

## Board Meeting 18 April 2019

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND  
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT THE BELMONT HOUSE HOTEL, BANBRIDGE  
ON THURSDAY 18 APRIL 2019**

Present:

- Mr Terence Brannigan (Chairman)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Mr Colin Neill
- 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
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing
- Ms Susie Brown, Director of Corporate Development
- Mr Dave Vincent, Chief Digital Officer
- Ms Dorothy Erskine, Insights and Intelligence Manager
- Mr Stephen Finlay, Experience Brand Development Manager
- Mr Jim Daly, Corporate Communications

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. Colin Neill declared a potential interest relating to an issue highlighted within the Chief Executive's Report, concerning the 148<sup>th</sup> Open.

The Chairman reported briefly on the previous evening's dinner discussion with tourism stakeholders. Minutes of the Board Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> March were presented for approval. While Members were broadly content with these, the Board agreed the Chairman's proposal that before

signing them he should discuss with Geoff Wilson a number of points raised regarding the minutes. Subsequent to the meeting, the minutes were signed.

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

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

*Tourism Ireland* – The Board was advised that Tourism Ireland would hold a Board Meeting on 13 June in Co Antrim. It was agreed that the Tourism NI Board should host dinner for them on the prior evening, and draw up an agenda for discussion. Terry McCartney gave apologies in advance.

*Great Britain Market Review* – The Board had recommended that DfE should be asked how it intends to monitor actions arising from the review. As no debrief took place following the last Board Meeting, the issue will be raised at the next debrief on Friday 19 April. Members agreed that this should also form a topic at the dinner discussion with the Tourism Ireland Board.

*PA Consulting* – The Chief Executive gave an update on Tourism NI's bid to the Department for Economy for additional staff resources within a revised organisational structure aligned to better deliver the ambitions of the Tourism Strategy. The Board was advised that DfE had requested substantial additional detail, including an options report. Members expressed concern at the delay in progressing the matter and commented that in the Board's view the Senior Management Team had already set out a sufficiently detailed rationale of the need for the additional posts. The Chairman advised that he had also had discussions with the Permanent Secretary. The Board asked for the matter to be raised at the debrief. **(ACTION: JMcG)**.

*Belfast International Airport* – The Chairman advised that he is to meet soon with the Airport's Chief Executive.

*Tourism NI ROI Staff Pensions* – Tourism NI had sought legal advice on the queries raised at the last Board meeting. It was confirmed that there was no conflict of interest issue in respect of appointing the pensions trustee, and it would not be necessary for an Audit Committee member to join the pension sub-committee.

The Board discussed issues raised at the previous evening's stakeholder dinner with regard to the pace and progress of capital developments. It was observed that some project promoters require a clearer understanding of the planning environment in Northern Ireland and the length of time needed to successfully deliver a capital project. Members agreed that when engaging with promoters the Board should be ready to challenge their assumptions about funding models and the regulatory regime.

## **2. Governance**

### **2 (i) a. Quarter IV 2018-19 Reports: Operating Plan Performance Monitoring**

A report was presented setting out progress against objectives in Tourism NI's 2018-19 Operating Plan. The Chief Executive reported on the status of objectives remaining incomplete or partially complete at the year end. Delays in the procurement process had impacted upon an investment study assessing the costs and economic benefits of implementing the Tourism Strategy and had also affected the implementation of Tourism NI's online platform.

The Board noted that a target for securing conference business had not been met, with a number of conferences in Belfast having been de-programmed by event organisers, citing a collapse in business confidence as a result of the ongoing uncertainty created by Brexit. As a result competition between business tourism destinations for conferences was growing. The Board commented that the reasons for such cancellations needed examination in greater detail but suggested that as a first step it should be reflected in the Risk Register (**ACTION:** JMcG).

The Board also discussed the ongoing issue of hospitality skills. While a bid for resource is being added to the submission to the Department for funds to mitigate the impact of withdrawal from the EU, Members commented that a more strategic long-term approach to resourcing is required to properly address the skills agenda and other issues.

The Board noted the content of the report and commended the Executive Team and Tourism NI staff for their work in fulfilling the majority of the Operating Plan objectives.

