

Board Meeting 6 October 2022

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD IN THE ANNESLEY ROOM, SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE
ON THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022**

Participating:

- Ms Ellvena Graham OBE (Chair)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Ms Anya O'Connor
- Mr John West
- Ms Michele Shirlow
- Mr Geoff Wilson
- Mr Colin Neill
- Mr Terry McCartney
- Mr Stephen Garvin

In attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Louise Fitzsimons, Head of People and
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Major Events
- Ms Una Foy, Finance Executive
- Ms Lesley Shannon, Head of Finance
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

Apologies:

- Ms Patricia Corbett

1. Introduction / Standing Items

Ahead of the meeting the Chair welcomed Stephen Garvin, who would be joining meetings during the coming year as the new Boardroom Apprentice. Also prior to commencement of the meeting proper the Board received a presentation on Tourism Ireland's new Corporate Plan.

The Chair asked Board Members to consider topics for future "deep dive" sessions preceding Board Meetings. It was suggested that Department for Economy (DfE) officials developing the new Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy might be invited to present, once work on the strategy is at a more advanced stage.

Members also suggested that it would be useful to revisit and refresh the draft Tourism Strategy Tourism NI had prepared before work was handed over to DfE, with a view to better aligning it with the 10X Strategy (**ACTION:** JMcG / DE).

The issue of a dedicated Tourism NI data strategy was also raised again. It was suggested that any such initiative might be best progressed through the Marketing Sub-Committee (**ACTION:** NW).

It was also agreed that the Chair should receive a briefing on the Tourism NI data hub similar to the presentation given to the Board in June (**ACTION:** DE).

The Chair reminded participants that minutes of the meeting will be published and asked if anyone wished to declare interests or conflicts in relation to agenda items. No declarations were made at this point.

1 (i) Minutes of Previous Board Meeting

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 11th August 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

1 (ii) Matters Arising – Actions from Previous Meeting

The Board noted the status of actions agreed at its last meeting. Updates were given as follows:

Skills – the Board was advised of a planned meeting with the DfC Permanent Secretary. Members suggested also inviting him to present to the Board (**ACTION:** JMcG).

TXGB – a recommendation on continuing with the pilot programme will form part of an update scheduled for the next Board Meeting (**ACTION:** NW).

Visitor Data – Members had previously enquired about visitor intelligence that might be derived from airport arrivals. The Insights and Intelligence team is exploring this with NISRA. The Board suggested Tourism NI should also give consideration to other areas in which data may be collated.

2. Items for Decision

2 (i) Tourism NI Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21 and Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance

The Board was presented with the draft Tourism NI Annual Report for 2020-21 and the draft Report To Those Charged With Governance. Tourism NI's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee met on 1st September to review the accounts and had recommended seeking the Board's approval to sign them off. In the interim, DfE raised a query in respect of the proposed treatment of payments to Tourism Ireland within the accounts and the Department was undertaking some further due diligence work in relation to the issue. Subject to the outcome of this work, the Board was asked for its approval to sign the accounts, on the proviso that any further changes required would be brought back for review and approval via the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. The Board agreed to proceed on this basis.

Members highlighted a small number of minor corrections required in the text. The Board also received confirmation that issues relating to the Bed & Breakfast, Guesthouse and Guest

Accommodation support programme did not extend past March 2021. An update was given on preparation of the 2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts, which it is hoped will be available for review by the Board in December. It was also emphasised that delays in finalising the 2020-21 accounts were not a reflection upon the work done by Tourism NI's Finance team in preparing them.

2 (ii) Proposed 2023 Board Meeting Dates

The Board approved a schedule of dates for its meetings in 2023. Members agreed to hold a private dinner in Belfast following the Board's Meeting and engagement with Tourism NI staff scheduled for Thursday 15 December and to meet the cost of this themselves.

3. Items for Discussion

3 (i) Human Resources Report

The Board had previously requested a report on Human Resources issues. A preliminary report was now presented and it was proposed that going forward, reports should be presented on a quarterly basis. Members were advised of turnover levels and issues with recruitment and retention of staff in the current job market. Departing staff members cited better salaries and conditions of employment as the primary reason for their departure. A number commented that level of bureaucracy involved made the Tourism NI a less attractive option than employment in the private sector.

