

## Board Meeting 13 December 2018

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, LINUM CHAMBERS, BELFAST  
ON THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER 2018**

Present:

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

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Aine Robinson, Director of Finance (items 3(i) – 3 (ii))
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing (from item 6 (i))
- Ms Louise Kearney, Director of Organisational Development and HR
- Mr Dave Vincent, Chief Digital Officer
- Mr Stephen Smyth, PA Consulting (item 1)
- Mr Michael McClelland, PA Consulting (item 1)
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

Apologies: None

### **1. Tourism NI Service Delivery and Transformation**

#### **1 (i) Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed those present and prefaced the first item by reminding attendees that minutes of the meeting would be published. He asked if anyone present wished to declare interests in respect of agenda items. Referring to the Chief Executive's report on measures to assist Belfast City Centre's recovery following the fire at Bank Buildings, Colin Neill declared an interest as a member of the working group established for that purpose. As the report represented an update and no decision was required, the Board agreed his withdrawal from the meeting was not necessary.

## **1 (ii) Tourism NI Service Delivery and Transformation**

Representatives of PA Consulting joined the Board for a discussion of their draft report setting out a model for future Tourism NI structures and resources to support delivery of the Tourism Strategy to 2030. The presentation was requested by the Board at its last meeting in order to better understand the evolution from the current organisational structure to the future delivery framework. The Board discussed the achievability of the proposed £2bn visitor spend target and was advised that all figures indicate a growth rate of at least 5%; however the acquisition of timely and authoritative visitor statistics was noted currently to present a challenge.

Principles underpinning future service delivery were set out, based upon Tourism NI's current mission and objectives and mapped to six headline areas that would be essential to support the Tourism Strategy. These are the delivery of world class experiences and events; strategic development and capability building; promoting Northern Ireland in the domestic market and the Republic of Ireland; supporting Tourism Ireland in international promotion of Northern Ireland; delivery of the Northern Ireland experience brand; and enabling the industry to sell better.

Emphasis was placed on the need for Tourism NI to become better at demonstrating the benefits that the wider economy derives from its interventions. Also discussed were the significant resources being made available to support tourism growth in near competitor destinations, and the risk that growth in Northern Ireland would falter if it is not similarly supported.

Consideration had been given to the range of capabilities required to underpin each service area. Digital capability and good governance were felt to be fundamental to all. A proposed directorate structure was set out based on these capabilities, along with a supporting second tier structure. Transformation activity would be critical and key to success would be the agility and adaptability of both the organisation and individual staff. The Board recommended that change management should be a central capability of the HR function.

The Board moved on to discuss staffing and resource requirements. This was felt to be an area requiring refinement in order to present a realistic and achievable proposal to the Department for Economy (DfE). The Board felt that government had a responsibility to invest in supporting tourism and to ensure that Tourism NI is the primary conduit for such Investment, with clarity required on collaborative activity with Invest NI.

It was agreed that the Senior Management Team would review the resource requirements and that the report would undergo further revisions on foot of commentary from the Board. A finalised report would be presented for the Board to confirm that it is content with the approach before submission to DfE (**ACTION: JMcG**).

## **2. Minutes of Last Meeting**

### **2 (i) Minutes of Last Meeting**

Minutes of the Board's meeting on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November were approved as an accurate record and signed.

## **2 (ii) Matters Arising from previous Board Meeting**

The Board noted completed action points following on from the last meeting and updates were given as follows.

*Conflict of Interest Training* – As some Members had been unavailable to attend the training, a further session is being arranged (**ACTION:** JD).

*Hospitality Skills Action Plan* – a meeting scheduled with DfE had been postponed and is due to take place on 15 January.

*Feedback on Board venues* – the Board was advised of measures put in place to follow up on feedback regarding venues and accommodation for ‘away’ meetings.

*Belfast Recovery Campaign* – the Board was advised that £400k of funding had been provided through DfE to support recovery. £100k had been provided to support a Visit Belfast campaign in the lead up to Christmas. A further £100k would be used to include a specific Belfast focus in Tourism NI’s spring campaign and discussions are taking place with Belfast City Council as to how the remaining £200k can best be used.

