

## Board Meeting 12 December 2019

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, LINUM CHAMBERS, BELFAST  
ON THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2019**

Present:

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

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Jill McKee, Director of Finance
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Ms Rosemarie McHugh, Director of Product Development
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

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 anyone wished to declare any interests in relation to agenda items. No declarations were made at this point.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 7 November 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman during the meeting.

#### **1 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

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

*Belfast International Airport* – The Chairman advised that a meeting would take place in the coming week with the Airport’s Chief Executive.

*Board Expenses* – training is underway for Board Members in use of the new system for claiming expenses.

*Tourism and Hospitality Skills* – a report was given on a meeting with representatives of Belfast Met. Members welcomed progress to establish a new Tourism and Hospitality Skills Collaborative Network and emphasised the need for continued engagement to ensure that small and micro-businesses benefit from this.

*Organisational Restructuring* - The Board received an update on business cases and other supplementary information supplied to the Department for Economy (DfE), to support Tourism NI’s bid for resources for organisational restructuring. Members agreed to await a response from the Department to the information provided, but agreed that this should be picked up at debrief meetings with DfE if progress is not made.

*Consultations* - At the last Board Meeting, Members had suggested that Tourism NI should seek to make a submission to a consultation on business rates. It was noted that as the last departmental guidance is almost ten years old, Tourism NI needs to establish with DfE the degree to which it has autonomy to respond to such consultations.

The Chief Executive advised that Belfast Harbour Commissioners had offered to host a Board Meeting so that they could present their future plans for the Harbour Estate. It was agreed that the January Board Meeting could take place in Belfast for that purpose.

The Board also agreed a suggested programme for its strategic Away Day scheduled for 6-7 February. This would include an initial session facilitated by Joy Allen, a discussion of the draft Tourism NI Operating Plan for 2020-21 and discussion of planning for the restoration of the NI Executive and Assembly.

## **2. Governance**

### **2 (i) Finance Report**

A report was given on the budget position up to 31 October. It was noted that in future the Finance and Casework Committee will consider finance reports in detail, with summary reports coming to the Board. The overall budget allocation remained unchanged since the last update. While the outcome of the December Monitoring round was not yet announced, indications were that resource bids were not met but capital bids had been approved. Querying the immediate impact that this would have, the Board was advised that options for Tourism NI’s spring marketing campaign would be more limited. Separately the Department had indicated that bids for resource to support activity following the UK’s departure from the European Union were well received and could be given further consideration post the UK’s departure from the EU. Broadly however, it appeared certain that budget pressures would continue.

The Board discussed implications for the roll-out of the Experience Brand. It was observed that Tourism NI will have to work significantly lower implementation budgets in comparison with funds

being made available to Failte Ireland in the ROI, which is likely to affect Northern Ireland's Share of Voice in both the ROI and NI marketplaces.

The Board remarked that there was a need for the industry to make the brand work to best effect within the confines of the resources available. Members agreed there was a role for the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance in preparing the industry to make a case with government for further support, ahead of a possible restoration of the Assembly. The Board also recommended that its next meeting should include a briefing on the Experience Brand Implementation Plan (**ACTION:** RMcH).

Returning to the Finance Report the Board noted the outcome of a further profiling exercise to help identify resources that might be reallocated to address budget pressures. Also outlined was progress on expenditure against budget – this was largely on track, and while to date spend on product development was low it was expected that picture would change within the last few months of the financial year. Capital resources for IT were also unspent as the money had only been made available following October Monitoring.

The Board was also advised that the Department of Justice had requested that PSNI invoiced Tourism NI for the policing costs for The 148<sup>th</sup> Open, rather than approving a technical transfer of funds as originally proposed.

Board expenses were noted to remain unchanged from the last report as Members were still completing training in use of the new system for claiming.

### **3. Reports**

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

The Board noted the Chairman's list of engagements since the last meeting and a report was given on a meeting with the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance.

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

The Board noted the content of the report and the Chief Executive gave updates on a number of matters as follows:

*CSO Statistics* – The Board was advised that issues with the production of tourism data by the ROI's Central Statistics Office (CSO) were in turn impacting upon NIRSA's ability to produce Northern Ireland visitor figures. The Board was advised that a report on ROI figures will be given in the new year (**ACTION:** NW).

