

Board Meeting 2 October 2023

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, LINUM CHAMBERS
ON MONDAY 2 OCTOBER 2023**

Participating:

- Ms Ellvena Graham OBE (Chair)
- Ms Aine Gallagher
- Ms Linda MacHugh
- Mr Colin Johnston
- Mr Ciaran O'Neill
- Ms Aileen Martin
- Ms Diane Edgington

In attendance:

- Mr David Roberts, Acting Chief Executive
- Ms Lynsey Sloan, (item 2 (ii))
- Mr Ciaran Doherty, Head of Regions (item 2 (i))
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing (item 2 (i))
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

1. Introduction / Standing Items

The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome to Diane Edgington, who was attending her first meeting as Tourism NI's new Boardroom Apprentice. Attendees were reminded that minutes of the meeting would be published and were asked to declare any interests in respect of agenda items. No declarations were made at this point.

1 (i) Minutes of Previous Board Meeting

Minutes of the last Board Meeting held on 30th August 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

1 (ii) Matters Arising – Actions from Previous Meeting

The Board was presented with a schedule of actions agreed at its last meeting and outstanding from previous Board Meetings. The Chair had requested at the last meeting that the Executive Leadership Team should seek firm conclusions to long-standing matters on the schedule and it was noted that these had either been resolved, were on the present agenda for discussion or that a timetable for completion had been agreed.

2. Items for Discussion

2 (i) Summary of Direct Award Contracts (DACs) 2022-23

A report was presented with a list of Direct Award Contracts during the 2022-23 financial year. For the benefit of new Board Members, the paper set out the nature and purpose of DACs, and the specific circumstances in which they are employed. The Board noted the content of the report.

2 (ii) Tourism NI Data Hub

The Board was presented with a paper setting out progress to date in developing Tourism NI's Data Hub and options for the way forward. Approval was sought for further investment for the remainder of the current financial year.

Members were advised that the Hub's purpose is to provide data analytics and real-time insights into visitor trends and behaviour that will support Tourism NI, the wider industry and government bodies in more agile decision-making that is timely and supported by up-to-date, meaningful evidence.

In discussing the project to date, the Board noted that significant resource had already been invested in the Data Hub over two pilot phases and part of the build phase. Members asked if the industry was making use of the data and insights. It was noted that to date, the outputs of the Data Hub had primarily been used by Tourism NI internally and by local authorities, with the next round of investment intended to complete the user interface that will permit its use by the industry.

The Board remarked that, given the scale of investment required it would be useful to have a further report that quantifies the full costs to date and those anticipated for the next few years, and which sets out in more detail the outputs that Tourism NI expects to derive for itself, for local authorities and for use by the industry.

In conclusion, the Board approved the funding request in the paper for the remainder of 2023/24 and requested that a further paper setting out the costs and benefits of options in future years be brought to the December Board Meeting for consideration (**ACTION**: AD).

2 (iii) Direct Award Contracts: Staff Support for CRM System and Co-Operative Marketing Fund

The Board was presented with a request to approve a Direct Award Contract (DAC), to extend the contract of a Digital Project Manager to support the ongoing roll-out of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for Tourism NI. This specialist support was needed in particular to help complete the transfer of Tourism NI's Quality and Standards functions from its old digital platform to the new framework. The Board's approval was sought to award a DAC for an initial seven months, with additional options to extend any period up to twelve months to May 2025.

Members commented that greater clarity was needed on the total value of the DAC. The Board granted approval to award the contract for seven months, subject to additional clarification of the costs involved (**ACTION**: DR).

Co-Operative Marketing Fund

The Board was advised that, in the period since the papers were issued, a potential requirement for a further DAC had been identified. This potential requirement arose from consideration by IAS that the arrangements adopted by TNI in engaging the NIHF in the management and operation of the Co-Operative Marketing Fund should be procured as a service. Legal advice was being secured by Tourism NI.

A DAC may be required and, if so, would require the Board's timely consideration. As paperwork was still in preparation, it was proposed that the Board's approval should be sought by correspondence.

Colin Johnston, Ciaran O'Neill and Aileen Martin all declared interests in relation to this matter, as it was likely that hotels would be applicants to the Fund. It was noted that the Board's Standing Orders made provision for any matters requiring an urgent decision to be made by three members and to be reported at the Board's next meeting. It was agreed to follow this process and to circulate the relevant papers only to the Board Members who had not declared an interest (**ACTION: DR**).

2 (iv) Proposed 2024 Board Meeting Dates

The Board approved a list of proposed dates for meetings in 2024, subject to a few minor amendments. The Chair asked for the dates to be circulated to Members for diaries (**ACTION: Executive Support Team**).

2 (v) Tourism NI Dublin Office

The Board was presented with a paper setting out options for Tourism NI's future office accommodation for its Republic of Ireland team. Work to fit out a joint Tourism NI / Invest NI hub in Dublin had been delayed due to Covid 19 and a series of procurement issues. As a result of these delays and increasing budget pressures, Tourism NI had been exploring the possibility of terminating the agreement. The Board was advised that Invest NI had indicated that it now expects work to be completed in the late autumn, and as a result a decision is required on whether or not to continue with the existing arrangement, agree an alternative or withdraw from the agreement.

Discussing the paper, Members asked about the preferences of staff in relation to office working and whether there was a synergy between Tourism NI and Invest NI's ROI operations. It was confirmed that these offer a combined destination sell as part of a broader vision of a Northern Ireland 'hub' in Dublin. The Board approved Option 2, which proposes exploring with Invest NI a reduced footprint for Tourism NI within the hub, with costs reduced proportionally based on the number of desks required.

