

Board Meeting 5 November 2020

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD REMOTELY BY VIDEO CONFERENCING ON THURSDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2020

Participating:

- Mr Terence Brannigan (Chairman)
- Ms Angelina Fusco
- Ms Anya O'Connor
- Mr John West
- Ms Patricia Corbett
- Mr Colin Neill
- Mr Geoff Wilson
- Mr Terry McCartney
- Ms Denise McAnena, Boardroom Apprentice
- Mr John McGrillen, Chief Executive
- Ms Lesley McKeown, Acting Director of Finance
- Ms Rosemarie McHugh, Director of Product Development
- Mr Dave Vincent, Chief Digital Officer
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support and Events
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

Apologies:

- Ms Michele Shirlow

1. Introduction

1 (i) Minutes of Last Meeting

The Chairman welcomed participants and reminded them that minutes of the meeting will be published. Board Members joined the Chairman in extending condolences to Michele Shirlow, following a recent family bereavement. The Chairman advised that in her absence he would report on recent meetings of the Finance and Casework Committee, and thanked John West for his contribution to those meetings.

Participants were asked if they wished to declare interests in relation to agenda items. No declarations were made.

Minutes of the Board Meeting held remotely on Thursday 24 September were approved.

1 (i) Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Board reviewed a schedule of action points from its previous meeting. A number of actions were noted as complete and updates were given on ongoing matters as follows:

Stakeholder Engagement – The Board was advised that work to develop an engagement plan was resuming following the Communications Manager’s return and that Angelina Fusco’s participation would be sought.

Statistics - The Board was advised that statistics showed that 44% of Northern Ireland residents had taken a Northern Ireland trip this year and 22% of ROI residents, with a further 25% intending to do so in the near future. A figure for those ROI residents visiting Northern Ireland for the first time was not available, but future barometers would include this as a measure. The Board was advised that as the portfolio of new Northern Ireland experiences expands, content highlighting these is added to the consumer site and forms part of future marketing efforts.

2. Discussion Items

2 (i) Tourism NI Organisational Restructuring

The Chief Executive presented a new proposed organisational structure for Tourism NI. Work to define the new structure had commenced following completion of the Hunter Review, with the aim of ensuring that Tourism NI remains fit for purpose in meeting its strategic and statutory obligations and fulfilling the needs of the industry. Discussions followed with DfE to agree a structure to support delivery of the draft Tourism Strategy and the resources necessary to put this in place. An outline was given of the process adopted to identify the individual roles required.

The Department had also requested a detailed business case to support the rationale for the new structure. This had gone through multiple iterations to address requests for additional information from the Department. The Senior Management Team had now arrived at an agreed structure in line with the business case approved by the Department and the detail of this was presented for approval by the Board.

Agreement had previously been reached with the Department that it would fund 50% of the cost of new posts, on the basis that Tourism NI would find the other 50% by identifying efficiencies. The Board was advised that the Department’s current position is that it was content for Tourism NI to proceed with the introduction of new posts but was not in a position to contribute to the costs at this point. A bid has however been made to DfE for funding for two Grade 7 and two DP posts to support the delivery of the City Deals programme which is expected to be approved.

The new structure envisions four directorates – Digital and Transformation; Strategic Development; Marketing, Sales & Communications; and Corporate Services. The detailed structure of each division including new and existing posts was set out. The Board was advised that the Senior Management Team was confident that through efficiency savings and by virtue of permanent appointments reducing the need for external support, resource will be available to meet the cost of putting the new structure in place. The result would be a more flexible and adaptable organisation that is better able to respond to the industry’s needs.

The Board was advised that the trade union had been consulted on the new structure. It was confirmed that all additional new roles at staff officer level and above would be advertised on the open market in line with current policy.

The Board also discussed systems of internal control and how risk management responsibilities might be better shared throughout the new structure rather than concentrated at senior management level. It was emphasised that primary responsibility for co-ordination and control rests with the Chief Executive. The Board also discussed the Grade 7 post which had been created as a temporary arrangement to support development of policy and strategy. In line with the Board's previous discussions of the need to maintain ongoing oversight of strategy development, Members agreed that the role should be made permanent in due course. It was emphasised that this creates an additional further post above those already agreed with DfE; however the Board agreed that this was necessary to fully achieve the objectives of the organisation.

The Board approved the proposals set out for the new organisational structure. Members asked if the person specifications and job descriptions for the new key roles could be shared with the Board (**ACTION: JO'R**).

2 (ii) Tourism NI Financial and Business Support Programme

At its last meeting the Board had requested detail of the expected benefits and outputs of the programme. The Director of Product Development presented an update setting out the response to the Programme, the agreed key performance indicators and the levels of satisfaction with service already provided. The Board was advised that for both the one-to-one and one-to-many elements of the programme, efforts were being made to identify the business segments that are availing of support and to identify any areas of particular need, or potential gaps that need addressed. This is also informing Tourism NI's work with EY on a vulnerability index. In addition, a new industry survey is due to issue with a focus on the survivability of businesses within the tourism sector.

