

Board Meeting 31 January 2019

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, BELFAST
ON THURSDAY 31 JANUARY 2019**

Present:

- Mr Terence Brannigan (Chairman)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Mr Colin Neill (from item 3 (ii))
- Mr Michael McQuillan
- Ms Michele Shirlow
- Mr Geoff Wilson
- Mr Terry McCartney

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Aine Robinson, Acting Director of Finance (to item 2(ii))
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events (to item 3 (iii))
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing (to item 3 (iv))
- Ms Rosemarie McHugh, Director of Product Development (items 3(ii) – 3 (iii))
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications (to item 3 (iv))

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 present wished to declare interests in relation to agenda items. Geoff Wilson raised his potential involvement in events which might apply for Tourism NI funding schemes, and asked if he should withdraw from discussion of the events strategic vision. This was not felt to be necessary as the Board would take no decisions on funding.

The Chairman advised that an update on arrangements for The 148th Open would be deferred to the next Board Meeting on 7 March. The purpose was to keep the Board agenda sufficiently short to allow Members time to travel to an event launching the Open, which would follow the Board Meeting. In the meantime a brief report was given on issues considered at a meeting of the Gold Planning Group for the Open, which had taken place earlier that day.

The Chief Executive advised of discussions with the Irish Tourism Transport Council concerning issues faced by operators of small tours with regard to taxi licensing legislation. The matter is being raised with the Department for Communities.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 13 December 2018 were approved.

1 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

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

Conflict of Interest Training – a further session had been held prior to the Board Meeting for Members who had been unable to attend the previous training. Participants confirmed that the training had been useful and illuminating.

Skills – As proposed by the Skills Sub-Group, Tourism NI met with officials of the Department for Economy (DfE) on 15 January to progress the Skills Action Plan. DfE had recognised that Tourism NI does not currently have the financial or staff resources to fulfil actions that the Plan identifies as being its responsibility. It was agreed that Tourism NI should submit a bid for resources to deliver these priority actions, and reflect these within the proposed new organisational structure. The Board welcomed the progress made and was advised that further thought is needed on how to progress the Action Plan in full. It was suggested that the Department should publish the priorities so that the broader industry was aware of the progress that was being made with regard to progressing skills issues.

Infographic – the Board was advised that work is continuing to develop an infographic for the use of Members. This breaks down by council area, tourism volume, value and Tourism NI's level of engagement with each local authority.

Tourism Ireland - the Chairman advised that he had raised a number of matters arising from the recent lunch with the Board of Tourism Ireland with its Chair, both in person and in writing. He had asked for a further meeting between the two Boards and it was agreed that the Chief Executive should follow this up at the next Tourism Ireland Board Meeting (**ACTION: JMcG**).

Operating Plan 2019-20 - The Board was advised that its strategic workshop to consider priorities for the 2019-20 Operating Plan had been rescheduled to 28 February. The Senior Management Team had already held a very useful workshop day with the facilitator. The Board was also advised that work is ongoing to refine the PA Consulting report on the review of Tourism NI structures and resources. The Chairman reported that he and the CEO had also held a positive meeting with the Deputy Secretary of DfE to present the report's topline findings. Arising from that meeting it was suggested that a straightforward, succinct and compelling case from Tourism NI for the additional resources that it needs to fulfil its strategic objectives should be prepared for consideration by the DfE Resource Committee.

Equality Scheme – The Chief Executive confirmed that the approval of Equality Commission was not required for the new scheme presented to the Board prior to Christmas.

At its last meeting the Board had suggested that Tourism NI should convene a media briefing on the 148th Open in response to reports of exorbitant prices for accommodation around the event. Members were advised that the Senior Management Team had reflected on this and proposed

that any such briefing should take place after the red carpet event. Additionally, messaging should emphasise that 87% of those attending the event have already booked their accommodation, that affordable accommodation remains available for the event and also underline Tourism NI's activity in engaging with the industry on the issue.

2. Governance

2 (i) a. Quarter III Reports - Operating Plan 2018-19

A report was presented on progress against the key objectives in the 2018-19 Operating Plan. Discussion focussed on objectives marked as red, indicating they were incomplete. It was emphasised that a significant proportion of these outcomes were due to factors outside of Tourism NI's control. The Board suggested that these objectives should be reviewed as part of the process to develop the new Operating Plan for 2019-20. The Board also noted that objectives relating to organisational structure and hospitality skills had been flagged red in the report, but progress was now being made on both counts. Good progress had been made towards the development of a new Tourism Growth Fund. While the experience brand remained on target for a launch at the World Travel Market, DfE had underlined a need for assurance that it will have support across the political spectrum. The brand was noted to have tested extremely well in the target markets, with responses indicating a 30% uplift in intention to travel to Northern Ireland. The range of assets tested included events, festivals and potential new product. It had performed extremely well in comparison with experience brands in ROI. The Board asked that the research findings be shared with Members (**ACTION: NW**).

