

Board Meeting 12 November 2025

**TOURISM NI
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT ARMAGH, BANBRIDGE & CRAIGAVON COUNCIL OFFICES,
THE PALACE DEMESNE, ARMAGH
ON WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2025**

Participating:

- Ms Ellvena Graham OBE (Chairman)
- Mr Michael Counahan
- Ms Aine Gallagher
- Ms Karly Greene
- Mr John Hood
- Mr Colin Johnston
- Ms Linda MacHugh (by remote call)
- Mr Ciaran O'Neill

In attendance:

- Ms Laura McCorry, Chief Executive
- Mr Adrian Doherty, Director of Corporate Development
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Events
- Mr David Roberts, Director of Strategic Development
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

Apologies:

- Ms Aileen Martin

1. Introduction / Standing Items

The Chairman welcomed those present. Participants were asked for declarations of interest in relation to agenda items. None were declared. The Board had a closed discussion with the new CEO.

1 (i) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Board reviewed draft minutes of its meeting on 18th September 2025. Members noted that some discussion points about Destination Stewardship had not been captured and reiterated that whilst they had approved the approach in principle, there was little evidence provided by way of supplementary reports that allowed them to endorse the recommended approach.

The Chief Executive advised that the consultants are visiting Northern Ireland at the end of November and will ensure an engagement session is planned for the Board. It was noted that some local authorities are developing their own destination plans and the Board are keen to understand the process of alignment across Councils (**ACTION: DR**). The Board also requested a workshop with the ELT to ensure alignment on strategic matters going forward (**ACTION: LMCC**).

2. Items for Discussion

2 (i) Digital Transformation Project

Ahead of a presentation from EY, the Chief Executive set out her assessment of the project to migrate the Q&S database system onto Dynamics. The Board was then joined by the Director of Strategic Development, the Director of Corporate Development and Tim Cush of EY who set out a proposed way forward.

The Board sought further assurances from EY including a detailed assessment of progress / deliverables against business cases to date, a functional benefit statement based on investment made to date, an options appraisal that set out the pathway to the preferred solution including the option of stopping the project, a costed plan to deliver the solution and a technical appraisal of TIDI if it is to remain as part of the hybrid solution proposed. The Board stressed the importance of closing out the project within the remaining funding envelope and urged the need for tight control, participation and tight oversight at Director level (**ACTION: DR / AD**).

Tim Cush left the meeting.

The Chair suggested the Board would benefit from a skilled advisor who could supply the technical oversight necessary to complete the project and scrutinise delivery over the next 12 months. The Chief Executive agreed to explore options (**ACTION: LMCC**).

The Board discussed the status of Tourism NI's broader IT infrastructure, noting the urgent need for technical expertise to replace the outgoing Head of Digital and IT to strengthen TNI's own IT capabilities and project oversight (**ACTION: AD**). The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee commented that the imminent departure of this staff member had not been included within the risk report provided at the most recent meeting and stressed the need for the deficit in IT expertise to be fully reflected within the corporate risk register (**ACTION: AD**). A Board member suggested a conversation in due course with VisitBritain's Head of Digital / AI might prove beneficial.

The Board stressed that it was essential to ensure that the remainder of the project stays on schedule with no deviation and requested that a progress update be given at each Board meeting until completion (**ACTION: DR / AD**).

David Roberts left the meeting.

2 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Board reviewed the status of actions from previous meetings. It was noted that the proposal to hold a risk workshop with ELT and the Board should be prioritised early in the new year (**ACTION: AD to get dates**).

2 (iii) Chief Executive's Report

The report was taken as read and several points were highlighted:

Travel Trade Strategy – Members noted the update on the strategy. They stressed the need for the Board to have a voice in developing strategy and asked for this piece of work to be presented to the Board (**ACTION: NW**).

VisitDerry – The Board was advised that discussions are ongoing between the Council and Visit Derry Board regarding future financial support.

Marketing Campaigns – the Board was pleased to note the outcomes achieved with reduced resource and commended the marketing team for its work. The Board emphasised the need to explore a partnership approach to marketing in order to leverage private sector investment. The Chair asked the Marketing Committee to undertake a review of the current multi-agency approach to delivering the contract and asked the committee to explore options for more integrated partnership marketing (**ACTION: NW**).

Derry Halloween – the Board noted a report on the recent event and suggested an assessment should be conducted of the impact of Tourism NI's support, including whether it directly helps to achieve the desired standout within the Home of Halloween brand (**ACTION: AK**).