The Board noted the content of the update.

2 (iii) Proposed 2021 Tourism NI Board Meeting Dates

The Board was presented with a schedule of proposed meeting dates for 2021. It was agreed that as recent months had shown that remote meetings remained effective, it was permissible for Members to join remotely on occasions where they cannot be physically present.

Members also agreed that as in recent years, the Board and Senior Management Team should hold a workshop early in the New Year to discuss strategic and operating plan priorities. Suitable dates in January are to be sought for this and the Board asked the Chief Executive to bring a proposed agenda for the workshop for discussion at the next Board Meeting (**ACTION: JMcG**).

2 (iv) Draft Mobile Devices Policy

A paper was presented setting out a new draft policy on the usage by Tourism NI staff of mobile devices. The updated policy had been prepared in order to reflect the more widespread usage of mobile devices in the current remote working environment. The Board approved the policy and recommended that it should be cross-referenced with Tourism NI's disciplinary policy. The Board

also recommended that Tourism NI's policy on social media usage should be reviewed (**ACTION:** JO'R).

2 (v) City Region Deals Update

The Director of Product Development provided the Board with an update on the current status of City Region Deals, setting out the geographical and financial scope of each deal and the process and governance structures which were in place to deliver the major infrastructure projects that were proposed as part of these. A series of advisory boards had been established to support the development of outline business cases, with Tourism NI participating in these and in tandem, undertaking market testing of the projects. The Board was advised that testing was now complete despite delays as a result of COVID-19.

Members discussed how the overall benefits, outcomes and cost of the projects would be assessed. It was noted that a first checkpoint review of projects had been completed and a second is underway with each project setting out their requirements and what they hope to achieve. The Board agreed that it would be useful to continue to receive ongoing updates on the status of the City Deals and it was agreed that details of the expected benefits and return on investment from projects would be shared with Members (**ACTION:** RMcH).

3. Reports

3 (i) Chairman's Report

Members noted the list of the Chairman's engagements since the last Board Meeting. The Chairman reported on issues raised at the debrief meeting with DfE; as agreed by the Board as its last meeting, the need to complete the review of certification schemes had been highlighted as a priority.

3 (ii) Chief Executive's Report

The content of the report was noted and the Chief Executive highlighted the following:

Visitor Performance – the pandemic had muted the response to the release by NISRA of full year figures for 2019 indicating that Northern Ireland had reached and exceeded the long-sought milestone of earning £1bn revenue from visitors during the year. The Board agreed that this represented a great achievement, highlighting that tourism's importance to the economy went far beyond the hospitality industry. Members suggested that the Chairman should write to staff to acknowledge this, and that PR opportunities should be considered to highlight it (**ACTION:** JMCG).

The Board also observed that the message of tourism's success and its further potential needed to land with a number of disparate audiences – government, industry and in the ROI market – and that there was a role here for the expanded communications structure envisioned as part of the organisational restructuring.

The Board also remarked that marketing messages on the forthcoming Northern Ireland centenary must take into account that in coming months tourism will remain reliant on the ROI market.

The Board was advised that despite good performance over the summer months the industry now faced a much more difficult period under a second lockdown. It was noted that this was also presenting Tourism NI with challenges on the timing and delivery of its marketing activity, given the potential for further restrictions in the New Year and the need to expend budgets approaching the financial year end. Noting that the difficult picture is likely to continue some way into 2021, the Board thanked the Director of Marketing and Director of Finance for their ongoing work to get a voucher scheme in place. Tourism NI's plans for promotion in 2021 were also noted to be encouraging.

Budgets – An update was given on the allocation to Tourism NI of additional resources agreed by the NI Executive, in response to COVID-19. The Board was advised that further support is still being pursued to assist those elements of the industry which so far, appeared to have been overlooked.

An update was also given on work to develop a Tourism Recovery Action Plan for approval by the NI Executive. The Board was advised that EY had updated its economic model assessing the economic impact on tourism of the COVID outbreak, and this will be presented to the Board at its next meeting.

Website Development Programme – the Board was advised of the very positive response from applicants to the programme. DAERA had provided additional resource to support the scheme bringing the total fund available to £1m.

Experience Development Programme – the call for applications had received a huge response and applications were being prepared for consideration by the Senior Management Team and the Finance and Casework Committee. The Board was advised that the Committee would be asked to review and approve a group of cases with a total value of circa £4.5m so that the £3m allocated to the scheme could be fully expended in the current financial year.

Quality and Standards – The Board was advised that inspections had been paused again for the duration of the current round of restrictions.

Dilapidations at former Tourism NI premises – The Chief Executive reported the latest position on a dispute with landlords for Tourism NI's former offices at St Anne's Court and a recommendation from legal advisers. On the basis of this advice the Board approved a proposal to move to a settlement.

3 (iii) Sub-Committee Reports

Risk and Audit Committee

There had been no meetings of the Committee since the last Board Meeting. It is next due to meet in early December.

