

Board Meeting 8 March 2018

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT THE SHORTCROSS DISTILLERY VISITOR CENTRE, RADEMON ESTATE, CROSSGAR
ON THURSDAY 8 MARCH 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
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Ms Eimear Callaghan, Business Solutions Manager
- 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. No declarations were made.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 25 January 2018 were approved subject to a minor amendment.

1 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

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

Corporate Plan – The Board was advised that as the Corporate Plan and Tourism Strategy both require ministerial approval, in the absence of any political settlement the Senior Management Team focused on developing a new Operating Plan which would be presented later in the meeting.

Belfast Cultural Hub – the Board was advised that although unavailable in June, the CEO of Belfast City Council had agreed to attend a forthcoming Board meeting to present on the proposals.

Strategic Partnerships Committee – the Chief Executive reported that he had been due to meet NILGA to invite them to meet the committee, but this was postponed and is to be rescheduled.

Board Review of Effectiveness – Members were advised that Deloitte will attend the next Board Meeting to present its report (**ACTION: JMcG**).

Linum Chambers – dressing of Tourism NI HQ is expected to be complete by the end of March.

Skills – the Board was advised that DfE had scheduled a workshop meeting with industry representatives for 21 March to consider how the Skills Action plan can be progressed.

Game of Thrones (Commercial in Confidence) – **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.**

HMS Caroline – Members discussed a proposed tour of the completed visitor experience to coincide with the next Board Meeting. It was agreed that the tour should include other new attractions in Titanic Quarter including the Titanic Hotel public exhibits and Hickson’s Point (**ACTION: SS**).

Members had previously asked for consideration to be given to including the collection of visitor data as a condition of funding support for events. The Board was advised that such activity was only appropriate to some larger scale events which would yield meaningful samples.

Governance Training – a refresher session had been arranged for the CEO and Chairman as part of the rolling programme of training for Board Members.

2. Governance

2 (i) Finance Update

A report was given on progress against spend with the end of the financial year fast approaching. The Board was advised that Tourism NI is confident that spend will be within the tolerances set by DfE. Capital spend was also noted to be progressing well, as was spending on the digital programme and SBRI. Discussing the digital programme the Board was advised that a secure app for accessing Board papers had been procured and that the Chief Digital Officer would provide an update on this at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION: DV**).

3. Discussion Items

3 (i) Draft Operating Plan 2018-19

The draft Operating Plan for 2018-19 was presented, incorporating priorities identified at the Board's strategic workshop held in January. It was emphasised that delivery would be dependent upon the budget allocation received from DfE. An update was given on recent discussions with the Department in relation to resources and Members suggested that this should be raised at the post-Board debrief meeting.

The Board remarked that it would be useful to extrapolate by market how the target of £1.7bn visitor spend by 2030 can be achieved. Members noted that the major milestone of £1bn spend is due to be reached in mid-2018 and recommended that some meaningful marketing and PR activity should be undertaken to coincide with this, stressing tourism's value to the economy (**ACTION: SB**).

Discussing the Northern Ireland proposition of scale, the Board agreed that the term should be replaced by "experience brand". Noting that the Senior Management Team is due to brief the new DfE Permanent Secretary and Departmental colleagues, the Board suggested that they should be invited to a meeting to take them through the Operating Plan in a greater level of detail. Members also proposed that the wording in the Plan of Tourism NI's mission statement should be changed to reflect more definitively the brand vision of Northern Ireland as a world-class short breaks destination.

Individual priorities were reviewed and the Board agreed that the implementation of digital transformation was essential, with the industry's capability given separate attention and prominence. The Board recommended that, given its importance and likely impact on working practice, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) should be given its own separate objective (**ACTION: SB / DD**).

The Board was advised that the Research and Policy and Insights teams had been merged. Members suggested a new Visitor Attitude Survey planned for the summer should include a question asking those who visit both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland where they spend more money (**ACTION: SB**). The CEO advised of Stephen Finlay's appointment as the new programme manager for the experience brand project. The Board also agreed that a programme manager should be sought to oversee workstreams in relation to the 148th Open and discussed a broader alignment of people resources with work programmes. The Senior Management Team was noted to be meeting soon with PA Consulting to discuss structures.