Geoff Wilson joined the meeting.

## **2 (i) b. Quarter IV 2018-19 Reports: Finance**

The Board was presented with a report detailing the budget position at the end of the 2018-19 financial year. Of the overall £24m budget, only £54k remained unspent. Progress on spend with the capital funding budget was highlighted. The performance on capital spend was noted to be particularly positive given that funds for the immersive technology programme had been received at a very late stage in the year. Board expenses for the year were reported and while the figure represented a slight increase on the previous year, spend was still low.

The Board was asked to note a typographical error in the Finance report for the previous Board Meeting, which had quoted a figure of £15k for support provided to Northern Ireland promotion at London's Borough Market. Members were advised that the correct figure should have been £25k. The Board was also advised that the new finance system is expected to go live in Quarter 3.

## **2 (i) c. Quarter IV 2018-19 Reports: Risk Management**

The Board received a report on risk management in the final quarter of the year. IT systems were noted to be performing normally following the implementation of a new security regime, with additional awareness training in place for staff. The Board suggested that IT security should be integral to management of staff performance and that disciplinary sanctions should be considered for those whose performance in this area is not satisfactory.

There had been a proposal that the risk associated with long-term staff absence should be removed from the register as levels had reduced. Members commented that the risk should be retained in view of comments in the staff engagement survey relating to workplace stress. The Board was advised that a focus group process had been undertaken with staff to assess these issues in more detail and a report will be presented to the Senior Management Team soon. The Board suggested that this should form an agenda item at its next meeting (**ACTION:** LK).

## **2 (i) d. Quarter IV 2018-19 Reports: Board Effectiveness**

The Board noted a report on progress against an action plan produced following the Board's review of effectiveness. Presentation training had been proposed for the Senior Management Team but given diary constraints this had been deferred until after the 148<sup>th</sup> Open. It was suggested that the training should also be offered to Board Members (**ACTION**: LK).

The Board discussed sub-committees, new structures for which had been approved in November 2018. It had been hoped to establish a programme of meetings for these, but the Board had also recommended the appointment of independent members to each committee and this was proving problematic, although an independent member had been appointed to the Audit Committee. The Board recommended a further discussion at its next meeting and asked for the paper from November's meeting to be shared again in advance (**ACTION**: JD).

The Board also discussed that challenges in getting papers for meetings out in a timely fashion – it was noted that delays with the current meeting were caused by other bodies not replying with required information. While acknowledging the issues, Members emphasised that their discussions are more effective when given time to properly consider the issues.

The Board reiterated the need for a long term plan to ensure ongoing vacancies in membership are filled as soon as possible and suggested this should be raised at the debrief (**ACTION**: JMcG).

## **3. Reports**

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

The Board noted a report on engagements undertaken by the Chairman since the last meeting. He advised Members of one additional meeting which had taken place, with Mike Nesbitt MLA.

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

The Board noted the content of the Chief Executive's report and specific updates were highlighted as follows:

*Tourism Performance* – the Board discussed recent performance, in particular the downturn in conference business attributed to uncertainly related to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The local industry remains strongly represented at trade events and workshops, but it was noted that for many businesses the cost of advertising in the RoI market is prohibitive. The Board discussed other promotional platforms aimed at the GB market. It was suggested that the issue presents an opportunity for the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance to take a lead.

With respect to withdrawal from the EU, the Board was advised that work continues within government to prepare for and address the impact, although activity specifically to mitigate effects of a "no deal" scenario had been deprioritised for the time being.

*Northern Ireland Affairs Committee* – The Board was advised of Tourism NI's contribution to a Departmental response to the Committee's request for evidence to inform an inquiry into the economic and social impact of tourism. Members were advised that the Board might be asked to

participate in oral evidence sessions and it was agreed that the Departmental submission would be shared with the Board when complete (**ACTION**: SB).

A report was given on Tourism NI's participation in the MIPIM conference as part of the Belfast delegation. The Board was advised that significant interest in Northern Ireland had been shown by one major hotel franchise in particular.

Colin Neill and Michele Shirlow declared interests and left the meeting for the duration of the following discussion.