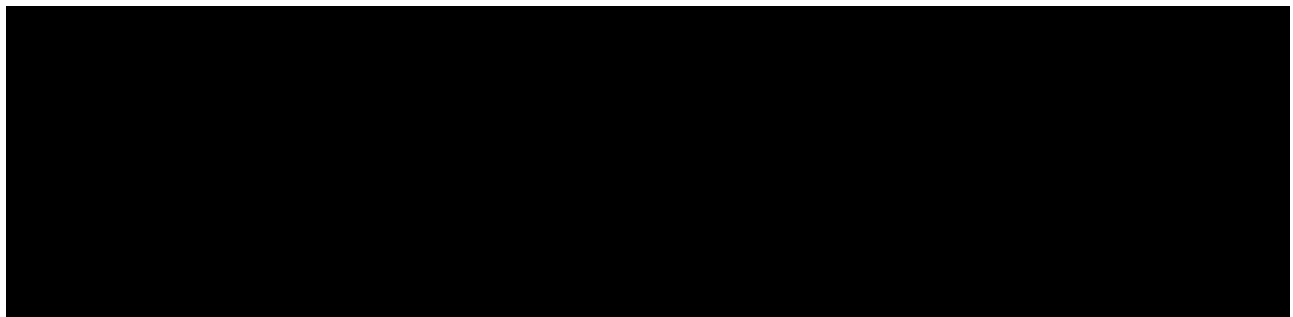
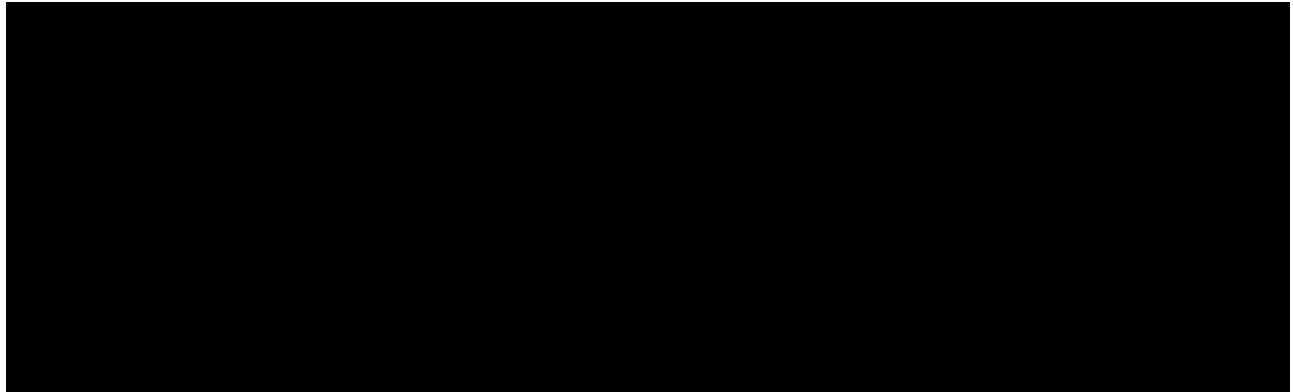
Marketing Committee

Terry McCartney reported on an initial meeting of the reconstituted Marketing Committee, held on 12 October. The agenda had included a presentation giving an overview of work underway with Tourism NI's creative and strategic partners, and updates were also received on changing attitudes to Northern Ireland in the ROI market, the website development programme and consumer research / insights. Campaign activity had been outlined with the Committee pleased to

noted that the Northern Ireland Embrace A Giant Spirit experience brand was demonstrably gaining traction with the industry and with strategic partners, and industry uptake and consumer response to the “We’re Good To Go” marque had also been extremely positive.

Finance and Casework Committee

(Exempt from disclosure under Section 43 – Commercial Interests of the Freedom of Information Act 2000)



4. Papers for Noting

4 (i) Quarter II 2020-21 Reports – Operating Plan

The Board noted the content of a report against Operating Plan objectives at the end of the second quarter. Good progress was being made on most of these with the exception of two objectives that could not be met as a result of COVID-19 – to promote Northern Ireland as a world-class short breaks destination, and to support the Meet in Ireland platforms with Failte Ireland.

4 (ii) Quarter II 2020-21 Reports – Risk Register

An update was given on work to develop a new corporate Risk Register aligned to the new Operating Plan, which is due to be presented to the Risk and Audit Committee for approval on 17 November. It was agreed that the detailed Register should be shared with all Board Members once available (**ACTION**: LMCK / JD).

4 (iii) Draft Agenda for Next Board Meeting

The Board noted a draft agenda for its next meeting and agreed to add proposals for the strategic workshop awayday discussed earlier in the meeting. Noting that the December Board Meeting is

usually followed by an opportunity for Members to engage informally with staff, the Board asked the Senior Management Team to consider how a remote thank you to staff could be facilitated and to introduce the new Board Members to staff (**ACTION**: JO'R).

6. Any Other Business

There were no other items of substantive business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled Board Meeting will be on Thursday 17 December 2020.