Board Meeting 20 May 2026

TOURISM NI
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING
HELD AT TOURISM NI HEADQUARTERS, LINUM CHAMBERS
ON WEDNESDAY 20 MAY 2026

Participating:

- Ms Ellvena Graham OBE (Chairman)
- Ms Aileen Martin
- Ms Aine Gallagher (by remote call, from item 2 (ii))
- Mr Ciaran O'Neill
- Mr Colin Johnston
- 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 David Roberts, Director of Strategic Development (items 2(ii) - 2(iv))
- Ms Eimear Callaghan, Interim Director of Marketing (item 2 (ii))
- Ms Aine Kearney, Director of Events (item 2 (ii))
- Mr Tom Potter, Head of IT and Digital (item 2 (v))
- Mr Jim Daly, Executive Support Team

1. Introduction / Standing Items

The Chairman welcomed participants to the meeting. 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's meeting held on 19th March 2026 were approved as an accurate record.

1 (ii) November Minutes

It was noted that the last set of published minutes were September 2025. Minutes from November onwards are now due to be published by the Executive Support Team.

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

The Board noted the status of actions and confirmed those recorded as complete could be removed from the list. In relation to an action proposing reciprocal attendance of Board Meetings with Visit Britain, the Chairman advised had agreed to attend a forthcoming meeting of the VisitBritain Board. In return the VisitBritain Chair would attend one of the next three Tourism NI Board Meetings, date to be agreed.

2. Items for Discussion

2 (i) Chief Executive's Report

The report was taken as read.

The Board discussed the International Tourism Events Fund. As the full budget had been allocated, members queried how the Marketing division would now support event activation and asked for confirmation of the budget involved (**ACTION**: AK).

Members noted the reference to correspondence from the DfE Permanent Secretary advising Tourism NI of the resource contingency arrangements ahead of the NI Executive agreeing on a government budget. It was stressed that while the final resource allocation requires the Minister's approval, this is unlikely to involve any increase, and the very constrained budgetary conditions will persist.

The Board discussed the lease at Linum Chamers. A member suggested exploring the option for relocation beyond Belfast to support the Minister's regional spread objective, noting that 70% of the hospitality industry is located outside Belfast (**ACTION**: AD).

The full Executive Leadership Team joined the meeting for the next item, and Áine Gallagher joined the meeting by remote call during the discussion.

2 (ii) Tourism NI Draft Operating Plan 2026-27 and Budget Allocation

The Board was presented with a draft Operating Plan for 2026-27 aligned to the 6% reduction in the baseline budget.

The Board had a comprehensive discussion noting the pressure on programme expenditure due to high fixed costs. The board stressed the need to examine and manage the cost base whilst also exploring opportunities to generate income. This should be considered within the current governance parameters as well as those that might become available through the forthcoming financial provisions bill. The Executive Team was asked to develop a proposal (**ACTION**: ELT).

The Chairman advised that she will request a meeting with the Minister and asked for a letter to be drafted. (**ACTION**: LMcC). Acknowledging the difficult position, the Board approved the Operating Plan and the recommendations as set out by ELT.

The Board also noted that much has changed since the draft Corporate Plan consultation process ended. A new CEO has been appointed, the organisation has been restructured, the budget has reduced and a more focused Impact Framework has been developed. It was agreed that the draft Corporate Plan should be refined and brought back to the Board for approval. It was noted that the Dept should also be engaged on this matter (**ACTION**: AD).

Áine Kearney and Eimear Callaghan left the meeting.

2 (iii) Future of the Visitor Accommodation Grading Scheme

The Board was presented with a paper setting out the findings of a review of the visitor accommodation Quality Grading scheme.

The limitations of the current scheme were discussed in detail. Members indicated that whilst there is a case for retaining the scheme, it requires an overhaul in line with the recommendations set out in the paper. Noting the proposed timeline for launching the revised scheme to be early 2027/28 financial year, the Board asked that this is brought forward and this work progresses at pace.

In conclusion, the Board approved the recommendation to develop and implement a revised visitor accommodation Quality Grading Scheme and a paper be presented at the September meeting (**ACTION**: DR).

2 (iv) Destination Stewardship

The Board considered the paper and offered feedback largely around the need for more specificity in the approach and impact. The Board was advised that the Minister's approval will be sought prior to launch. The final paper is to be brought back to the Board in September **(ACTION:** DR**).**

2 (v) IT Review Update

Tourism NI's new head of IT and Digital Tom Potter joined the meeting for this item.