*Lunch with Tourism Ireland Board* – The Chairman had raised issues discussed at the last Board meeting informally with the Tourism Ireland Chair, and agreed to follow this up in writing (**ACTION:** TB).

*Strategic Planning Workshop* – Members were advised that the Board’s strategic workshop planned for January coincides with an event being organised by the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance and it was agreed to find a venue nearby that might permit the Board to attend. It was also agreed that in advance of the workshop, it would be useful for the facilitator to speak to the Chairman and Michael McQuillan. Terry McCartney gave his apologies in advance.

## **3. Governance**

### **3 (i) Finance Report**

A report was given on budgets. The Board’s attention was drawn to variances in expenditure versus budget, with £386k profiled not spent. In part delays in spend had been the result of a request from the Department to review business cases for approval. DfE had subsequently decided that such a requirement was not necessary. The Senior Management Team reviewed variances on a monthly basis and the Board was advised that the reasons for variances were fair and reasonable. The backlog in the Central Procurement Directorate process was also noted to be creating substantial difficulty in progressing projects quickly, with a number of innovative immersive technology projects unable to be delivered due to the timelines involved. It was agreed that this issue should be raised at the debrief meeting with the Department.

An update was given on Administration budget spend and the Board was pleased to note that staff back pay had now been processed in full. The Board’s attention was also drawn to Tourism NI’s contribution toward the new Belfast cruise terminal. Members discussed the need to better understand the spend per head derived from cruise visitors and the need to achieve greater regional dispersal where possible.

### **3 (ii) Budget Reallocations**

As requested by the Board at its last meeting a paper was presented setting out the Senior Management Team's proposals for where unallocated budget should be directed. This would leave Tourism NI on course to meet the spend targets set by the Department. The proposals included a sum of £25k towards an event at Borough Market in which Food NI was involved. The Board agreed that Michele Shirlow should withdraw from the meeting to permit the Board to consider approval. The Board approved the proposals for the reallocation of funds. The Board was also advised that Tourism NI is planning activity to capitalise on the recent award of Best Food Destination at World Travel Market.

Michele Shirlow rejoined the meeting.

At this point the Board received an update on arrangements for a forthcoming red carpet event to commence the run-up to the 148<sup>th</sup> Open at Portrush. The programme for the evening was outlined. The Board requested that Members be fully briefed on their roles with key tourism messages for the evening and suggested that the Let's Talk Tourism fact cards should be available on each table. An update was also given on the ongoing preparations for the tournament itself in July. (**ACTION:** SB).

## **4. Items for Discussion**

### **4 (i) Tourism NI Equality Scheme 2018-23**

A new draft Equality Scheme and Action Plan was presented for the Board's approval. This had been prepared with input from the Equality Commission. The Board approved the Scheme and asked the Chief Executive to confirm if the Equality Commission's approval was also required (**ACTION:** JMcG).

It was noted that the Commission's primary interest will be in how Tourism NI implements the scheme and the Board was advised that staff had recently undergone a refresher training programme on Tourism NI's obligations under Section 75. Training was also confirmed to form part of staff induction.

### **4 (ii) Tourism NI Recruitment and Selection Policy**

A new draft recruitment and selection policy was presented for the Board's approval. Members were advised that this was part of a wider review of all Tourism NI's HR policies following a recommendation by Internal Audit Service, to ensure that the organisation is fully compliant with all its statutory and legislative obligations. The review of all 27 policies is expected to take twelve months to complete, with priority being given to policies requiring urgent review. Members recommended that the new recruitment and selection policy should support the objectives of the review of service delivery.

With regard to the specifics of the policy the Board was advised that in most instances the policy will now align with NI Civil Service policy; however given Tourism NI's small size a requirement to initially recruit internally disadvantages it, both in terms of acquiring new expertise and in creating new pressures when staff members change roles internally. The new policy therefore proposes that staff officer posts would be advertised simultaneously externally and internally. Noting that

the next step will be to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment, the Board approved the new policy. Members also recommended that streamlining or amalgamation of the 27 HR policies should be considered, if possible.

