

## Board Meeting 3 October 2019

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT THE BEECH HILL COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, DERRY-LONDONDERRY  
ON THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 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 Aine Robinson, Acting Director of Finance (up to item 2 (iii))
- Ms Rosemarie McHugh, Director of Product Development
- Mr Stephen Finlay, Experience Brand Manager (item 4 (iv))
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

Apologies: None

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

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

The Chairman greeted all present and extended a formal welcome to Colette Brown, who was attending her first meeting as part of the Board Apprentice programme. He reminded attendees that minutes of the Board Meeting would be published, and asked if they wished to declare any interests in relation to agenda items. No declarations were made.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held at Tourism NI headquarters on 29 August 2019 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:

*Belfast International Airport* – The Chairman advised that he had agreed a date for a meeting with the Airport’s Chief Executive.

*Future Board Agenda Items* – It was noted that the Migration Advisory Group is due to meet on 26 October and it was suggested that a paper on the associated tourism and hospitality issues could be prepared for the Board following that.

*Board Workshop* – the Chairman and Chief Executive had discussed an outline programme for the workshop planned for January. It was suggested that this should focus on a number of key topics - sustainable tourism; strategic and tactical use of technology; and effective governance, management and organisational culture. It was proposed that a number of specialist guest speakers should be secured for the workshop including a futurologist, and possible facilitators were suggested (**ACTION:** JMcG). The Board asked for dates to be finalised and a suitable venue to be agreed as soon as possible.

*IT Security* – the Board was advised of activity undertaken to give assurance on the security protocols to be followed by staff using mobile technology at external events.

*Fermanagh and Omagh District Council* – an update was given on engagement with the council and local tourist industry in Fermanagh, following discussions at the last Board Meeting.

Michael McQuillan joined the meeting at this point and confirmed that he had no interests to declare in respect of the agenda.

The Chairman invited views on the previous evening’s engagement with industry in the Derry-Londonderry area. Members felt the discussion was positive, with industry in the area willing to speak with a cohesive voice, to collaborate and embrace collective opportunities. While the need was perceived for an anchor attraction and a robust evening economy to better animate the city, the industry felt its ambitions are curtailed by a lack of resources. The Board suggested that better use of existing assets including the river and lough could also present a solution and prove a draw for visitors. A member remarked that the area also represented a fertile ground for sports tourism.

The discussion also touched on tourism and hospitality skills. The Board had noted guests’ comments regarding one project for which resources had been available, which would not be proceeding as a result of a skills gap in the city. Members agreed that a further detailed discussion was required urgently to advance the skills issue and proposed that the next pre Board Meeting Dinner should focus on this.

## **2. Governance**

### **2 (i) Draft Tourism NI Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19**

The Board was presented with the draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-19. The Board was pleased to note that the Audit Office had given an unqualified opinion on the accounts, which had been reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Committee on 30 September. The Board approved the accounts and agreed that they could now be signed by the Chairman and Chief Executive.

## **2 (ii) Draft Report to Those Charged With Governance**

A draft Report to Those Charged With Governance was presented to the Board in tandem with the annual report and accounts. Members were pleased to note positive comments on improvements in the production of the accounts. The Board noted that no significant risks had been identified by the audit and just two priority 2 recommendations had been made, one of which was downgraded under review to priority 3. The Board was advised that the recommendations were being actioned but that as one related to the staff pay remit, it would require Ministerial sign-off. As Audit Committee chair, Angelina Fusco congratulated the Finance team for their work to complete the accounts. The Chief Executive also took the opportunity to convey his thanks to Áine Robinson for her work as Acting Director of Finance. The Board warmly endorsed the remarks.

## **2 (iii) Finance Update**

An update was given on budget position at the end of August, and the outcome of the October Monitoring round. A bid for resource to relocate Tourism NI's Dublin office had been approved, while other bids amounting to £1.9m to address resource pressures had not been met.

Budget spend was noted to be on track for this time of the year. The Board's travel and subsistence expenses were detailed and Members were reminded of the requirement to submit claims in a timely fashion. The introduction of the new finance system will streamline the claim process and it was agreed that the Board should receive guidance on this.