The Chief Executive reported on a useful meeting with the CEOs of VisitWales and VisitScotland. The Board agreed that Katy Best of Belfast City Airport would continue to attend meetings of the VisitBritain Board as an observer.

A report was given on the ANVR conference (the Association of Dutch Travel Agents) held recently in Belfast. One of the speakers had been the futurologist Anna Pollock. Her presentation was felt to have a particular relevance to Tourism NI's strategic priorities and it was proposed to

engage her to present in the New Year to an audience including the Board, DfE representatives and NITA. Suggested dates are to be circulated to the Board (**ACTION:** JMcG).

*Game of Thrones* – An update was given on the legacy projects.

*The 148<sup>th</sup> Open* – The Board noted the launch of the final report on the economic impact of the 148<sup>th</sup> Open at Royal Portrush and discussed the key learnings from the event, as well as the potential for the event to return to Northern Ireland in the coming years.

### **3 (iii) Other Reports**

The chairs of the Board's sub-committees gave reports on the recent meetings as follows:

*Finance and Casework Committee* – the Committee held its first meeting immediately following the Board Meeting on 7 November. Michele Shirlow was nominated as chair, terms of reference for the committee were formally adopted and a forward work programme agreed.

*Audit and Risk Committee* – Angelina Fusco reported on the meeting held on 9 December. The Board was pleased to note that Internal Audit had revised its opinions of audits of the Strategic Partnership Fund and Tourism NI's GDPR preparedness, from 'limited' to 'satisfactory'. The Risk Register had been reviewed in detail and a workshop is to be arranged to look at the rephrasing and reallocation of some risks.

The Board was advised that an independent reviewer had been engaged to consider a collective grievance raised by some staff members in respect of Tourism NI's new mileage scheme.

It was agreed that the Audit Committee minutes should be added to MinutePad for the Board's information (**ACTION:** JMCK).

To permit the next agenda item to be discussed in camera, Jill McKee, Aine Kearney, Rosemarie McHugh, Naomi Waite and Jim Daly all left the meeting at this point.

## **4. Items for Discussion**

### **4 (i) Board Review of Effectiveness**

As Board Apprentice, Colette Brown declared interests in respect of this item and the HMS Caroline project. The Board agreed that it was not necessary for her to withdraw from the discussion.

The Board discussed a report by Deloitte giving the findings of a new review of the Board's effectiveness, following a similar exercise undertaken last year which had resulted in the production of an Action Plan. Broadly this had identified significant improvements in all areas of performance, although there were areas in which progress could still be made such as the timeliness with which Board papers are issued. Following discussion of the report the CEO agreed to draw up a revised Action Plan based on the report's content and the views expressed by the Board. This would be agreed at the January Board Meeting. (**ACTION:** JMcG)

Jim Daly rejoined the meeting.

#### **4 (ii) HR Policy Review**

As part of a review of all Tourism NI's HR policies, two new draft policies were presented for the Board's approval. The first of these was a draft Onboarding Policy, replacing the previous induction policy. Also presented was a new draft Security Policy.

The Board approved both the new policies and requested that a separate onboarding process should be put in place to support new Board Members (**ACTION: JO'R**).

#### **4 (iii) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Update**

As part of the ongoing process to embed awareness of GDPR across the organisation, Tourism NI staff had all received refresher training outlining their obligations in relation to the handling and security of personal data. A short awareness training session was delivered for the Board.

Colin Neill left the meeting at this point.

### **5. Papers for Noting**

#### **5 (i) Draft Agenda for Next Board Meeting**

The Board noted a draft agenda for its next meeting, and it was agreed that this should be reordered to permit a presentation by Belfast Harbour (**ACTION: JMcG / JD**).

### **6. Any Other Business**

#### **6 (i) Visit Belfast**

The Board was advised of ongoing discussions with Visit Belfast officials regarding the future implementation of the Northern Ireland Experience Brand.

### **7. Date of Next Meeting**

The next Board Meeting is due to take place at Belfast Harbour Commissioners offices on Thursday 30 January 2020.