2 (vi) Tourism NI Annual Performance Report 2022-23

The Board was presented with a draft Annual Performance Report for 2022-23. Produced alongside Tourism NI's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23, the Performance Report is intended as a tool to communicate Tourism NI's achievements, to highlight key aspects of visitor

industry performance and support stakeholder communications and engagement by helping to promote the value of Tourism NI's work with the industry and public.

Members commented that the report was comprehensive and well produced and suggested that it would be useful to add further detail on achievements in the domestic Northern Ireland market. For future such reports, the Board also recommended a greater focus on the benefits and outcomes deriving from Tourism NI's activity.

2 (vii) Northern Ireland Product Review

The Head of Regions joined the meeting to deliver a presentation highlighting the key findings of a comprehensive audit of Northern Ireland's tourism product and setting out the proposed future strategic direction for capital investment. Five strategic themes had been identified in the review – Attractive, Innovative, Regenerative, Inclusive and Collaborative – aligned to the objectives set out in the 10X economic vision. The process undertaken to identify and define these themes had involved creative engagement from across the industry. The Board suggested it would be helpful to have a better understanding of how Tourism NI defines a visitor attraction and asked for detail of the full portfolio of attractions across Northern Ireland (**ACTION**: CD/DR).

The discussion moved on to how investment is to be sourced to deliver new product. The Board was advised of work being done to engage in new innovative partnerships with other agencies and avenues to support investment such as the Shared Island Fund and Peace Plus. Members also enquired about timelines and were advised that work on the review is now complete, with its outworkings being used to inform conversations with strategic partners to ensure that a joined-up approach is adopted in developing new product. A programme of council engagement and experience development roadshows for the industry is underway.

The Board was advised that it is proposed to present a deep dive session on the new Visitor Experience Development Plans at its next meeting. Members commented that the Review represented a very useful and positive piece of work and stressed the need to align the product review's findings with the priorities that will be set out in the Tourism Strategy. The Board also asked that a fuller update should be provided as part of a 'deep dive' session at its strategic awayday planned in January (**ACTION**: CD/DR).

2 (viii) Northern Ireland Golf Strategy – Terms of Reference

The Board was presented with draft Terms of Reference for the development of a new Northern Ireland Golf Strategy, seeking to maximise future opportunities for golf tourism. Members discussed the proposed composition of a Steering Group which is being established to drive delivery of the Strategy and commented on the need for any action plan arising from this to be fully costed, with responsibility for delivery clearly identified. The Board approved the Terms of Reference and also nominated Aileen Martin to be its representative on the Steering Group.

2 (ix) Role of Board as Investment Decision Maker for City & Growth Deals

The Board discussed Tourism NI's role as investment decision maker in respect of the City & Growth Deals and the associated governance structures. It was noted that DfE's expectation is that Tourism NI will provide the Department with assurance that the City & Growth Deals tourism projects represent value for money, supplying a challenge function in relation to cost assumptions

and strategic fit. The Board felt there was a need to more clearly understand and define its role in tandem with that of the Executive Team. It was agreed that Linda MacHugh should discuss this further with the interim Chief Executive (**ACTION: DR**). It was also observed that consideration needs to be given to how the City Deals team is resourced.

3. Reports

3 (i) Chair's Report

Members noted the detail of engagements undertaken by the Chair in the period since the last Board Meeting in March. The Chair reported on her participation in a recent showcase event held in Westminster by Lisburn & Castlereagh Council. She also reported on her attendance at the recent UK Inbound convention held in Belfast and observed that organisers and delegates alike had been very positive about Belfast as the venue for the event.

4 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

The Board noted the content of a report by the Chief Executive on current issues. Members were advised that Tourism NI had just received an additional capital allocation of £448,000, of which £300,000 was for marketing content. In addition, a further £1.644m of resource budget had been allocated to Tourism NI by DfE for upweighting of an existing marketing programme in the ROI market. As these allocations had been notified after the Board papers had been issued, it was agreed that a fuller update would be provided at the next Board Meeting on how these allocations are to be used (**ACTION: NW**).

The Board was also advised of the resolution of an issue relating to salaries, with arrears owing to staff currently being processed for payment. It was confirmed that this had been factored into Tourism NI's budget and accrued.

4. Papers for Noting

4 (i) Market Outlook

The Board noted the latest Market Outlook Update highlighting key visitor trends.

4 (ii) Draft Agenda for November Board Meeting

The Board noted the draft agenda for its next meeting.

5. Any Other Business

5 (i) World Travel Market

Expressions of interest were sought from Members in attending the World Travel Market, which is due to take place in London from 6-8 November. The Chair advised that the event represented a good means of understanding the competitive landscape for tourism. The Interim Chief Executive agreed to circulate further details following the meeting (**ACTION: DR**).

5 (ii) Sustainability Mark Panel

The Board was advised that Tourism NI is working with colleagues in Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to develop an All-Ireland Sustainability Mark. An expert panel is being established to evaluate applications from certification organisations and Board Members' participation was sought. Colin Johnston indicated his willingness in principle to join the expert panel and the Interim Chief Executive agreed to share further details (**ACTION: DR**).

As there was no other business, the Chair thanked Members and drew the meeting to a close.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting will be held on Thursday 9 November 2023.