Staff Member Anniversary – The Board agreed to write to congratulate Jim Hughes of the Corporate Services team on fifty years of service with Tourism NI / NITB and asked if it was possible to make a small presentation marking this milestone (**ACTION: LMCC**).

Colin Johnston advised that an airline is keen to present to the Board regarding air route development. The Board agreed this would be useful, noting that the new Derry – Dublin route provided new opportunities for collaboration (**ACTION: CJ to make intros to Chair / CEO**).

2 (iv) International Events Programme

Director of Events Aine Kearney joined the meeting.

The Director of Events presented a request to operate an International Events Programme in 2026. It was stressed that the new programme would represent a transitional arrangement pending outcomes linked to the ongoing work to develop a new events vision for NI. A wide ranging discussion ensued, including evaluation of previous events, support for smaller events and consideration of other forms of support (e.g. TNI marketing, product, training). The discussion culminated in the Board approving the proposal as set out in the paper for operating the International Tourism Events Programme. Members also asked for a progress update to be given in due course (**ACTION:** AK) and stressed the need for Tourism NI to consider how it uses its resources more effectively to support events.

John Hood agreed to act as the Board representative on the appeals panel for the 2026 scheme.

2 (vii) Report on The Open Championship

The Board received a presentation setting out the headline metrics for measuring the impact of the Open Championship. The Board asked how the results for out-of-state visitors compared with the Championships held elsewhere and were advised that the Northern Ireland event was bettered only by those tournaments held at St Andrew's.

The Board also discussed legacy activity, noting the value of that work carried out following the Open in 2019. Members stressed that it would be important to understand when the event is likely to return to Northern Ireland and stressed the importance of continuing to make the golf product a priority by having a TNI presence at the Ryder Cup and other forthcoming platforms.

At this point, the order of the agenda was adjusted to facilitate an early departure by the CEO following a family emergency.

2 (viii) Sub-Committee Reports

The Board received reports from the Chairs of its Sub-Committees:

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee – a report was given on the Committee's meeting held on 30 October. The Committee Chair advised that the status of assurance set out in her written report on IT did not now reflect the actual position, as the Committee had not been notified of the imminent departure of a senior team member. She stressed the need for the Committee to have genuine assurance on such matters.

The Committee also reviewed Tourism NI's Standards of Conduct, Performance Management and Probation policies, and the Board discussed the approval process. While it was noted that only the Board could approve policies, Members felt strongly the level of detail in the current papers should not be required if policies fully align with those of the NICS. They remarked that

Board approval of detail should be required only in cases where policies are unique to Tourism NI or differ substantially from NICS practice.

An extraordinary meeting has been scheduled on 2nd December to review the Annual Report and Accounts.

The Committee had also discussed ongoing work on assurance mapping and considered that an absence of reported issues is not equal to positive assurances. The Committee also requested that a review be completed of financial reporting to demonstrate appropriate linkages between financial performance and operational outcomes. A board self-assessment questionnaire produced by the National Audit Office has been circulated to relevant TNI staff but has not yet been reported to the Committee, noting that the Executive Leadership Team is to review this first. It was agreed that the factual elements of this questionnaire should be completed by TNI staff and reviewed by the ELT, and the template could be amended to reflect this **(ACTION: AD)**. It could then be used as a basis for the Board to complete the remainder of the assessment and identify any gaps for consideration, with the aim of ensuring that the Board receives the most appropriate financial reporting going forward. **(ACTION: AD)**.

The Board was content to approve the three policies as recommended by the Committee and asked that in future when policies do not deviate from NICS practice, a statement confirming this can be presented for approval instead.

The CEO left the meeting, and ELT members Aine Kearney and Adrian Doherty remained.

Finance & Casework Committee – the Committee's Chair reported outcomes from its meeting held on 29 October to review the Quarter II Finance Report. The Committee noted that the budget update reported a contingency sum for the Open had been returned to the Department as it was no longer required. As this resource was ringfenced it could not be reallocated by Tourism NI to other activity and a bid under the October Monitoring Round for a similar sum had not been successful.

An update was also given on City Deals, and the Board expressed concern at the slow progress and delays on the projects within the programme. Policies on Stakeholder Engagement and Expenses had been presented and recommended for approval with some amendments. The Board approved these subject to the allowance for overnight stays in London being reviewed, as it was felt to be insufficient. The Board asked for details to be provided on the arrangements for expense claims from Members, noting the distinction between mileage to TNI headquarters and to other venues **(ACTION: AD)**.