More detail was given on the unsuccessful bids to October Monitoring. The Board devoted some time to discussing measures to support business tourism, for which Tourism NI had been seeking an additional £325k. The Chief Executive explained that currently Tourism Ireland do not see this as their responsibility and that in the ROI business tourism is currently viewed as being the responsibility of Failte Ireland who spend over £5m on this activity each year.

Reviewing capital budgets the Board asked if there were any risks attached to a project to relocate the visitor information centre in Derry-Londonderry; management were content that there were no concerns about spend.

Áine Robinson left the meeting following the report.

## **3. Reports**

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

A report on engagements undertaken since the last meeting was included with the papers for the Board to note. The Chairman advised that he had no other substantive business to report.

### **3 (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:

*Visitor Performance* – Figures for the first quarter of the 2019 calendar year were reported. It was emphasised that the fuller picture on trends will emerge only as the year progresses and although

performance during summer was reported to be good, clear indications of some consumer nervousness were emerging as visitors are making short-term decisions and booking trips late.

The Board was advised that recent reductions in air routes into Ireland are expected to have an impact and that other factors also suggest that the coming year will present challenges for the industry. Negative sentiment amongst European consumers relating to the GB market and EU exit appears to also apply to Northern Ireland. Indications were that the GB domestic market is trending towards 'staycations' but despite this, Northern Ireland could expect to see a fall of around 8% in GB visitors, who do not view it as a staycation destination. August had also seen a sizeable fall-off in visitors to visitor attractions from ROI. The Board commented that sentiment is likely to continue to play a significant role in influencing visitors' intentions for the foreseeable future.

*EU Exit* – the Board received an update on bids made to the Department of Finance for resources to deliver mitigating action in a number of areas: support to businesses, support for the conference / incentive market and enhanced marketing activity. It was emphasised that tourism businesses will require support regardless of whether or not a withdrawal deal is agreed with the EU. The Board also suggested that consumer messages would be needed to counter reported anticipation of civil protests, and Tourism Ireland is understood to be developing some material for that purpose. The industry is being encouraged to focus on best prospects and the bids for business support propose a mixture of industry workshops, events, toolkits and online platforms.

*Web Improvement Programme* – The Board was advised of the launch of a new £150k programme of support to assist small businesses with developing their online capabilities.

*Events* - The Board noted that Tourism NI is involved in discussions about bringing the World Rally Championship to Northern Ireland, and it was emphasised that the cost base would need to be examined very carefully. Members were also advised of a request from Galgorm Resort and Spa for support for the Northern Ireland Open over a three-year period.

*Taste the Island* – the Board noted the progress of the programme, which is so far proving a success. A member remarked that it would have been good to have had more Board engagement in the programme.

*Explore GB* – The Board welcomed the news that Tourism NI had been successful in its bid to host VisitBritain's Explore GB event. The Department had been advised that this would represent an inescapable budget pressure requiring support of up to £400k.

The Board was also pleased to note the very positive international media coverage of Northern Ireland generated by the launch of the *Game of Thrones* Tapestry's exhibition in Bayeux.

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

Angelina Fusco gave a report on the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 30 September. In addition to approving the annual report and accounts the committee had reviewed the Risk Register for Quarter 1 and discussed the wording of risks and the corresponding risk appetite. The Board agreed to adopt a proposal that the Audit and Risk Committee should become the vehicle for monitoring the Risk Register in detail, with a summary report coming to the Board and any

significant issues escalated to the Board for discussion. The detailed risk reports would be circulated electronically to all Members (**ACTION: JMCK**).

Members were again reminded to make every effort to submit timely expense claims, and the Board endorsed a document setting out a protocol whereby expenses more than three months old would require a clear explanation of extenuating circumstances around the delay and sign-off from the relevant officials before payment could be made.

## **4. Items for Discussion**

### **4 (i) Digital Programmes Update**

Chief Digital Officer Dave Vincent delivered a presentation setting out progress on digital innovation and transformation throughout Tourism NI. Substantial progress had been made on a number of key workstreams. Tourism NI's new finance system was being implemented and a new HR system is expected to be in place by the end of the year. Progress was also being made towards putting in place a customer relationship management (CRM) system and the Decision Time app, used by the Board and Senior Management Team to access meeting papers, had been expanded to include systems for monitoring and reporting on corporate goals and risks.

