

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

REVIEW OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND TOURIST BOARD AND WIDER TOURISM STRUCTURES

Published at 3 pm on Thursday 14 November 2013

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I wish to make a Written Statement to the Assembly to advise Members of my plans to conduct a review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and wider tourism structures.

Tourism is a key driver of our economy and is an important element of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government and Economic Strategy. The NI Economic Strategy is central to the delivery of the Executive's overall strategic aim of growing the NI economy and tackling disadvantage.

An extensive consultation on tourism with a broad range of stakeholders was undertaken in 2009/10. This consultation identified, in broad terms, how tourism should be developed over the next 10 years and proposed a number of ambitious targets to grow tourism's contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. Based on this consultation the Programme for Government contains the following targets – "Increase visitor numbers to 4.2 million and tourist revenue to £676 million by December 2014".

My Department has set out a range of tourism priorities, under four main themes linked to the Economic Strategy.

These key themes are:

Promotion – led by NITB and Tourism Ireland, bringing new visitors and welcoming back visitors to see a place that is confidently moving on.

People and Business – working with people and businesses to develop a visitor experience that is unique and an industry that has pride and professionalism.

Product and Places – investing in products and places to make them better for residents and ready to receive the visitors of the future.

Making it Happen – identifying the roles and responsibilities of businesses, Departments and agencies and setting out how we monitor progress.

In December 2008, I commissioned the Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP). The report provided much of the basis for the Economic Strategy and a revised structure within Invest NI. Following on from IREP, I indicated that I would like to conduct a review of the NITB. In announcing the review I stated that I wanted "to ensure that there is a greater alignment between what NITB does and the work of Invest NI".

The overall aim of the review therefore is to ensure that current organisational structures are the optimum necessary to deliver the targets and actions set out in the Programme for Government and the Economic Strategy and that these are effectively aligned with the work of Invest NI. The review will therefore consider whether current DETI/NITB/Invest NI arrangements are sufficient to ensure:

- the delivery of the tourism objectives within the Programme for Government and Economic Strategy;
- effective delivery of the various statutory functions set out in the remit which falls to NITB under the Tourism NI Order 1992.

and:

- a. advise on the extent to which existing NITB and Invest NI structures, policies, programmes and resource allocations are sufficiently aligned;
- b. identify whether there is merit in the adoption of any new structural arrangements, policies or programmes; and
- c. identify whether there are any issues which risk compromising the delivery of the relevant strategies, including those which fall to other departments or bodies.

Project Brief

I have specifically tasked the Review with identifying opportunities for improvement. In particular the Review is tasked with making recommendations designed to:

- a. ensure that appropriate structures are in place to deliver the objectives and targets for tourism and ensure alignment with the work of Invest NI;
- b. identify opportunities to capitalise on NITB's working links within the NI Executive and on an east/west and north/south basis, including the relationships with Tourism Ireland and Visit Britain;
- c. ensure the effective delivery of integrated business support services to the tourism industry across its many sectors;
- d. prepare for the impact of the Review of Public Administration on tourism development in Northern Ireland; and
- e. rationalise, where it is cost-effective to do so, the provision and delivery of corporate services (including accommodation) within NITB and Invest NI.

Timing

It is anticipated that the review will be completed by the end of March 2014.

I will provide further information to the Assembly when the review is complete.