*The 148<sup>th</sup> Open* – a report was given on the ongoing preparations for the event. The Board was advised that the Department for Communities is undertaking consultation on an amendment to licensing legislation to facilitate special events such as The Open. The Board agreed that Tourism NI should respond favourably to the proposal but added that any response must emphasise that while this represents progress towards making Northern Ireland more visitor-friendly, other changes are required to bring it more in step with the approach to licensing in the rest of the UK.

*Game of Thrones* – Colin Neill and Michele Shirlow re-joined the meeting. The Board noted the significant positive media coverage generated for Northern Ireland in connection with the premiere of the show's final season and the opening of the Touring Exhibition. Members commended the staff involved with both events.

*Meet the Buyer* – a report was given on the Meet the Buyer workshop. This had been the biggest such event held to date with a comprehensive programme arranged around it to promote Northern Ireland to delegates, and a great deal of positive business transacted on the day. Members were pleased to note very positive feedback received about the knowledge and professionalism of Tourism NI staff in attendance at the event, in assisting buyers and operators to do business.

Geoff Wilson reported on a Tourism NI masterclass held at Riddell Hall and commended staff involved in organising the event.

The Board received an update on work towards developing a new media library as a shared asset in partnership with Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Members suggested this should form a topic for the forthcoming dinner discussion with Tourism Ireland.

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

There were no substantive updates on committees as they had not met since the last meeting. Angelina Fusco advised that she had now assumed the chair of the Audit Committee.

## **4. Papers for Discussion**

### **4 (i) Experience Brand**

The Board received a presentation on work in progress to develop the new experience brand. This set out the development of the brand concept to date and the thinking that shaped its look, feel and design. It was emphasised that the brand remains a work in progress. A significant step had been the convening of a group of influencers who had helped to further refine the concepts ahead

of a period of stakeholder engagement planned for spring and summer. Members were also advised of the timeline for the process leading up to a launch planned for the World Travel Market in November. The Board commented that the phase of engagement with the industry would be critical and recommended securing the assistance of good examples of well-established experience providers to animate the brand and help to sell it. Members emphasised that these brand champions needed to encompass not just familiar elements such as Titanic and the Giant's Causeway, but be representative of the whole of the Northern Ireland experience. It was stressed that the current presentation focused on the framework, and that while research to date showed that the brand was testing well with audiences, further work needed to be done with focus groups and research to ensure that it is fully market-ready.

#### **4 (ii) Tourism Strategy**

The Board received a presentation setting out the key elements of a revised draft Tourism Strategy to 2030, setting out the goal and vision for growing tourism over the next decade and highlighting the markets, segments and niches to be targeted to achieve that growth. The Board's input and comment was particularly sought on how regional dispersal, seasonal growth and a more vibrant night-time economy might be stimulated. Emphasis was placed on the requirement for new and refreshed product and infrastructure to support growth, underpinned by capital investment. Commitment and collaboration from key strategic partners will also be essential to the strategy's delivery.

The Strategy will be supported by a comprehensive Action Plan – the Board commented that this needs to be realistic about what can be achieved in areas such as digital infrastructure. The need was also highlighted for the strategy to be fully aligned with Tourism Ireland's plans and resources. Members also recommended that while the Strategy represents a horizon document, periodical reviews should be built in to assess progress. The Board was advised that a recently completed Visitor Attitude Survey provides important data to support the Strategy and it was agreed that the Board should receive a presentation on this at its next meeting (**ACTION: SB**).

Noting that the Permanent Secretary had indicated that he is minded to permit the commencement of consultation, the Board was content to approve the revised strategy document for submission to DfE.

#### **4 (iii) Tourism NI Budget 2019-20**

The Board was presented with a proposal outlining how Tourism NI's budget for 2019-20 would be allocated. It was noted that with the exception of funding to support the 148<sup>th</sup> Open, the budget is essentially the same as that for 2018-19. Noting that the final 2018-19 position included in-year bids for additional funds it was emphasised that Tourism NI could make more effective use of resources if it had those funds at the outset of the financial year, rather than being reliant on in-year bids. The Board approved the proposed budget allocation.