The Board commended the Business Planning and Improvement Team on the work done to develop the plan and incorporate the priorities identified at the workshop, and approved the Operating Plan.

3 (ii) The 148th Open

Tourism NI's Director of Business Support and Events introduced a presentation updating the Board on preparations for the 148th Open, to be held in July 2019 at Royal Portrush. It is hoped that the unprecedented scale of this event will build upon previous successes in hosting the Irish

Open, to realise Tourism NI's ambition of achieving £50m of visitor spend on golf and to host the tournament at least two further times before 2040.

The presentation set out work to date on event and infrastructure planning, the respective areas of responsibility for Tourism NI and the R&A and the key operational relationships with other agencies. A great deal of useful engagement had taken place with the R&A since the Board's decision in 2014 to support the event.

The Board commented that a general discussion was needed on the issue of accommodation providers charging "spectator rates" to coincide with major events. With Belfast and Derry-Londonderry acting as spectator hubs, proposals were outlined for a "festival of golf" to animate the tournament across Northern Ireland. Given its scale there is also a need to consider how the Open can best be used as an opportunity for engagement.

A Marketing and Communications Group had been established. The resources allocated to marketing the event were detailed and it was noted that Tourism Ireland will have a significant role in promoting the Open in key international markets. The wide range of activity planned to promote the event will include a trophy tour and the dressing of gateways and stands at tournaments including the Irish Open, the NI Open and at the 147th Open in Carnoustie, for which a 'handover' ceremony was also being discussed.

Structures of the multi-agency planning groups were outlined. Members agreed that appointment of a dedicated Programme Manager would be critical to support the work of these groups and oversee workstreams. It was suggested that the Board should visit the North Coast when preparations are more advanced. The Board was also delighted to note that Ireland had just been named Golfing Destination of the Year at the Rhein Golf exhibition in Dusseldorf.

With the presentation concluded the meeting paused for a tour of the distillery and for lunch.

3 (iii) Business Solutions Presentation

The meeting resumed with a presentation by Tourism NI's Business Solutions Manager Eimear Callaghan on the work of the Business Solutions Team. In recent months the team's work had concentrated on two workstreams – business tourism and international travel trade activity, adopting a "match-making" approach to aligning local industry with international operators. Its joint activity with VisitBelfast and VisitDerry is governed by service level agreements and was noted to be on target for the year.

Good outcomes had been achieved from a familiarisation programme for the international trade. Seventeen group visits were arranged in 2017-18, bringing 275 operators from across fifteen markets. Close collaboration was ongoing with Tourism Ireland's overseas offices to secure international sales, a presence for Tourism NI on marketing platforms and participation in sales missions in Europe. Attention was given to ensuring that the platforms used are fit for purpose and can demonstrably secure the market leads that Tourism NI is seeking.

Participation in major international shows and platforms in Great Britain had generated over 550 business tourism sales appointments and resulted in 86 "warm leads" with an approximate value of £28m. Anecdotal feedback also indicated that operators were actively programming new Northern Ireland experiences such as the Heaney Homeplace into their itineraries. The team was

working closely with destination management companies in Dublin, which had resulted in 11 fam visits during 2017-18. Additional bespoke activity by the Business Solutions team throughout the year generated a further 130 leads.

Members remarked that the team's activity in markets was generating better market intelligence and commented that this, together with the results achieved, validated Tourism NI's decision to continue to invest in business tourism. The value of the market was emphasised with an incentive visitor being worth three times as much as an ordinary tourist and Northern Ireland was noted currently to be the second most popular choice of destination for fam visits.

Future plans for business tourism activity and work with the travel trade were outlined, adopting a key account management approach which will be underpinned by a new customer relationship management system and supported by industry toolkits and media on tourismni.com. The Board was also advised of work on the forthcoming Meet the Buyer workshop and the Hosts Global Forum. The Board had previously asked Tourism NI to consider ways in which greater attendance SMEs could be encouraged to participate and Members were pleased to note that there was an increased uptake for places at Meet the Buyer. Hosts Global Forum was emphasised to be an unprecedented opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland.

The Board thanked Eimear for the presentation and commended the work of the team over recent months.