## **5. Standing Items**

### **5 (i) Chairman's Report**

A list of engagements undertaken by the Chairman since the last Board Meeting was presented and noted. The Chairman reported on an introductory meeting with the new Deputy Secretary at DfE. This had been a wide ranging and positive conversation and gave assurance of the Department's support for what Tourism NI and the Board are seeking to do.

The Chairman also advised the Board of a discussion requested by Katy Radford of the Institute for Conflict Research on "dark tourism" and how it is often characterised, particularly in light of some recent media coverage. The Chairman advised that he had referred to the Belfast Story project as a possible avenue to approach the subject matter in a more balanced and nuanced fashion. There was a broad discussion of Tourism NI activity in engaging with stakeholders involved in what is sometimes now referred to as "phoenix tourism", and possible measures to encourage providers to consider the sensitivities of audiences in developing tours and other visitor content.

Reports were also given on a positive meeting with the Chairman of Belfast Chamber of Commerce and a meeting with the UK-US ambassador in the margins of the very successful Friendship Four event. The Board was advised that a meeting scheduled with Sport NI to discuss opportunities for collaboration had been cancelled by them. The Board discussed how Sport NI and local authorities would have a useful role to play in supporting the new events vision and strategy. The Chairman also gave a report on the recent Belfast Homecoming events to which he had been invited and emphasised his use of these as an opportunity to promote Tourism NI's strategic objectives.

### **5 (ii) Chief Executive's Report**

The Board noted the content of the Chief Executive's report and updates were given on a number of specific issues as follows:

*Tourism Sector Deal* – the Board was pleased to note the very positive announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Tourism NI had been asked by Visit Britain to facilitate a follow-up workshop with the local industry and the CEO stated that he hoped the announcement may assist in gaining greater prominence for tourism within the Northern Ireland Industrial Strategy. Colin Neill declared an interest, advising that he is represented on a group chaired by UK Hospitality as part of VisitBritain's initiative.

*Tourism Statistics* – the Board was advised of delays in receiving NISRA statistics as a result of issues with input that it receives from the Central Statistics Office in ROI. Alternative sources of data are being sought and some other statistical resources are already being used informally to reinforce the data provided by NISRA. The Board was advised that the Chief Executive is visiting some banks along with ASM Horwath, to brief them on the performance of the hotel sector to assist in supporting lending decisions.

*Chambers of Commerce* – The Board was also advised that as part of its engagement activity Tourism NI has joined the UK/Ireland and Dublin Chambers of Commerce, initially for a single year. The Board's participation in engagements may be sought as opportunities arise. Tourism NI had been given a platform at Tourism Ireland's recent marketing plans launch and that had proved a useful and positive development.

*Food Month* – the Chief Executive reported on a meeting with industry providers and government/tourism sector interests from ROI to discuss proposals for an all-island Food Month. It was stressed that should the initiative proceed Tourism NI will require dedicated additional financial and people resources to deliver it.

The Board was also advised of activity to capitalise on the recent Best Food Destination Award at World Travel Market. Members also noted that the BBC Good Food Show organisers had been granted approval under the terms of its original letter of offer, to bring the show in a revised format to a new venue at Hillsborough Castle.

*Cluster Programme* – Cluster activity had proved hugely successful and is clearly valued by many participants, and the programme was being extended. It was emphasised however that Tourism NI's lead on the initiative needed to be complemented by a commitment to collaborate on the part of local authorities and individual businesses.

*Capital Programme* – The Board was advised that the HMS Caroline project is now largely complete, and details were given of the current status of a broader maritime heritage and public realm project incorporating Thompson Dock and Pump-House.

*The 148<sup>th</sup> Open* – the Board noted an update and requested that a fuller report on arrangements be given at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION: AK**).

*Skills* – The Board was advised that a meeting with DfE officials had been rescheduled to 15 January. Reporting on the selection of Belfast Met as the hub for skills, the Chief Executive declared an interest as a member of the Met's board and confirmed that he had not had any involvement in the decision.