Members were also advised of the substance of a class action being brought by the NIPSA union on behalf of its members against a number of government bodies, including Tourism NI in respect of changes by Government to the structure of public sector pensions.

An update was also given on the hybrid working model. All Tourism NI staff based at headquarters had returned to the office effective from the start of October through a hotdesking system, for at least two days per week. The system was noted to be working well. Discussion also touched on organisational culture, which was perceived generally to be very strong. Tourism NI expects to carry out a new staff engagement survey soon and the Board asked to see the results and an assessment of how these compare with the previous survey (**ACTION: LF**).

Staff learning and development was discussed. The Chief Executive reported that a previous leadership programme had proven to be very successful and well received. He stated that he was keen to run a similar programme once new posts in the leadership team were filled. The Board commented that it would be useful to receive a more detailed overview of this in a future report (**ACTION: LF**). Also discussed were job vacancies and staff absences, as well as the importance of staff health and wellbeing, including that of senior management, and the availability of support services. Members emphasised the need to identify and monitor trends in these areas and suggested that they might form useful areas of focus for future reports.

3 (ii) Finance Update

A report was presented setting out Tourism NI's latest budget position, highlighting the total allocation for the year and additional resource totalling £7.938m which had been received through

bids to the June monitoring round. The Board was asked to review the breakdown of budget allocation and confirm that it was content with the distribution of resources.

Expenditure against the budget in the year to date was detailed and emphasis was placed on the need for careful ongoing management and monitoring to ensure that this allocation is spent in full by 31st March 2023. The CEO pointed out that, due to the time taken to get approvals in place, marketing activity being primarily in Autumn and Spring and the fact that the tourism industry seldom attended development workshops in the high season meant that Tourism NI's expenditure is always heavily weighted towards the end of the financial year. He did however point out that he was fully aware of the challenges which this brought and had made it clear to managers the need for accurate profiling and tight management of budgets. The Board was also advised that the financial picture for government going forward is likely to be characterised by extreme constraints on available resources.

The Board discussed options for ensuring that the budget not only can be spent in full, but in the most impactful way, for example through another phase of the Market Led Product Development Programme. It was noted that the Finance and Casework Committee would play a significant role in the oversight of the budget and ensuring that all resources are expended as required by the Department. The Board also noted the position with spend on capital programmes and discussed options for other activity that might help with spend.

Colin Neill declared a conflict of interest in relation to any potential grant funding as some of Hospitality Ulster's members might well be applicants for such funds.

4. Reports

4 (i) Chair's Report

The Board noted a list of engagements undertaken by the Chair in the period since the last meeting and she reported on her participation in the recent Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) conference. Members noted that a dinner with the Minister had been scheduled for 24 October. The Board was also advised that DfE is commencing the process to recruit new Board Members, with appointments expected in spring 2023.

4 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

The content of the report was noted and the Chief Executive provided updates on a number of issues, including discussions about future arrangements to support the North West 200.

In the context of a forthcoming tri-agency meeting with counterparts in Tourism NI and Fáilte Ireland, Tourism NI is seeking to get a picture of bids for resource made by the other tourism agencies to the Shared Island Fund.

The Board also received a report on the Corporate Launch of the One Young World Forum, due to take place in Belfast in October 2023.