2 (i) b Quarter III Reports – Finance

The Board received a report setting out the latest position in respect of Tourism NI's budget allocation and management, and spend as at 31 December. The budget allocation included December Monitoring and a Brexit mitigation fund. Ongoing budget profiling was noted to be providing a greater measure of assurance that spend is on target. The Board was advised that following the settlement of outstanding pay awards to staff, an underspend had remained which was being used to ease pressures within the programme budget and which would permit Tourism NI to run its spring marketing campaign through to 31 March. Overall budget underspends were noted to be within the tolerance set by the Department.

In the context of the marketing campaign, the Board discussed perceptions of media reporting on the Brexit process and the potential for this to translate into negative consumer sentiment towards Ireland and Northern Ireland in particular. The Board was also updated on arrangements for monitoring the impact of funds allocated through Tourism NI to support recovery of Belfast City Centre following the fire at Bank Buildings. Additionally Members were advised that resource was being directed towards messaging to promote Derry-Londonderry following the recent bomb explosion in the city.

Capital funds spend was detailed and that Board was advised that as the immersive technology programme had only recently been launched, it is likely that some funds to support projects under that scheme will need to be accrued. This again highlighted the issues created by twelve-month programmes and the matter had been raised with DfE.

The Board thanked Aine Robinson for the update and she left the meeting.

2 (i) c. Risk Register

An update was given on risk management in Quarter III. The Board was advised that there had been no major movement in risks during the period, although some progress was being made towards finalising the draft Tourism Strategy. The Board discussed recent virus attacks on IT infrastructure; work was ongoing to mitigate the effects and increase the organisation's protection against such threats. As the Board Member tasked with oversight of data protection issues Geoff Wilson commended the Chief Digital Officer for keeping him fully updated on progress. It was agreed that an update should issue to the Board by email and the issue should be added to the Risk Register (**ACTION: DV**).

2 (i) d. Board Review of Effectiveness Action Plan

The Board noted the content of a report on progress against the Action Plan.

3. Discussion Items

3 (i) Review of Events Programme 2011-16

As a preamble to discussion of the Draft Tourism Events Strategic Vision, the Board's attention was drawn to a draft report on the impacts of the Tourism Events Programme from 2011-16 commissioned by DfE. In addition to setting out the impacts of the programme it was emphasised that this would also raise issues for the Board to consider in terms of the future governance and audit regimes for events.

Rosemarie McHugh and Colin Neill joined the meeting during the next item.

3 (ii) Draft Tourism Events Strategic Vision to 2030

The Board was joined by representatives of Festival Events International (FEI) and Blue Sail for a presentation setting out a strategic vision for tourism events over the next decade. This considered how events can contribute to strategic ambitions for tourism, including the target of £2bn visitor spend by 2030 and the development of a portfolio of distinctly Northern Ireland experiences that align with the experience brand. The primary objective for the events vision is to generate increased bed-nights and visitor spend, especially from out of state visitors.

With multiple sectors, agencies and local authorities having an interest in events, partnership represents a key theme. A key recommendation is to re-categorise events in line with a standard industry model and to narrow Tourism NI's focus within those categories to concentrate upon major, signature and growth events. The vision considered where in the life cycle of events Tourism NI intervention should best take place. The Board had earlier discussed the difficulties created by the constraint of only being able to fund projects within a single financial year and returned to this theme, with the strategy recommending multi-year funding for events. Members remarked that continuing with year-on-year funding of events would not yield the required impact and a strong case needed to be made to DfE to permit multi-year support.

Also discussed was how best to use events to generate out-of-state visits, with success in this area likely to be on the back of domestic success. An impact model was outlined, offering an assessment of those events which work well. The organisation and delivery of events represented

a further strand of activity, with a recommendation to re-establish a strategic and partnership overview group.

The dynamic underpinning the proposed new categorisation of events would be a focus on outcomes rather than indicators. The Board discussed the distinct features and functions of major, signature and growth events and the need to further develop the skills and expertise of event organisers. Scope was considered for future year-long themed programmes of events, similar to the recent Year of Food and Drink. The Board suggested that there might be useful learnings from exemplars of best practice in event management outside Northern Ireland.

Next steps required the Board's approval of vision and agreement to adopt the principles, the new event categories and the impact model. A visioning workshop was also proposed for stakeholders and a multi-year funding model would need to be agreed with DfE and established, with the aim of a scheme launch towards the end of the year or in early 2020.