*Quality and Standards* – statistics on new accommodation ventures were circulated for the Board's information. This underscored the significant pressures on the Q&S team to complete certification inspections. Members asked if legislative requirements might be set aside and it was confirmed that does not represent a viable option. The present situation presents a reputational risk to Tourism NI in that the backlog needs to be balanced with the potential for rogue operators to trade without certification.

A related issue was noted to be exorbitant prices reported on online booking sites for accommodation around the 148<sup>th</sup> Open. This is presenting a problem in particular for those working on the event and staying for longer periods. In addition to the potential for negative publicity and deterring future visits, 'price gouging' is perceived to be artificially inflating demand for certification of new accommodation. Affordable accommodation remains available in the North Coast area and there was a need to get messages out about that. The Board recommended that Tourism NI should look into organising a media briefing early in the new year to pre-empt these issues and lead into the red carpet event (**ACTION: SB**).

*Business Tourism* – The Board was advised that the recent ITOA workshop had represented a significant success, generating much interest in new product and experiences and a great deal of very positive feedback. A further major coup was represented by securing The Travel Company’s annual conference in 2019, taking place right after the 148<sup>th</sup> Open.

The Board was also pleased to note that Tourism NI’s Marketing Division had received a successful Customer Service Excellence assessment, following on from last year’s success with the Business Support and Events Division.

The Board also received information on the impact of events. Members were advised that underperforming events would be considered as part of the new events strategic vision, currently in preparation. A programme of industry development events for 2019 was also circulated for information.

### **5 (iii) Sub-Committees and Other Reports**

*Audit and Risk Committee* – The Audit Committee Chairman reported on the most recent meeting held on 4 December. It was noted that the independent member Brian McClure is stepping down and Angelina Fusco would assume the role of chairperson in the new year. Audit Committee members hold a closed meeting in advance of their main meeting and it was suggested that a similar arrangement might be useful to the Board. Members agreed that the option for a “Reserved Matters” discussion could be added to future Board meeting agendas as part of any other business (**ACTION: JD**).

Issues discussed at the Audit Committee included the Strategic Partnership Grant Fund and how staffing pressures might best be reflected in the Risk Register, given the results of the staff engagement survey in respect of stress. This was also noted to have been raised with DfE at the debrief following the November Board Meeting to highlight the Board’s concern for staff welfare. The Board was also supportive of Tourism NI’s request to defer an audit of events until the end of April given end of year pressures on the events team.

*Skills Sub Group* – a report was given on the outcomes of a meeting held following the last Board Meeting, at which the group had agreed to the creation of a collaborative network. The sub group had emphasised the need for robust terms of reference for this network and balanced representation in its membership. Discussing Tourism NI’s future role it had been proposed that a management resource should be contracted to support the skills agenda. This, and key themes, would be subject to DfE’s support for the proposal.

## **6. Papers for Noting**

### **6 (i) Memorandum of Understanding with VisitBritain – Update**

The Board noted an update on activity in support of Tourism NI’s Memorandum of Understanding with VisitBritain. Much positive progress had been made and a good relationship was developing. The Board was advised that a report had been received on the recent highly successful Social Travel Summit and it was agreed that this would be placed on the secure app for the Board to review at leisure (**ACTION: JD**).

## **6 (ii) Draft Agenda for Next Board Meeting**

A draft agenda was noted for the next Board Meeting.

## **7. Any Other Business**

### **7 (i) Brexit**

The Board asked what preparations were being made by Tourism NI for Brexit, in the context of the recent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) report. Members were advised of Tourism NI's engagement activity, with the Director of Corporate Development attending meetings of the EU Exit Board. The Board debated whether there was a role for Tourism NI in discussions on immigration requirements given workforce supply issues within the industry. It was suggested that the issue might potentially impact on the Tourism Strategy target for 20,000 jobs by 2030. DfE was noted to be in the lead on all such preparations.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 31 January 2019 at Tourism NI Headquarters in Belfast.