4 (iii) Sub-Committee Reports

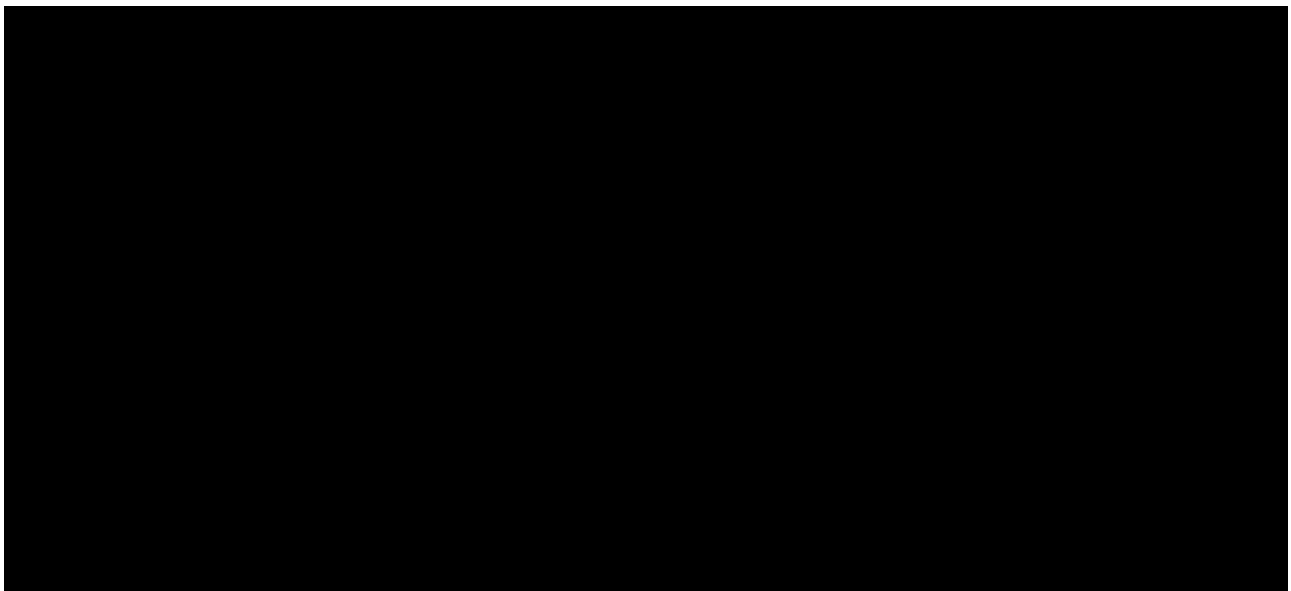
Reports were given by the sub-committee chairs as follows:

Finance and Casework Committee – Michele Shirlow reported on the Committee’s meeting held on 29 September. The Committee had received a Finance report, an updated version of which was presented to the Board earlier in the meeting. Discussion of the report had focused on concern around budget spend in the year to date and measures to give assurance that budgets are fully spent by 31 March 2023.

The Committee had also approved proposals for the launch and delivery of the International Events Funding Programme 2023-24 and the National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme 2023-24. The Committee also received updates on Phase II of the Website Development Programme for accommodation projects and City and Growth Deal projects.

Having declared a conflict of interest at previous Board Meetings in relation to major sporting events submissions, Geoff Wilson left the meeting to permit discussion of the next item.

(This section is exempt from disclosure under Section 43 – Commercial Interests of the Freedom of Information Act 2000)



Geoff Wilson rejoined the meeting.

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee – Angelina Fusco gave a brief update on an extraordinary meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which had been held to review and approve the draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2020-21. She also gave a report on a meeting convened by DfE of the chairs of Audit and Risk Committees of the Department’s arms-length bodies. They had received a briefing on the economic outlook for the next few years which predicts a very challenging budgetary picture for 2023 and beyond. Scenario planning will be required and there are likely to be severe limitations on activity that can be delivered. Another topic of the meeting had been Partnership Agreements between the Department and its agencies.

The Chief Executive advised that the Department is also asking Tourism NI to give thought to action that might help to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis. The Board stressed the need for Tourism NI to be clear and realistic with the Department about what can be achieved in the current circumstances. The Board was also advised that next year’s DfE accounts will be

consolidated and represent a substantial additional workload for the arms-length bodies including Tourism NI, as their input will be required.

Marketing Sub-Committee – there had been no meeting of the Marketing sub-Committee in the period since the last Board Meeting.

5. Papers for Noting

5 (i) Draft Agenda for October Board Meeting

The Board noted the draft agenda for its next meeting.

Jim Daly, Aine Kearney, Una Foy and Lesley Shannon all left the meeting to permit the Board to discuss the next item in camera.

6. Any Other Business

6 (i) Closed session – HR Issue

The Chief Executive updated the Board on an informal grievance which he had received and advice which he had sought on how this might be dealt with. He agreed to keep members updated on any action to be undertaken to resolve the issue.

Board members noted the Chief Executive's update.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting will be held on Thursday 10th November 2022.