The Board was broadly content with the direction of travel outlined in the draft strategy and presentation. The Chairman suggested that Members should take some time to absorb the report and content of the presentation and relay any further feedback on the content via the Director of Business Support and Events (**ACTION: AK**). The Board thanked the presenters and they left the meeting.

3 (iii) Funding Cases for Approval

The Director of Product Development presented the following requests for funding, for approval by the Board:

i) Visitor Servicing – Belfast Cruise Terminal

A request for support of up to £153,000 was presented from Belfast Harbour on behalf of Cruise Belfast, to provide a new interim berth at Belfast Harbour for visiting cruise ships. Existing facilities are poor and the Board was advised that some operators had signalled their intention to discontinue programming Belfast as a cruise destination as a result. Discussion focused around the rationale for intervention from Tourism NI – the Board was advised that support will enhance visitor servicing and the gateway experience at the port, as well as extending the reach of tours beyond Belfast with a showcase of places to visit. The Board was therefore content to approve support of up to £153,000 for the project. An update was also given on the Derry-Londonderry Visitor Information Centre project.

ii) Immersive Technology – Narnia Trail

The Board considered a submission from Newry and Mourne District Council seeking support to animate and enhance the existing Narnia Trail at Kilbroney Forest Park. Members were advised that some questions had been raised around revenue targets, but the project was still found to demonstrate value for money following the exclusion of in-app purchases from the appraisal. Discussing the availability of augmented / virtual reality generally, it was emphasised that Northern Ireland's tourism product remains only a small way into the journey and the project potentially represented a good test case of exemplar for the potential of such innovative ventures. Again it was observed that the requirement to fund projects within the financial year had prevented some other exciting and ambitious proposals from progressing. Considering the Narnia

project the Board asked how the content of the project would be kept up to date. More generally, given the significant investment in projects such as Center Parcs in the Republic of Ireland, the Board stressed the need for support to enhance and improve family-oriented product. The Board was content to approve support for the project with the addition of conditions within the Letter of Offer requiring a content plan to refresh the project.

iii) Immersive Technology - W5 AMAZE!

The Board was presented with a request seeking support of up to £396,868 to create a new self-guided, immersive walkthrough experience called AMAZE! at W5. This virtual and physical 'labyrinth of discovery' will refresh and enhance the existing visitor offering at the centre. Colin Neill declared a possible conflict of interest as Hospitality Ulster is currently advising W5 on licensing issues – however the Board felt that the nature of this relationship did not impact upon any decision it might take on supporting the project. Members considered whether it was appropriate for Tourism NI to be supporting a refresh of an existing facility and discussed whether the proposal was sufficiently innovative to merit support. The Board was advised of feedback from the Titanic cluster which indicated that the project would represent a strong addition to the area's product mix. The Board approved support of up to £396,868, on the proviso that the offer includes a condition requiring the content of the experience to be strongly embedded in local culture and landscape.

Aine Kearney and Rosemarie McHugh left the meeting at this point.

3 (iv) Great Britain Market Review Update

The Director of Marketing provided an update on work by Tourism Ireland on its review of the Great Britain market. The Board was advised that a draft report is expected to be presented shortly to the Tourism Ireland Board. Members again discussed sensitivities around Brexit with hardening consumer sentiment as a result of negative rhetoric and concerns that access to the ROI market will become more difficult. The Board commented that it would be useful to see the sentiment analysis and agreed that Tourism NI's own messaging would need to be adapted accordingly, whether it positions itself within the UK or the island of Ireland context. The Board agreed that the Chairman should write to Tourism Ireland's chair welcoming the completion of the report and seeking clarity on how its recommendations will be used to secure differentiation and maximise opportunities for Northern Ireland. It was also suggested that the Department should be asked for its views on how recommendations are to be driven and monitored and this is to be raised at the debrief with DfE (**ACTION: JMcG**).

It was agreed that the Board and the Chief Executive would hold discussion of the remaining items in a closed session. Jim Daly and Naomi Waite left the meeting at this point.

3 (v) Organisational Restructuring

This minute is non-disclosable under the 'Section 22 – information intended for future publication' exemption of the Freedom of Information Act (2000). This exemption is subject to a public interest test.

3 (vi) Former Tourism NI Headquarters – Dilapidations

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.

3 (vii) Direct Award Contract – Web Platform Support

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.

4. Reports

4 (i) Chairman's Report

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

4 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

The content of the report was noted.

4 (iii) Sub-Groups / Committee Updates

There were no sub-group meetings since the last Board Meeting.

6. Any Other Business

There were no other items of business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 7 March, venue TBC.