

## Board Meeting 29 August 2019

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT THE KILLYHEVLIN HOTEL, ENNISKILLEN  
ON THURSDAY 29 AUGUST 2019**

Present:

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

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Aine Robinson, Acting Director of Finance (items 3(i) – 3 (iii))
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events (from item 3 (i))
- Ms Louise Kearney, Director of Organisational Development and HR (from item 3 (i))
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing (from item 3 (i))
- Ms Dorothy Erskine, Insights and Intelligence Manager (item 3 (i) only)
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

Apologies: None

### **1. Introduction and Minutes of Last Meeting**

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

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

Minutes of the Board Meeting held at Tourism NI headquarters on 20 June 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed.

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

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

*Belfast International Airport* – The Board was advised that the Chairman is continuing to seek a meeting with the Airport’s Chief Executive. Members remarked that while the airport appeared to be making progress on passenger management, more could be done to improve facilities and ensure a better welcome to Northern Ireland for inbound visitors. Some issues with the visitor experience were observed to relate not to behaviour of airport staff but to Customs.

*Capital Projects* – The Chief Executive reported that the Department for the Economy (DFE) had sought Tourism NI’s involvement in a Steering Group for a capital project; Tourism NI’s view was that it should only assume the role of observer. The matter is to be raised at the debrief meeting with the Department.

*Assurance Framework* – Work is underway on a mechanism for consideration at the November Board Meeting (**ACTION: JMcG**).

*Board Review of Effectiveness* – The Chairman reported that he had met with Deloitte to discuss the parameters of a new review of the Board’s effectiveness, and advised that the process would commence with a survey which will be circulated to Members in the coming weeks.

*Board Vacancies* - It was confirmed that at the last debrief meeting with DfE, the Chairman had raised the issue of ongoing vacancies in Board membership.

*Future Board Agenda Items* – At the last meeting a number of future discussion topics were proposed. The Board was advised that management intended to present a paper on sustainable tourism issues at its next meeting. It was also clarified that a second proposal was for a briefing, preferably from a Home Office representative, on issues affecting visitor access to Northern Ireland such as passports, visas and electronic travel authorisation. It was suggested that a written briefing on this topic might be sufficient for the Board’s needs (**ACTION: JMcG**).

The Chairman commented that the issue of sustainable tourism might more usefully form the basis for discussion at the Board’s Annual Away Day early in the New Year. It was proposed that dates for this should be sought in January ahead of public consultation on the draft Tourism Strategy and that the workshop should focus on the impact of sustainability and other potential factors impacting the Strategy’s deliverability. It was agreed that the Chairman and Chief Executive would consider an agenda for the workshop and discuss guest presenters to provide some scene-setting material as context for discussion (**ACTION: JMcG**).

Jim Daly left the meeting temporarily at this point and the Board and Chief Executive discussed in closed session the terms and conditions and remuneration of executive team members.

## **2. Governance**

### **2 (i) Quarter 1 2019-20 Reports – Operating Plan Performance Monitoring**

A report was given on progress against key objectives in the Tourism NI Operating Plan for the first three months of the financial year. Members were advised that this report was the first in a new format which focused upon the delivery of strategic priorities agreed by the Board. A high proportion of actions were noted to be on track or complete, including the submission of a draft Tourism Strategy to the Department and the successful delivery of The 148<sup>th</sup> Open. The Board was advised that discussions were ongoing with DfE regarding the future focus of capital programmes.

An outline was given of bids submitted to the Department to support activity to mitigate the effects of either a 'deal' or 'no deal' outcome to the EU exit process and the Chief Executive offered to share the detail with the Board (**ACTION: JMcG**).

Successes in gaining traction on incentive travel were highlighted, against a background of falling bookings from European conference organisers as a result of uncertainty around the EU exit and consequently, increasingly strong competition for the UK association market. The Board discussed whether perceptions that Northern Ireland might be less easy for delegates to access were offset by lower costs for hosting conferences and venue hire, and Members acknowledged efforts that the Chief Executive had personally made to generate opportunities for such business. It was also suggested that the Chief Executive of ICC Belfast should be invited to a Board meeting in the near future for a more detailed discussion of these issues (**ACTION: JMcG**).

The running order of subsequent agenda items was altered.

## **2 (ii) Quarter 1 2019-20 Reports – Risk Management**

A report was given on activity to manage and mitigate risks during the first quarter, presented in a new style aligned to the new Operating Plan. Activity on maintaining good governance was noted. Angelina Fusco in her role as Audit Committee chair reminded Members of their obligation to submit expenses within three months of incurring them. The Board noted activity on data protection had included a review of all Tourism NI's contracts, to amend them where necessary in respect of requirements on data shared with third parties.

Progress towards a launch of the experience brand was noted and the Board is to receive a full update at its next meeting. The Board noted that delivery of marketing programmes is well on track. IT security remained a priority following a number of incidents during the year. The Board was pleased to note that the process for reacting to such incidents was robust and Members recommended that policies should be reviewed to ensure that they are being adhered to and are sufficiently strong (**ACTION: DV**). The Board also noted action by management to significantly reduce long-term sickness absences.