Progress towards the redevelopment of corporate websites was also outlined, as well as action to procure a destination management platform which could provide a route to market for businesses that do not use large booking engines. Emphasis was placed on the real value of Tourism NI developing its own internal skills and capabilities to manage and maintain its online presence.

The Board was also given an overview of the exciting possibilities being offered by augmented reality and virtual reality technology, to enhance and transform the visitor experience. It is hoped that the Board can take an opportunity at a future meeting to have a practical demonstration of the possibilities offered by the technology.

Progress was also outlined towards developing a data hub providing a powerful research tool for Tourism NI and the wider industry, generating a wealth of meaningful real time data on visitors' behaviours and preferences. It was emphasised that this work is being undertaken with due regard towards the protection of personal data. A trial at the walls of Derry-Londonderry had demonstrated the real benefits of such tools.

It had been proposed that the Board would receive a practical demonstration of the new system for completing expenses but given time constraints it was agreed that a 'how to' guide would be circulated instead (**ACTION: AR**).

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

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

The Board was presented with three revised policies for approval, as part of a comprehensive review of Tourism NI's HR policies and protocols:

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy

- Staff Code of Conduct

Each had been developed in agreement with the Trade Union and supported by legal advice. The Board approved the policies, and agreed the opening of the Equality and Diversity Policy should be redrafted to make it more engaging (**ACTION: JO'R**).

#### **4 (iii) Northern Ireland Tourism Awards**

The Board was presented with a paper outlining plans for the 2020 Northern Ireland Tourism Awards. This set out proposals for new categories, a revised and more independent judging process and options for venues. A number of local authorities had expressed an interest in having the awards visit their regions; the Board agreed that a venue for the 2020 event should be sought in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area. Members were content with proposals for the revised judging process that balanced the Board's involvement with a greater degree of independent input, and suggested that consideration should be given to renaming the awards to avoid sharing an acronym with the NI Tourism Alliance.

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

#### **4 (iv) Experience Brand Update**

The Board received a presentation giving an update on work to develop the experience brand framework and implementation action plan, and progress towards the brand launch scheduled for November's World Travel Market. Terry McCartney left the meeting during the course of this discussion.

Members were advised that the brand framework was being revised to incorporate learnings derived from engagement with the industry over the last year. An outline was given of the tools being prepared to help define the essence of the brand: inspirers, the central themes of the brand; a series of experience criteria to shape the development of high quality experiences for the international market; and awakers, exemplars that represent the tangible benefits that participants derive from developing experiences based on what visitors are seeking.

Using these tools a series of 23 experiences had been identified, developed and refined for promotion on the microsite, in the brochures and at the World Travel Market stand.

An overview was also given of the approach taken to develop the Implementation Action Plan, focused on the strategic ambition of achieving £2bn annual spend and 25,000 new tourism jobs by 2030. The plan adopts a phased approach, setting out a roadmap to the 2030 targets that permits activity to be reviewed and refined as it progresses.

It was emphasised that the time taken to identify, develop and refine the experiences had delivered in brand material of real substance for the launch and an outline was given of the arrangements for events and stakeholder engagement around the launch.

It was agreed that final creative material would be shared with the Board as soon as it is available. (**ACTION: RMcH**).

## **5. Papers for Noting**

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

Members noted the proposed agenda for the Board's next meeting. Further consideration was given to the urgent need for a comprehensive discussion of hospitality skills issues. Rather than deferring any of the agenda items already scheduled, it was agreed to hold a dinner on the evening prior to the meeting, with invited guests to include DfE's newly appointed Under Secretary responsible for Tourism (**ACTION: JMcG**).

## **6. Any Other Business**

### **6 (i) MIPIM 2020**

The Board noted that a Belfast delegation would attend MIPIM in 2020. Members agreed that as previous events had generated a great degree of useful engagement, Tourism NI should be represented by the Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer as part of the delegation.

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

The next Board Meeting is due to take place at Tourism NI Headquarters in Belfast on Thursday 7 November.