

Board Meeting 20 August 2026

TOURISM NI MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, LINUM CHAMBERS, BELFAST ON THURSDAY 20 AUGUST 2026

Participating:

- Ms Ellvena Graham OBE (Chairman)
- Mr Ciaran O'Neill
- Mr John Hood
- Ms Karly Greene
- Ms Linda MacHugh
- Mr Michael Counahan

In attendance:

- Ms Laura McCorry, Chief Executive
- Mr Adrian Doherty, Director of Corporate Services
- Mr Harris Bokhari OBE, Chairman, VisitBritain
- Mr Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, DfE
- Ms Christine Robinson, incoming Deputy Secretary, DfE
- Ms Michelle Scott, DfE
- Mr Aaron Ward, National Museums NI (item 2(iii))
- Mr William Blair, National Museums NI (item 2(iii))
- Mr Mark Thompson, Visitor Information Manager (item 2(iv))
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

1. Introduction / Standing Items

The Chairman welcomed participants including DfE officials and the Chair of Visit Britain as observers of this meeting.

The Chair advised that in addition to Aileen Martin and Áine Gallagher, Colin Johnston had stepped down from the Board. It was noted that despite the vacancies, the Board remained quorate. It was acknowledged the composition of sub-committees would need to be reviewed, and temporary measures put in place as appropriate. There were no apologies.

Participants were asked to declare any interests in respect of agenda items. No declarations were made.

1 (i) Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on Wednesday 24th June 2026 were approved as an accurate record.

1 (ii) Matters Arising – Actions from previous Board Meeting

The Board noted the status of actions and agreed that those recorded as complete could be removed from the list, except for the Managed Professional Services contract which is to be presented again to Board in September. Given the large number of items scheduled for discussion at the September Board meeting, Members asked the Chief Executive and Chairman to prioritise items and defer some to a subsequent meeting.

2. Items for Discussion

2 (i) Welcome to VisitBritain Chairman

The Chairman welcomed Harris Bokhari OBE, Chairman of VisitBritain, who was attending the meeting as an observer. Mr Bokhari thanked the Board for the welcome he had received during his visit and for the work on his itinerary. He remarked that the presentation prior to the Board meeting was excellent and asked the CEO to share thinking with the other nation CEOs to support messaging around the importance of tourism to the economy.

2 (ii) DfE Permanent Secretary Update

The Permanent Secretary introduced Christine Robinson, who will take up post as Deputy Secretary on Sept 1st. He advised that the budgetary position remains unchanged with Departments and arms-length bodies reliant on contingency allocations, pending agreement of a NI Executive budget.

The Board discussed the impact of reduced budgets on Tourism NI's ability to deliver its Operating Plan and in particular, the implications of having no capital resource to deliver key projects or fulfil the transfer of functions from Invest NI. Members stressed the need to build upon the success of the recent Fleadh Cheoil to ensure an enduring tourism legacy. The secondment of a TNI resource into DfE to take forward the development of an events policy was noted and welcomed by all.

The Board stressed the need to balance the public sector's investment constraints with a proportionate regulatory framework that avoids adding unnecessary costs and administrative burdens for tourism businesses who were already struggling.

2 (iii) National Museums NI – Reawakening the Folk Park

The Board was joined by Aaron Ward, Director of Public Engagement and William Blair, Director of Collections at National Museums NI. They delivered a presentation on redevelopment plans for the Folk Museum and Ulster American Folk Park. The Board thanked the NMNI representatives for the update and they left the meeting.

2 (iv) Future Direction of Visitor Servicing

Tourism NI's Visitor Information Manager, Mark Thompson, joined the meeting. Members endorsed the approach as per the presentation. Noting the current budgetary pressures, members encouraged acceleration of the structured engagement and transition process, and suggested a mechanism be put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the new approach after one year (**ACTION:** Director of Demand Generation).

The Permanent Secretary requested a summary of the impact of the proposals and any other areas where budget cuts would have a knock-on industry impact (**ACTION:** ELT)

2 (v) Chief Executive's Report

The report was taken as read and noted. The Board commended the work of staff on delivering the Fleadh and asked for their congratulations to be passed on to staff.

2 (vi) Board Mid Year Review of Objectives

A report was provided detailing progress at the mid-year point on Board objectives, which were all noted to be on track. It was agreed that a new objective be considered for next year on monitoring performance associated with the new impact framework approved by the Board. (**ACTION:** AD).

Proposals for an independent review of the Board's effectiveness were discussed. It was agreed to defer this until next year to allow for the appointment of new Board Members in the autumn. It agreed that a self-assessment would be carried out by the Board again this year, to satisfy governance requirements.

3. Reports

3 (i) Chairman's Report

Members noted the Chairman's report on engagements in the period since the last Board Meeting.

At this point the meeting paused for lunch, following which the DfE representatives left.

3 (ii) Sub-Committee Reports

The Chairs of the Board Sub Committees presented reports on their most recent meetings:

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

John Hood presented the Chair's Report of the meeting held on 4th August.

The Board noted the Committee's report; approved the Procurement Policy and Terms of Reference; and agreed for the Annual Report and Accounts to be submitted to NIAO.

The Board placed on record its thanks to Áine Gallagher for her work as the ARAC Chair over the last three years. It was noted that a temporary ARAC membership may need to be agreed to consider business at its next scheduled meeting in October. It was also proposed that the next meeting of the Marketing Committee should be deferred until new members are appointed and the new Director of Marketing was appointed.

Marketing Committee

The Board was presented with reports on meetings held on 23rd June and 4th August. The Board noted the reports on the meetings as well as the Committee's annual report on its effectiveness.

Finance & Casework Committee

A report was given on the Committee's meeting on 5th August. The committee recommended the approval of a business case to the board for the renewal of the lease of Tourism NI's Headquarters, which proposed a reduction in its footprint at Linum Chambers.

During the earlier discussion regarding budgetary pressures, colocation with Invest NI was discussed. The Permanent Secretary agreed to revisit this option with INI but recognised that the current business case and associated lease arrangements need approved urgently. The ability to exit the lease early should be agreed with INI should collocation emerge as a possibility.

The Board granted approval of the business case and noted the Committee's report on its effectiveness.

4. Quarter I 2026-27 Performance Reports

4 (i) Integrated Performance & Finance Report

The Board was presented with a new report that integrated detail on Operating Plan and budget performance in the first quarter. Noting the report's format and content, Members agreed that it was a useful report and commended ELT for the work in developing it.

4 (ii) Risk Management

The Board noted the report.

4 (iii) People & Organisational Development

The Board noted the report.

5. Papers for Noting

5 (i) Market Outlook Update

The Board noted the latest report on visitor performance and trends.

6. Any Other Business

The Board received a letter from Gareth Wilson MLA regarding destination stewardship and approved a response.

A 'save the date' communication had been issued to Members for the forthcoming Tourism Conference. It was agreed that a diary invitation should also be circulated (**ACTION:** EST).

The Board noted a letter from the Minister thanking Tourism NI for its work in delivering the successful Fleadh Cheoil.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Thursday 24th September at Tourism NI Headquarters.