

Board Meeting 25 January 2018

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT CLOTWORTHY HOUSE, ANTRIM CASTLE GARDENS
ON THURSDAY 25 JANUARY 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 Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

Apologies:

None

1. Introduction and Minutes of Last Meeting

1 (i) Minutes of Last Meeting

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. Colin Neill advised in relation to agenda item 3 (ii) (Tourism NI Sponsorship Scheme) that Hospitality Ulster could potentially be an applicant, and said that he would withdraw from discussion at that point. He also advised that his membership of the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance's board had commenced.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 14 December 2017 were approved and signed.

1 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Board received updates on actions arising from previous meetings as follows:

Year of Food and Drink Legacy Action Plan – The Board was advised that in the absence of additional resource to progress the legacy action plan, Tourism NI was working together with Food NI, Invest NI and Tourism Ireland to develop a platform for Northern Ireland's food product at

London's Borough Market in the week prior to St Patrick's Day. Members commented on the need to continue making the case for resource to support activity capitalising on the Year of Food.

Board Workshop – Following on from the workshop event held on 11th and 12th January, a new Operating Plan for 2018/19 is being drafted. The Chief Executive is to circulate a copy of Tourism Sector Bid submitted by the UK tourism Industry in an effort to have tourism prioritised within the UK's Industrial Strategy (**ACTION**: JMcG).

Belfast Cultural Hub – The Board was advised that a steering group had been established to take the project forward. Deloitte and CHL Consulting had been engaged to develop a business case for the project. This will be brought to the Board for consideration when the proposals are more advanced.

Strategic Partnerships Committee – the Board noted that a date had been agreed for the Board's meeting with the CEO for Sport NI.

Board review of effectiveness – the Chief Executive reported that he and the Chairman were due to meet with Deloitte on 15 February to discuss a review of the Board's effectiveness.

Linum Chambers – the Board was advised that further dressing of Tourism NI HQ is being progressed and expected to be complete by the end of March.

Skills – A report was given on a meeting on 15 January with the Department for Economy to discuss progress on the Tourism and Hospitality Skills Action Plan. It was agreed at that meeting to arrange a workshop with the industry to identify a small number of immediate priorities and agree how these could be delivered. Tourism NI's Skills sub group is due to meet on 6 February and DfE officials have been invited to attend that meeting.

The Open – The Board was advised that a full update on The Open will be given at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION**: AK). Delivery structures and areas of responsibility were outlined, and a report was given on the first meeting of the "Gold" delivery groups. Members were advised that while good progress is being made one issue requiring resolution is costs for delivery of water infrastructure to support the event. Given the unprecedented scale and significance of the event, the Board recommended that a full-time Programme Manager was required to oversee delivery and requested that The Open should remain a standing item on Board agendas in the run – up to the tournament.

Board Members commented very favourably on a number of industry events organised recently by Tourism NI including the ROI Taskforce Report launch and an event preparing the ground for the Meet the Buyer Workshop. Both were felt to have been very well received and supported by the industry.

2. Governance

2 (i) a. Quarter III Reports - Operating Plan 2017-18

The Board was presented with a report on progress against the key objectives in the 2017-18 Operating Plan. Members were advised that Tourism NI is seeking to establish what the Department's future capital budget is likely to be in order to progress its own business case for

capital investment. It was noted that circa £100m would be required in order to deliver all the projects that are currently in the pipeline. In this context the Board also discussed City Deals. It was felt that a clearer indication is required of how such a concept would operate in Belfast and the Board suggested that it might be useful to have Belfast City Council representatives attend a Board Meeting for a discussion. The Chief Executive agreed to follow this up (**ACTION: JMcG**). It was observed that any city deal would need to reflect the Northern Ireland Proposition of Scale Experience Development Framework.

A discussion developed on the Proposition of Scale. It was emphasised that work will need to be completed to allow a launch at World Travel Market. The Chief Executive reported that further consumer testing would take place in the interim.

The Board turned to discussing legacy activity to capitalise on the Year of Food and Drink. Successive bids for resource to implement an action plan had been turned down. Members commented that “Year of...” initiatives might no longer be sustainable and suggested that political and Departmental “champions” are needed in order to support sustained activity. It was also emphasised that a strategy needs to be considered for activity commemorating Northern Ireland centenaries in 2021-22. The Chief Executive expressed a view that this should be contextualised within the NIPOS which which is currently in development.

2 (i) b Quarter III Reports – Finance

The Board was presented with a finance report setting out the latest position in respect of Tourism NI’s budget allocation and spend in the year to date. Members’ attention was drawn to additional budget allocation received as a result of a foreign exchange gain arising from the last EU programme. Progress with budget spend across all departments was detailed. Noting the position with capital spend on the HMS Caroline project and its expected completion date, Members suggested that it might be useful for the Board to hold its April meeting in the Titanic Quarter to include a tour of the ship at its new permanent mooring and the surrounding walkways (**ACTION: SS**).

Board Members were reminded that they should seek to submit any outstanding expense claims before the financial year-end.

2 (i) c. Risk Register

The Board was presented with an updated Risk Register. Movement of risks within the summary matrix was attributed largely to the new resource allocation made recently by DfE. It was emphasised that without sustained investment, there remains a likelihood of being unable to deliver on proposals set out in the Tourism Strategy. The forthcoming General Data Protection Regulation was observed to potentially represent a fundamental impact on working practices and will create a requirement for all Tourism NI staff and officials, including Board Members, to receive training in GDPR principles and the obligations it places upon them. It was suggested that it would also be worth considering the implications for the industry, perhaps in tandem with the NI Hotels Federation and/or Hospitality Ulster, with the emphasis on the knowledge, tools and tactics that all businesses need in order to effectively meet the requirements of GDPR and to identify those uses to which data can still be put.