Members commented favourably on the new reporting format for its clarity.

## **2 (iii) Board Stakeholder Engagement, 28 August**

At this point the Board discussed the previous evening's dinner with local stakeholders. Members felt that the format of the evening was useful, with discussion following a scene-setting presentation. While the focus of discussion had been on opportunities for the council area the Board felt there had been little commitment to action, with a great deal of fragmented activity and a need for leadership. While these issues were not unique to the Fermanagh and Omagh council area, there was a pressing need for a number of small, quick successes which would demonstrate the benefits of partnership. Members suggested that there was a role for the NI Tourism Alliance and declaring an interest, Colin Neill left the meeting to permit further discussion. It was agreed that the Chief Executive should follow this up with NITA and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council (**ACTION: JMcG**). Colin Neill rejoined the meeting.

### **3. Items for Discussion – Part 1**

#### **3 (i) Review of Tourism NI Research Programmes**

At this point Aine Robinson, Naomi Waite, Aine Kearney, Louise Kearney and Dorothy Erksine joined the meeting. The Board was also joined by representatives of Team Tourism Consulting for a presentation on a review of Tourism NI's current research activity. The focus of the presentation was on proposals for future data collection to provide an evidence base in support of strategic delivery, to establish a data hub for use by stakeholders and to assist the industry with informed business decisions.

Broadly, existing programmes were felt to provide a good core research base and the best local data available from present sources. Challenges related to the timeliness with which statistics are generated, the granularity of local data and the availability of information on specific markets and segments. Exploratory work had been done on uses of so-called 'big data', but there was a need to consider whether this could replace or simply complement existing data resources.

Recommended actions included refinement of both core and ad hoc research; programmes of exploratory research in social media and third-party data; an assessment of what is available, useful and relevant for sharing via a data hub; and the options for communicating and sharing results with the industry and other stakeholders. On timeliness, it was stressed that considered analysis of raw data inevitably means a delay in producing detailed statistics, and the expectations of stakeholders need to be managed in light of that.

The Board was broadly content to adopt the recommendations set out and discussed the need for better data on day visitors. In relation to 'big data' it was observed that some resources are not yet sufficiently developed or comprehensive enough to replace existing statistics, and carry significant cost implications. Asking if there were any risks in relation to confidentiality of such data, Members were advised that it is anonymised and aggregated so that individuals and businesses cannot be identified. The Board asked if there was any sense that data will be used to shape government policy and interventions. It was stressed that the proposals represent a refinement of data resources that are recognised as authoritative and can be used to develop predictive models. Members also commented that it would be useful to have data that might inform discussions on sustainable tourism: some of this could be derived from an assessment of visitors' motivations and travel habits.

The Board thanked the presenters and they left the meeting.

#### **3 (ii) Quarter I 2019-20 Reports - Finance**

A report was presented on budget allocations and finance management from the beginning of the financial year through to 31 July. Tourism NI had received an additional £1m in the June Monitoring round. Preparations were underway to submit further bids to October Monitoring. Work on bids for funds to mitigate the impact of EU exit had required additional intensive work within a very narrow timeframe.

Expenditure in the year to date was noted generally to be on course, with capital slightly behind due to some funds only being received in June Monitoring. The outcome of budget profiling

exercises was noted. The Board was pleased to learn profiling and cash forecasting exercises carried out by Tourism NI had allowed External Audit (NIAO) to place reliance on this and reduce the testing by 50%. The imminent introduction of a new electronic finance system and CRM system should further reduce the administrative burden on staff and the Board discussed the availability of resource to implement Tourism NI's ambitions in the area of digital transformation and innovation.

The Board's expenses were noted to be slightly up during this quarter as a result of participation in the Tourism Awards event held in Armagh compared to prior year event being held locally in Belfast. Members were again reminded to submit their expenses within the specified timeline of three months.

### **3 (iii) Business Case – Tourism NI Pay Scales [Exempt from disclosure under 'Section 42. Legal professional privilege' of the Freedom of Information Act (2000)]**

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

### **3 (iv) Revised HR policies for approval – Draft Disciplinary Procedure and Draft Grievance Procedure**

The Board was presented with revised disciplinary and grievance procedures for approval. These had been reviewed by legal advisers. Members were advised that the grievance procedure encouraged the adoption of an informal procedure where possible and made provision for the use of mediation services if required. The Board approved the policies and was advised that further policies will be presented for approval at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION:** LK).

The Chairman advised that this was Louise Kearney's last Board Meeting before her departure for a new role in early September. Paying tribute on behalf of the Board, offered his warm best wishes for her future career. In turn Louise wished every success to the Board, her colleagues on the senior management team and the Tourism NI staff.

