

Board Meeting 30 January 2020

**TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT BELFAST HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS HARBOUR OFFICE
ON THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2020**

Present:

- Mr Terence Brannigan (Chairman)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Mr Colin Neill
- Ms Michele Shirlow
- Mr Geoff Wilson
- Mr Terry McCartney
- Ms Colette Brown

In Attendance:

- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Jill McKee, Director of Finance
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Ms Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

Apologies: Mr Michael McQuillan

1. Introduction and Minutes of Last Meeting

1 (i) Minutes of Last Meeting

The Chairman welcomed attendees and reminded them that minutes of the Board Meeting would be published. He asked if anyone wished to declare interests in relation to agenda items. It was agreed that Geoff Wilson should withdraw from discussion of an events casework submission, as part of a report on the Finance and Casework Committee meeting held on 28 January.

The Chairman advised the Board that he had been appointed a director of Glenarm Distillery. He also stated that as he was an advisor to developers of the former Sirocco Works site, which had been identified as one of the potential sites for a Belfast destination hub, he would recuse himself from any relevant future discussions. Colin Neill stated that he had taken up a role on a sub-group for the Special Olympics.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 12 December 2019 were approved and signed.

1 (ii) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

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

Belfast International Airport – The Chairman reported on a telephone conversation with the Airport’s Chief Executive and advised that some progress had been made to address issues raised by the Board.

ROI Statistics - The Chief Executive advised that updated figures are unlikely to be available before May. Representatives of NISRA and DfE are due to meet to discuss the situation.

Tourism Strategy – Discussions were continuing with DfE on the best forum for a presentation by the futurist Anna Pollock and how that might influence the Tourism Strategy. The Board recommended that, subject to her availability, a programme of engagements should be arranged including an industry workshop, and separate presentations to the Board and the Permanent Secretaries’ Group.

A report was given on the position with regard to recruiting new Board Members and reappointing those whose terms are due for renewal.

Board Review of Effectiveness – a revised action plan was drawn up following completion of the review and in line with agreed actions, the structure of meeting agendas had been reordered.

2. Reports

2 (i) Chairman’s Report

A report was given on the Chairman’s engagements undertaken since the last meeting. He advised that along with the chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, he took part in a workshop to discuss a new Partnership Agreement with the Department for Economy (DfE), governing working relationships between the Department and Tourism NI. It was noted that Tourism NI’s Senior Management Team and DfE’s Tourism Liaison Branch held a meeting on 27 January to discuss partnership working. Members commented that principles in the Partnership Agreement must be reflected in the day to day experience of collaboration between the Department and Tourism NI.

The Chairman reported that at December’s debrief meeting with DfE, he had again raised the need for Tourism NI’s to have sufficient resources to implement an organisational structure that helps fulfil its strategic remit. He had also highlighted the Board’s specific needs in terms of skills, experience and diversity that must be met by any new appointees.

2 (ii) Chief Executive’s Report

The Board noted the report and the Chief Executive gave a number of updates as follows:

Northern Ireland Assembly – The Chief Executive reported that Tourism NI’s workload had increased significantly with the Assembly’s restoration and appointment of a new Minister for the Economy. He advised that he would be briefing the Assembly’s Economy Committee on the impact of Brexit on 12 February. Tourism NI had supplied input to the New Decade, New

Approach negotiations including bids for sustained investment to support tourism and events, but no resources had been aligned to those.

Members were advised that the industry expects a particularly challenging year, given market sentiment associated with the UK's exit from the EU and the recent coronavirus outbreak. Concerns around air access and regional connectivity were also impacting upon Northern Ireland's ability to attract conference business. The Board was advised that work was being carried out to assess market sentiment in the ROI.

The Chief Executive also reported on his attendance at a recent ITOA conference in Limerick. Feedback from delegates there had highlighted that consumer perceptions were that Ireland is expensive, with Scotland seen as offering better value for money. The Board agreed that it was more important than ever to differentiate Northern Ireland and remarked that this underlined the need to have the Experience Brand rolled out as soon as possible.

An update was also given on the status of a number of screen tourism attractions at varying stages of development. Noting issues in respect of one of these proposals the Board recommended that the Chief Executive should write to the promoters (**ACTION: JMcG**).

Progress was reported on work to refresh tourismni.com, providing a new information platform for the industry. Redevelopment of the consumer website discovernorthernireland.com had also commenced, to give it a look and feel consistent with the experience brand.

The Board was also advised that following the conclusion of a process to procure new marketing services, one unsuccessful candidate was likely to issue a legal challenge which Tourism NI would be strongly defending.