2 (ix) Internal Board Review of Effectiveness

Members noted the content of a report on an annual internal review of the Board's effectiveness, compiled from the findings of an anonymous survey of Board Members. Broadly, the review was positive and indicated that the Board was functioning effectively. Members

commented in relation to succession planning that the Board had no influence on the matter as it was a decision for the Minister. Members also reiterated the need for financial reporting to be linked closely to performance on Operating Plan delivery. The Board suggested that it would be useful to develop an Action Plan for the Board linked to areas identified in the effectiveness report with scope for improvement (**ACTION: AD**).

The Board was asked to bear the findings of the review in mind when agreeing to its objectives for 2026-27.

2 (x) Board Objectives

The Board was presented with a set of proposed objectives for 2026-27. Reviewing these, the Board commented that an objective on risk and crisis oversight should not focus solely on cyber and data security and take a more general view of critical risks, and the KPI should be delivery of a Board / ELT risk workshop. Members also commented that as the Board could not influence appointments, succession planning should not be included as a KPI, and the focus should be on identifying skills gaps. It was also suggested that a facilitated session was needed to reaffirm the Board and ELT's respective roles and responsibilities. In relation to the conduct of Board Meetings, Members asked to receive copies of presentations well in advance of the meeting so that Members could frame their thoughts more effectively.

Members discussed the setting of tourism strategy and while it was acknowledged that responsibility for this rests with the Department, the Board agreed it had a strategic oversight role to play in defining performance indicators and ensuring that resources are aligned to support delivery. It was agreed that a revised and updated version of the objectives would be circulated by correspondence for the Board's approval (**ACTION: AD**).

The Board also noted the proposal that going forward, the Director of Corporate Services would attend each Board Meeting to provide advice and insight on governance matters.

3. Reports

3 (i) Chairman's Report

The Board noted the content of a summary of the Chairman's engagements since the last meeting. She reported on an introductory meeting with Mark Lee, the new G3 Deputy Secretary within DfE's Economic Policy Group with responsibility for tourism.

3 (ii) VisitBritain Relationship

The Board was presented with a paper prepared by Karly Greene that set out the background to Tourism NI's relationship with BTA / VisitBritain. It was noted that as TNI's representative participates in VisitBritain Board Meetings in the capacity of observer, the other UK home nations have a more active role and VB does not have any lobbying or advocacy role with the

UK government. The Board commented that attendance in an observer capacity requires a significant commitment but does not represent the best use of a Board Member's limited time. The Board asked the Chief Executive to give some thought to how the relationship with VisitBritain might be maintained at Executive level (**ACTION:** LMCC). In the interim it was agreed that Karly Greene should attend her final scheduled VisitBritain Board Meeting in December.

4. Quarter II 2025-26 Performance Reports

4 (i) Operating Plan

Colin Johnston left the meeting at this point.

The Board noted a report on the status of Operating Plan objectives at the end of the second quarter. Members discussed the number of objectives at amber status and stressed the need to understand the reasons behind any changes in status and to have some assurance that the final status would be green / achieved at year end. It was noted that each quarterly report is reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team. The Board questioned whether the development of the new strategic vision for events would be complete by the end of Quarter IV – Members were advised that work on this had been substantive and will be delivered by Q4.

4 (ii) Risk Management

The Board noted the report, which was the same report provided to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee on 30th October with the Committee's comments included in its report to the Board at 2 (viii). Dates for the risk workshop in the new year are to be agreed (**ACTION:** AD).

4 (iii) Finance Report

The Board noted this report, having received a detailed update earlier in the meeting as part of the report on the Finance & Casework Committee.

4 (iv) People & Organisational Development

The Board noted the update. Discussing the number of staff on temporary contracts, the Board asked for further detail (**ACTION:** AD) and urged the need to have plans in place to deal with the expiry of such contracts. The Board also discussed the number of performance reviews that remain outstanding and requested these to be progressed.

5. Papers for Noting

5 (i) Market Outlook

The Board noted the content of the latest update on visitor performance trends.

5 (ii) Draft Agenda for December Board Meeting

The Board noted the proposed agenda for its next meeting.

6. Any Other Business

As there were no other substantive items of business the Chairman thanked attendees and drew the meeting to a close.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Wednesday 10 December 2025 at Tourism NI Headquarters, Linum Chambers.