating Plan Performance Monitoring

The Board was presented with a report setting out progress against Operating Plan objectives at the year end. There was a discussion of the constraints placed upon long term planning for strategic product development as approval of Tourism capital projects was limited to those where the capital expenditure would be fully concluded in the current financial year.

The Board noted the position in relation to an events strategy and asked for an interim update on event funding schemes for 2018/19. At this point Geoff Wilson declared an interest and left the room. An update was given on the application process. Members were advised that all applications received for the International Events Funds had been subjected to independent evaluation. The Board recommended that advice and feedback should be given to applicants where appropriate and asked for a list of successful applicants to be shared with them (**ACTION: AK**). Geoff Wilson then rejoined the meeting.

The Board also received an update on work to develop a business case for revised organisational structures. It was emphasised that details need to be agreed with DfE's new senior team and that resource issues will represent a significant challenge in the coming year. The issue has been logged within the risk register. Members discussed alternatives and there was a need to showcase

Tourism NI's achievements and the visionary things it is seeking to do. The Board agreed that senior Departmental officials should be invited to a discussion highlighting the opportunities. **(ACTION: JMcG).**

3 (i) b. Finance Report

A report was given on the budget position as at 31 March. Actual expenditure at year end was outlined in comparison with the budget allocation; the figures had been reported to the Department although remaining provisional at this stage. Final spend was noted to be within the tolerances set out by DfE.

The budget allocations for 2018-19 were also outlined and bids for June's Monitoring round were being sought. Bids had been sought from each of the business units. These will be prioritised and presented to the Board for approval at the next Board Meeting.

Noting the year-end position the Board thanked the Director of Finance and her team for their work in helping to bring the budgets in within the limits set.

3 (i) c Risk Register

A report was presented on the monitoring and management of risks in the final quarter of 2017-18. Staffing issues were noted to continue to represent a challenge. The Board was advised of ongoing work on the experience brand to ensure it was market-ready, with consumer testing taking place on a number of variants. A report on this phase of work will be presented to the Board in the summer months. Members commented that the significant risk lies in the potential for the brand to be under-resourced. They suggested that there would be value in arranging a visit to meet with Failte Ireland to get a sense of how propositions such as the Wild Atlantic Way were developed and resourced and asked the Chief Executive to pursue this **(ACTION: JMcG).**

4. Discussion Items

4 (i) Revised Conflict of Interest and Whistleblowing Policy

As part of a broader process to review Tourism NI's HR policies, the Board was presented with revised policies on whistleblowing and conflicts of interest. Members were advised that training would be provided for relevant staff in funding and finance roles, as part of the process of rolling these out. In developing the new policies, engagement had taken place with the trade union and Internal Audit Service. The Chief Executive made it clear to members that the policies would also apply to Board Members

The Board was content to approve the new policies.

5. Items for Noting

5 (i) The Open Update

At the previous Board Meeting a presentation was given on preparations for the 148th Open at Royal Portrush and Members had agreed that this should remain a standing item on Board agendas in the run up to the event. An update was given, including a report on ticket sales. There

was a discussion of the rationale behind the R&A's policy on re-admissions which was noted to be in the interests of consumer protection. This would form a key item at a forthcoming briefing being arranged by the R&A at Royal Portrush.

5 (ii) VisitBritain

A report was noted detailing progress on agreed activity in Tourism NI's Memorandum of Understanding with VisitBritain. Members were advised that VisitBritain supplies a number of valuable services to Tourism NI for which it receives a small amount of resource. In return, Northern Ireland secures a place on VisitBritain promotional platforms, extending Tourism NI's marketing reach in GB and beyond. Members asked about how value for money might be measured and it was agreed that this could be pursued as part of a discussion scheduled for the next Board Meeting.

5 (iii) Experience Brand Programme

The Board noted the content of an update on progress with developing the experience Brand. A full update is to be given at a future Board meeting.

6. Reports

6 (i) Chairman's Report

Engagements undertaken by the Chairman since the last Board meeting were noted. The Chairman gave a detailed report on his participation in the MIPIM property conference and of presentations given by hotel developers and franchises at the expo. Members enquired about the process by which leads from the event were progressed and were advised that Invest NI follows up on initial contacts. The Board discussed what Tourism NI might do to encourage banks to invest more throughout Northern Ireland. It was emphasised that Tourism NI is not in a position to make recommendations on agents or developers.

The Chairman also reported on a preview visit to the new AC by Marriott Hotel at the City Quays development in Belfast, commenting that this represented a good new addition to the city's accommodation stock. He advised the Board that together with Colin Neill, he had undertaken a refresher course in governance training. A report was also given on the Chairman's attendance at a reception hosted by Historic Royal Palaces in the Tower of London, at which Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council had launched its Tourism Strategy. A minister representing the Northern Ireland Office had been present and the Chairman advised that he had taken the opportunity to discuss the need for the Industrial Strategy to include tourism as a priority sector.

6 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

The content of the report was noted and the following issues highlighted:

Treasury call for evidence – The Board was advised that the UK Treasury is issuing a request for evidence in respect of Air Passenger Duty and VAT on tourism. Consultation sessions would be held in early May.

Belfast Destination Hub – the status of the project was outlined. A more detailed update will be presented to the Board at its next meeting in June by consultants commissioned to progress the business case for the project.

Experience Development – the Board suggested that it would be useful to carry out a ‘sense check’ of the brand with the largest tour operators on the island of Ireland. Members were advised that Tourism NI is discussing with Failte Ireland how its contacts in ROI might be used for that purpose.

Game of Thrones – the Board was advised that a forthcoming Tourism NI insight event focused on screen tourism is generating significant interest.

Council Tourism Strategies – Noting that Tourism NI is engaging with local authorities on the development of their individual strategies, the Board suggested that it would be useful for Members to see either the strategies or a document summarising key points (**ACTION: SB**).

Certification – The Board’s attention was drawn to a rise in requests for certification driven by a recent PR campaign underlining the statutory requirements.

Spring Campaign – Members were advised that while the industry gave very positive feedback on the campaign’s impact, earlier receipt of Tourism NI’s budget allocation would have permitted better planning and potentially would have been still more effective. The campaign was noted to have visibly created greater confidence in the industry.

Meet the Buyer – Noting the increased scale of this year’s event, on behalf of the Board the Chairman warmly commended Tourism NI staff involved for its success. This was borne out in particular by enquiries about Meet the Buyer and Northern Ireland from buyers who were also in attendance at Meitheal, held just beforehand. In particular it was noted that buyers are increasingly enquiring about exploring areas of Northern Ireland other than Belfast or the Causeway Coast.

Northern Ireland Tourism Awards – the support of Board Members was sought in agreeing suitable recipients of the Local Hero and Lifetime Recognition awards.

Hosts Global Forum – It was agreed that the Chief Executive would circulate a schedule for the Forum, indicating where Board Members might be required to support the event (**ACTION: NW**).

Jill McKee and Jim Daly left the meeting at this point to permit the remainder of the meeting to be conducted as a closed session.

7. Board Review of Effectiveness

Jackie Henry and Stacy Bonar from Deloitte joined the meeting to present the results of the Board’s self-assessment of its effectiveness. A detailed presentation was given to members on their input into the online survey and associated commentary, which they had individually provided. It was agreed that a workshop should be arranged to discuss the key points and develop an action plan to address any issues arising from the review (**ACTION: JMcG**).

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 7 June at Tourism NI Headquarters, Linum Chambers.