3 (iv) Board Sub- Committees

A paper was presented setting out revised Terms of Reference for the sub-committees of the Board. The Audit and Risk Committee was noted to be well-established, with a robust programme of ongoing work. It was noted that the Casework Committee normally carries out its function of review and approval by correspondence, meeting only when members deem it is necessary. Reviewing terms of reference for the Strategic Partnerships Committee the Board felt there was a need to further consider its functions, both in the context of the Tourism Strategy and how Tourism NI aligns with the objectives of other bodies. It was suggested that the Committee's chair Angelina Fusco should meet with the Chief Executive to discuss this further (**ACTION: JMcG / SB**).

The Marketing Sub-Committee had met recently, with increased membership drawn from industry and the ROI market recovery taskforce.

3 (v) Disability Action Plan

A new Disability Action Plan for Tourism NI was presented for comment and approval. The Board approved the draft, which will be issued for a period of consultation.

3 (vi) DAERA Yellow Frames Project

The Board was presented with details of a proposal by DAERA to provide support through its Rural Development Programme for the placement of large yellow frames at iconic locations throughout Northern Ireland. The purpose is to offer visitors novel photo opportunities particularly for social media. The Board was advised that local authorities would be likely to seek Tourism NI's support for planning applications to install the frames.

Members debated the merits at some length and concluded that the project was not something Tourism NI could support given the potential for future dilapidation, vandalism and the visual impact on natural assets. Given the strength of feeling on the Board, it was agreed that the Chief Executive should write to the Department emphasising Tourism NI's opposition to the proposal (**ACTION: JMcG**).

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. Further detail on engagements had been circulated to the Board prior to the meeting, and he gave a report on a meeting to discuss a municipal gallery for Belfast. Stakeholders present at the meeting had suggested that the proposal could best be taken forward as part of a larger, multiple use project.

4 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

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

Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance – NITA was now incorporated as a limited company and its interim Chief Executive appointed. The Board discussed how benefits of NITA membership could best be communicated to the industry. The Alliance had written to invite Tourism NI to nominate an individual to attend its board meetings as an observer. The Chairman indicated his willingness to participate and the Board agreed that he should take up NITA's invitation at least temporarily.

The Board noted a report that as part of its new corporate plan and forward work programme, VisitBelfast proposes to offer events support. Commenting that VisitBelfast activity should complement rather than duplicate that of Tourism NI, Members suggested that Tourism NI should consider writing to VisitBelfast. In that context Angelina Fusco asked if it was felt appropriate for her to remain on the VisitBelfast Board. The Board agreed that she should continue to attend meetings while the situation was reviewed and consideration given to resuming the practice of sending a member of the Senior Management Team as an observer.

4 (iii) Sub-Groups / Committee Updates

Audit and Risk Committee – Draft minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting had been circulated to Board Members for information. An update was given on work to resolve pay issues for both headquarters and ROI staff. The Board was advised that a number of future Audit Committee meeting dates will be changed.

Marketing Committee – the Committee had held its first meeting with an expanded membership including representatives from industry and the ROI market taskforce. The agenda included business solutions, experience brand, a calendar of activities and council funding for marketing activity.

Skills Sub-Group – The Sub-Group met on 6 February, subsequent to which DfE agreed to convene a workshop with the industry to agree next steps for implementing the skills action plan.

Strategic Partnerships Sub-Group – A report was given on an exploratory meeting held on 8 February with the Chief Executive of Sport NI. Arising from a wide ranging discussion it was agreed that once restructuring within Sport NI is complete, the senior management teams of both organisations should meet to discuss issues of common interest and Tourism NI should brief Sport NI’s officials on the Tourism Strategy.

VisitBritain – the Board was advised that Belfast will host the Social Travel Summit from 24-26 September. PR activity was being planned around the event which represented a huge coup for Northern Ireland, secured through partnership working with VisitBritain.

5. Items for Noting

5 (i) Research Update

The Board noted the content of a report on recent visitor performance. Members observed that the good results from the Republic of Ireland market supplied evidence of the success of Tourism NI’s campaigns and underlined the need for sustained investment in marketing.

6. Any Other Business

There were no other items of substantive business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 26 April at the Belfast Metropolitan College, Titanic Quarter.