The Board was presented with a paper setting out the findings of the review of Tourism NI's IT infrastructure and ICT service management. The Board commented that the paper gave clarity on the way forward and approved the recommendations set out in the paper. The Chair thanked Tom Potter for the update and he left the meeting.

The Board also discussed the need for members to undergo cyber security training (**ACTION**: AD).

3. Reports

3 (i) Chairman's Report

The Board noted the Chairman's report. The Chair commented on the success of the recent Meet the Buyer workshop and warmly commended the staff involved with arrangements for the programme of events.

She also reflected on the recent dinner event held by Titanic Belfast to mark its milestone of ten million visitors, remarking that the evening underlined just how far tourism has come over time and the important role Titanic has played.

3 (ii) Sub-Committee Reports

Chairs of the Board's sub-committees reported on meetings as follows:

Finance & Casework Committee – The Committee met twice, on 26 March and 4 April, to review the recommendations on support under the International Tourism Events Fund Programme. The Board was advised of the outcomes. It was noted that one unsuccessful applicant did not initially receive notice of the decision due to an administrative error.

The Committee met again on 30 April to review the management accounts report for Quarter IV of the 2025-26 financial year. The Board was advised that the final budget spend position was within the 1% tolerance set by the Department and commended staff for their efforts in achieving this result.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – The Committee met on 30 April. It was noted that a lot of good progress had been made in addressing audit recommendations. Work on assurance mapping was well underway. The Board was advised that Internal Audit Service had given an overall Satisfactory assessment of Tourism NI in 2025-26.

The Board was also advised that the independent ARAC member Gerard Byrne would be stepping down, and it was agreed that the Director of Corporate Services should consult the NI Audit Office on its recommendations as to a suitable replacement (**ACTION**: AD).

Both Committees reviewed a number of new or revised corporate policies. These were presented for the Board's approval but as a number had issued late, it was agreed that the policies should be considered by correspondence alongside the new Risk Management Framework (**ACTION**: AD).

3 (iii) Board Operating Framework

The Board noted and approved the Operating Framework.

4. Quarter IV 2025-26 Performance Reports

4 (i) Operating Plan Performance Monitoring

The Board noted a report setting out the final status of performance against the 2025-26 Operating Plan. The Board noted those objectives outwith TNI's control and emphasised the need for Tourism NI to ensure that activity in future Operating Plans is realistic and achievable. The Board also discussed the timescale for the transfer of tourism functions from Invest NI and the Board reaffirmed their position that this should take place only when there is capital funding in place.

4 (ii) Risk Management

The Board noted a report on risk management including the ongoing development of the corporate risk register and the risk review process.

4 (iii) Finance

The Board noted the content of the Finance report for Quarter IV, as an update on this had been given as part of the Finance & Casework Sub-Committee Report at 3 (ii) above.

4 (iv) People and Organisational Development

The Board noted a report on HR and staff engagement issues during Quarter IV. An update was given on the commencement of an organisational renewal programme and thanks were extended to John Hood for his participation in this process as the Board's representative.

5. Papers for Noting

5 (i) Market Outlook

The Board noted the latest report on visitor trends.

5 (ii) Financial Information Management Report

A paper was presented setting out a new format to integrate finance and performance information. The Board noted and approved the new report format.

5 (iii) Draft Agenda for June Board Meeting

Noted and approved.

5 (iii) Agenda Feedback

The Board remarked that the volume and content had made heavy demands on Members. It was requested that future agendas should be structured to foreground the matters that the Executive Team believes require detailed consideration, with update papers to be more succinct. The Board also requested that sub-committee updates should be limited to the chairs' written report with supplementary papers to be uploaded to the Decision Time resource library to be read at Members' convenience (**ACTION**: AD).

6. Any Other Business

The Board discussed representation at the forthcoming Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. It was agreed that a programme of the core Fleadh events should be circulated by correspondence so that Members can consider what they wish to attend (**ACTION**: AK).

The Board was advised that a briefing session for all Tourism NI staff is to be held on 11th June and were invited to attend if they wish.

As there were no other matters for discussion, the Chairman thanked participants and brought the meeting to a close.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is due to take place on Wednesday 24th June 2026 at the Seamus Heaney Homeplace Centre, Bellaghy.