#### **4 (iv) Mileage Policy**

A paper was presented setting out a new interim mileage policy aimed at supporting field-based Tourism NI staff engaged in activity such as quality and standards inspections, until an agreement is reached between the NI Civil Service and NIPSA on future mileage arrangements. The Board agreed to adopt the interim mileage policy.

#### **4 (v) Business Tourism Strategy**

The Board was presented with draft Terms of Reference for a market review that will result in a strategy to generate sustainable growth in business tourism from 2020-2030. The Board was advised that in particular a strategy was required to identify growth opportunities and address loss of conference business as a result of uncertainty around the UK's impending withdrawal from the European Union. The Board commented that there was a need to have evidence of Brexit's impact upon industry confidence and the plans of conference organisers. The proposed budget was noted. Agreeing that the strategy was critical to growing this area of business already worth £560m, the Board approved the commencement of work.

#### **4 (vi) Agency Procurement**

The Board was presented with a paper seeking approval of the Terms of Reference for a process to procure a new framework of specialist agency suppliers with media buying, digital, design and creative brand development expertise. The Board approved the terms of reference and the commencement of the procurement process.

Geoff Wilson left the meeting during discussion of the next item.

#### **4 (vii) Events Funding**

The Board was presented with the following requests for Events funding for approval.

*Northern Ireland Open* – The Board was presented with a request for support for an expanded event that will include a combined men's and women's professional tournament, making it the first such in Europe. This would represent a significant opportunity to reach out to the golf market. The Board approved support and commenting that this represented a significant forward step in ambitions for the tournament the Board suggested that it would be useful for Tourism NI to have an observer in place on the organising committee for the event (**ACTION:** AK).

*Derry International Halloween Festival* – A request was presented for support for the 2019 Festival. The Board was advised that in the last five years the scope of the Festival had increased significantly, with the 2018 event running for a full eight days. The programme for the 2019 Festival represented another advance in scale and ambition. A number of funding options were presented for the Board's consideration and Members approved the recommended option to provide support of up to £130,000 subject to a number of conditions including the organisers undertaking to secure at least an additional £20k of funding from within its own resources or from other funders. The Board also suggested that a delegation of up to two Board Members should undertake a visit to Derry-Londonderry during the course of the event (**ACTION:** AK).

*The Open Addendum* – The Board was presented with an addendum to the business case for the 148<sup>th</sup> Open, setting out the expected costs of policing / fire / rescue and ambulance services to support the event. At £1.4m these were significantly higher than the costs outlined in the original business case. The submission emphasised however that given the unprecedented ticket sales for the event (with the additional allocation now having fully sold out), the high proportion (59%) of spectators from out of state and the subsequent impact of both direct and net economic benefits, the event still represented significant value for money. Accordingly the Board approved the addendum to the business plan and suggested that it would be useful also to have an indication of

the number of day visitors expected from out of state. The Board also approved a proposal to deal with the policing costs for the event by means of a technical transfer (**ACTION**: AK).

Geoff Wilson re-joined the meeting.

#### **4 (viii) Visa Data Direct Award Contract (DAC)**

The Board ratified its approval by correspondence of a direct award contract to Visa, for a pilot project to generate additional visitor performance data.

### **5. Papers for Noting**

#### **5 (i) Tourism NI Scheme of Delegations**

The Board was presented with a draft Scheme of Delegation setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Tourism NI Chairman, Board and Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, along with a complete list of delegations. It was noted that the draft Scheme had already been discussed by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Board approved the Scheme of Delegation and asked for it to be added to its online document library for ease of reference (**ACTION**: JD).

#### **5 (ii) Code of Conduct for Bus Tour Operators**

A paper was presented setting out proposals by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for a mandatory Code of Conduct governing the operation of hop-on / hop-off guided bus tours. DfI is preparing to initiate a consultation process and had sought Tourism NI's support for this approach. The Board agreed to support the proposal in principle.

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

The Board noted the draft agenda and agreed to add the items proposed during the current meeting. It was agreed that the venue for the Board Meeting on 20 June will be Tourism NI headquarters. Members proposed that a dinner should be held the evening before with the Board of the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance. Members also suggested that the August Board Meeting should be held at a Fermanagh venue.

### **6. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of substantive business.

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

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 20 June, at Tourism NI headquarters.