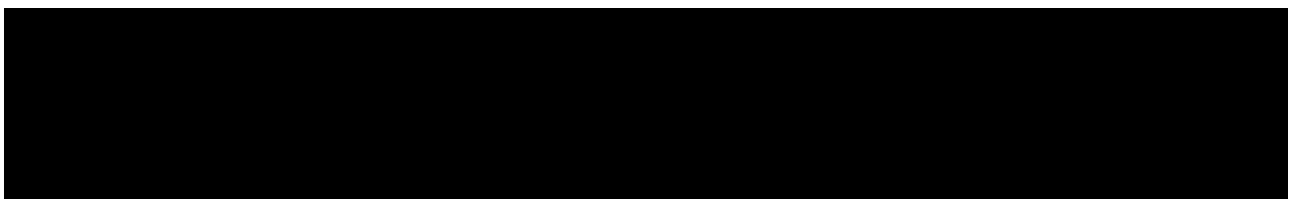
2 (iii) Sub-Committee Updates

As the Audit Committee had not met in the interval since the last Board Meeting, the only update required was from the chair of the Finance and Casework Committee. Michele Shirlow reported on the committee's meeting held on 28 January. A detailed finance report had been provided, giving budget positions at the end of December. The Board was advised that bids to the December Monitoring Round had not been met.

The report had also given a detailed overview of budget expenditure to date had been given, and the Committee had agreed to meet again prior to the end of the financial year to again review progress on spend.

Geoff Wilson left the meeting for the duration of the following discussion.

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





3. Items for Discussion

3 (i) Belfast Harbour Presentation

The Board was joined by the Chairman and Chief Executive of Belfast Harbour for a presentation setting out the economic and social benefits that the harbour has brought to the city, and detailing plans for an ambitious long-term programme of investment, development and regeneration throughout the estate. The Board discussed the potential of these plans to transform civic life as well as visitors' experience of Belfast. Given the synergies between the Harbour's plans and Tourism NI's objectives it was suggested that consideration should be given to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Harbour and Tourism NI. The Board suggested that it would also be worthwhile to engage with the Odyssey Trust given its interest in further development, and proposed that its Chief Executive should be invited along for a discussion at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION:** JMcG).

3 (ii) Domestic Market Presentation

The Director of Marketing presented the findings of a review of the domestic Northern Ireland market, emphasising its importance to maintaining off-peak growth and regional spread. The market was noted to account for half of all overnight trips and a third of visitor revenue and in terms of growth, is second only to the ROI market.

The review had resulted in a strategy designed around best prospects for growth, based on segments likeliest to take domestic holidays and their motivations. Next steps were outlined, with the draft report and strategy to be presented to the steering group for consideration and feedback in anticipation of roll-out and implementation during Quarter 1 of the 2020-21 financial year.

Commenting on Failte Ireland moves to make greater inroads in the Northern Ireland market the Board emphasised the need to ensure that the new Minister has a clear understanding of the competitive environment within which Tourism NI is operating. (**ACTION:** JMcG).

4. Items for Noting

4 (i) Quarter III 2019-20 Reports - Tourism NI Operating Plan

A report was presented on Tourism NI's performance against key Operating Plan objectives at the end of the third quarter with discussion focused on objectives that were incomplete or not progressing as anticipated. The implementation of a new organisational structure to support strategic ambitions remained a work in progress. Similarly, development of the Tourism Strategy had paused since the restoration of the NI Assembly, as a revised timetable for consultation and Ministerial approval would be necessary. Activity proposed to mitigate the impacts on tourism of the UK's exit from the EU could not be implemented as the bids for resource to support that activity were not met.

4 (ii) Quarter III 2019-20 Reports - Risk Register

The Board received a report on management of corporate risks during the quarter. Two additional risks had been added to the register. The first related to potential failure to invest in new products and attractions, given the resources being allocated to tourism development in the ROI market. The other new risk related to Tourism NI's ability to cover the cost of its certification service. While intended to be cost-neutral, the fees charged to applicants for the scheme are not sufficient to cover the scheme's costs – however it was hoped that the appointment of a new Grade 7 official in DfE's Tourism Liaison Branch would help to progress the issue. The Board endorsed the inclusion of these risks on the register.

5. Papers for Noting

5 (i) Experience Brand Implementation Plan

The Chief Executive reported on activity to roll out the Experience Brand and provided a draft of a four-year implementation plan. Members were advised that it is proposed to continue to employ a project manager to oversee the work. A key issue remains the need for local authorities to adopt the experience brand. It was observed that Tourism NI's new marketing services contract may support this ambition, as local authorities can draw upon the service.

5 (ii) Assurance Mapping Update

There was no assurance mapping update in the absence of any new data. Members were advised that a piece of work is underway on sentiment analysis in NI and the ROI and it was proposed that this should be brought to the next Board Meeting (**ACTION:** NW/DE).

5 (iii) Draft Agenda for March Board Meeting

The Board noted a draft agenda for its next meeting and proposed to include a discussion with the Chief Executive of the Odyssey Trust, and a review of outcomes of the forthcoming Board

Workshop (**ACTION:** JD). The Chairman suggested that as the agenda included a discussion of the Tourism NI – DfE Partnership Agreement, it would be useful for him to meet with the Director of Finance to provide feedback from the recent workshop (**ACTION:** JMck).

6. Any Other Business

Jill McKee, Naomi Waite and Jim Daly left the meeting to permit the Board to hold a brief closed discussion.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place at Montalto Estate, Ballynahinch on Thursday 19 March 2020.