## **4. Reports**

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

The Board noted the Chairman's report on engagements he had undertaken since the last meeting. He warmly commended Tourism NI staff involved in the delivery of the 148<sup>th</sup> Open and the passion, commitment and professionalism displayed by all involved. He also reflected on the

excellent feedback from delegates in attendance at the recent TTC global sales conference in Belfast and stressed the need to consider how the opportunities presented by events such as this and the C&IT forum can best be maximised.

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

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

*EU Exit* – The Chief Executive reported on bids to the Department for Economy to mitigate the potential impacts from either 'deal' or 'no deal' scenarios. The Board noted reports on impacts on visitor performance in the ROI and Great Britain.

*Tourism Performance* – In the context of the EU Exit performance was noted to have been good, and likely to have been sustained by the impact of the 148<sup>th</sup> Open.

*Experience Brand* – a report was given on preparations to launch the brand and the Board agreed to the submission of a Public Interest Test for that purpose. A full update is to be given at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION:** RMcH).

*The 148<sup>th</sup> Open* – a report was given on the scale of the impact of the event. The Board was notified that an event is in planning for 26 September, to acknowledge the contribution made by key delivery partners. The Chairman gave his apologies due to prior commitments and asked if he could be allowed to participate by filming a recorded piece for this (**ACTION:** ). It was noted that the Secretary of State is hoping to acknowledge the scale of the achievement.

*City Deals* – A report was given on Tourism NI involvement in project boards for a number of initiatives seeking support through the deals. The Board suggested it would be more appropriate to assume the role of observer in such bodies, rather than Tourism NI having any decision making responsibility.

Reports were also given on progress to resolve dilapidations relating to Tourism NI's former headquarters in North Street, on *Game of Thrones* legacy projects and the launch of the Taste the Island initiative. Geoff Wilson recorded his thanks to the Director of Business Support & Events and her team for their participation in a tourism marketing platform at the Ulster Grand Prix. The Board noted reports on The Travel Corporation (TTC) sales conference and the Conference and Incentive Travel (C&IT) Forum in Belfast, both of which had received effusive praise from delegates and attendees. The Board was also advised that Northern Ireland had been shortlisted as a potential venue for VisitBritain's ExploreGB event in 2020 with a site visit by organisers due to take place shortly.

The Chief Executive also reported on a visit with Tourism Ireland to the USA, where he had presented the experience brand to TI's North American teams and met with influential tour operators. He advised that the chair of CIE Tours had offered to chair a business development forum which would focus on business growth to NO from the USA and would meet twice per year.

#### **4 (iii) Other Reports**

As sub-committees had not met in the period since the last meeting there were no other reports.

The Board Meeting broke at this point and resumed following lunch.

## **5. Items for Discussion – Part 2**

### **5 (i) Northern Ireland Domestic Market Review – Presentation**

The Board received a presentation on a review of the Northern Ireland domestic market, which seeks to establish clearly defined strategies for unlocking growth. The review emphasised the market's importance as a 'backbone' of the visitor economy, contributing 45% of all trips and 29% of all revenue, and in keeping the visitor product refreshed and authentic. The market's significant seasonal and regional value was highlighted. It was stressed that while, given the market's maturity, there is no quick fix to boosting growth, the competitive market is intensifying.

The review concluded that market conditions and consumer sentiment are broadly positive. The key challenges are to improve volume and value and to motivate NI residents to take more breaks at home. Unlocking growth would require better differentiation between Northern Ireland, the ROI and Great Britain. Also outlined were principles of a segmentation strategy to identify best prospects for stimulating growth, and the characteristics of segments likeliest to achieve this.

Members were advised that next steps involved work on refining the growth and segmentation strategies, which would then be considered for approval by the steering group before being brought back to the Board with an action plan. Discussing the presentation it was noted that the respective roles of Tourism NI and local authorities would need to be clearly defined. Members commented that the experience brand would have a significant part to play in articulating a fresh vision of the tourism product for the domestic market and inspiring new product, especially in the regions.

### **5 (ii) Game of Thrones Touring Exhibition**

The Director of Business Support and Events provided a verbal update on the exhibition's performance. The Board was advised that 77% of visitors to date had been from out of state, resulting in a higher economic return overall. With the run extended to 8 September, marketing activity was underway to maximise ticket sales in the exhibition's final weeks in Belfast.

### **5 (iii) Proposed 2020 Board Meeting dates**

The Board approved a schedule of Board meeting dates and venues proposed for 2020.

## **6. Papers for Noting**

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

The Board noted a proposed agenda for its next meeting. Members discussed succession planning in view of ongoing vacancies on the Board and with a number of members' terms due to be complete in coming months. The Chairman advised that he had repeatedly raised the matter at debrief meetings with DfE and would continue to seek a resolution, given its increasing urgency.

The Chairman also suggested that it would be useful to promote the Board's activity in engaging with stakeholders prior to Board Meetings (**ACTION: OF**).

## **7. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

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

The next Board Meeting is due to take place in Derry-Londonderry on Thursday 3 October – venue to be confirmed.