3. Discussion Items

3 (i) Board Self Assessment

At its recent meetings the Board had discussed the need for a self-assessment to review its collective performance and identify objectives. Members were advised that the Chairman and Chief Executive will be meeting with Deloitte to discuss the format of such an assessment.

3 (ii) DfE Budgets 2018-19 and 2019-20

The Chief Executive presented a paper to the Board on potential budget reductions for Tourism NI over the next two years. This was within the context of a budgetary outlook paper issued by the Department of Finance in December, setting out likely scenarios for the funding of public services up to 2020.

Detail was given of three different budget scenarios for the Department for the Economy and DfE had produced a document setting out its view of how reductions might be implemented, including the potential impact on Tourism NI. The CEO had attended a presentation to DfE ALB's on 23 January at which responses to the DoF Paper were discussed.

The Board discussed the current difficult economic environment and the likely role of the new Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance in helping to make a case for sustained investment in tourism, given its increasing success in contributing to the economy. Members also remarked again on the low profile accorded to tourism within the NI Industrial Strategy.

The Board approved a proposed response from the Chief Executive to the Department of Finance and suggested that a submission be prepared for presentation to the Department for Economy outlining the economic impact that tourism is now having in NI and the need to maximise the resources available to deliver on the tourism potential (**ACTION:** JMcG / SMT).

Having previously declared an interest Colin Neill left the meeting for the duration of the following discussion.

3 (iii) Tourism NI Sponsorship Scheme

The Board was presented with draft guidelines for a new Tourism NI Sponsorship Scheme. This had been developed in order to ensure a transparent and consistent approach to requests that Tourism NI receives to support awards, business functions and events and to set out the conditions under which Tourism NI can provide sponsorship. To achieve value for money, the provision of sponsorship would therefore be conditional on alignment with Tourism NI's strategic objectives. The Board approved the draft scheme, subject to minor amendments and commented that Tourism NI could usefully seek to derive some data from event organisers in return for sponsorship (**ACTION:** SB).

3 (iv) *Game of Thrones* (Commercial in Confidence)

The 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.

4. Reports

4 (i) Chairman's Report

The Board noted the content of a report on engagements attended by the Chairman since the last Board Meeting

4 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

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

Tourism performance – Members were advised that the ROI market was continuing to perform strongly despite some indications of a general slowing down in other markets when compared to the rate of growth in the same period in 2016.

Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance – Members were advised that the Steering Group had agreed to incorporate NITA as a limited company. Work is underway to complete this process. An interim Chief Executive had been identified and Colin Neill had agreed to serve as a director in his capacity as CEO of Hospitality Ulster, together with Janice Gault of the NI Hotels Federation.

European Year of Culture and Heritage – the Board was pleased to note a strong response to the launch by Tourism NI (working with the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Environment Division) of a fund supporting new and innovative projects to unlock the potential of heritage assets. Applications for 70 projects worth a total of £2.4m had been received for the fund, the total value of which is £400k.

Events Funding – noting the details of applications received under the events programmes the Board suggested that consideration should be given to some PR activity highlighting the response to funding calls.

Members were advised that the "China Ready" initiative had been well-received and that a wider roll-out is being planned. The Board commended the recent media event highlighting new product at which Fionn Davenport of Lonely Planet had been a keynote speaker.

VisitBritain – the Board was advised of ongoing collaborative activity with Northern Ireland receiving a greater presence on VisitBritain platforms, highlighting Game of Thrones and the Lonely Planet's designation of Belfast and the Causeway as the top region to visit in 2018.

MIPIM – the Board was advised that the Council had approached Tourism NI to be involved for a second year in the MIPIM event in Cannes. The Board remarked that participation in last year's event had been useful and productive and agreed that the CEO / Chairman should attend again.

Dublin Office – An update was given on work to secure new permanent accommodation for the ROI team. Tourism NI, in partnership with Invest NI had been close to agreement on a property

near Connolly Station but this is no longer an option. Temporary accommodation is being sought urgently and discussions are ongoing with a number of partner agencies and trade bodies in ROI in pursuit of a solution.

4 (iii) Sub-Groups / Committee Updates

Audit and Risk Committee – The Committee is not due to meet until February and there was no update to be given.

Skills Sub-Group – The Sub-Group has also not met recently so no update was required.

Strategic Partnerships Sub-Group – An exploratory meeting with the Chief Executive of Sport NI has been agreed for 8th February. A number of discussion topics were suggested.

The Board suggested that it would be useful to invite Katy Best to a future meeting to give an update on VisitBritain's work. **(ACTION: JMcG/NW).**

Revised Terms of Reference for sub-committees are being developed and will be reviewed at the next Board Meeting together with committee memberships **(ACTION: JMcG / SMT).**

6. Any Other Business

There were no other items of substantive business

7. Date of Next Meeting

Members suggested that the April Board Meeting should be held in Belfast in Titanic Quarter with a presentation from Belfast City Council and a tour of HMS Caroline / the Pump House/Thompson Dock Area.

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 8 March at the Shortcross Distillery, Rademon Estate, Crossgar.