

Partnership Agreement between
Department for the Economy (DfE)
and
Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI)

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Introduction

1. The Partnership Agreement

- 1.1 This document sets out the partnership arrangements between the Department for the Economy (DfE) and Tourism NI (TNI). In particular, it explains the overall governance framework within which TNI operates, including the framework through which the necessary assurances are provided to stakeholders. Roles/responsibilities of partners within the overall governance framework are also outlined.
- 1.2 The partnership is based on a mutual understanding of strategic aims and objectives; clear accountability; and a recognition of the distinct roles each party contributes. Underpinning the arrangements are the principles set out in the [NI Code of Good Practice 'Partnerships between Departments and Arm's-Length Bodies'](#) which should be read in conjunction with this document. The principles which are laid out the Code are:

LEADERSHIP
<i>Partnerships work well when Departments and Arm's Length Bodies demonstrate good leadership to achieve a shared vision and effective delivery of public services. Strong leadership will provide inspiration, instil confidence and trust and empower their respective teams to deliver good outcomes for citizens.</i>
PURPOSE
<i>Partnerships work well when the purpose, objectives and roles of Arm's Length Bodies and the Partner department are clear, mutually understood and reviewed on a regular basis. There needs to be absolute clarity about lines of accountability and responsibility between departments and Arm's Length Bodies. In exercising statutory functions Arm's Length Bodies need to have clarity about how their purpose and objectives align with those of departments.</i>
ASSURANCE
<i>Partnerships work well when departments adopt a proportionate approach to assurance, based on Arm's Length Bodies' purpose and a mutual understanding of risk. Arm's Length Bodies should have robust governance arrangements in place and in turn departments should give Arm's Length Bodies the autonomy to deliver effectively. Management information should be what is needed to enable departments and Arm's Length Bodies to provide assurance and assess performance.</i>

VALUE
<i>Partnerships work well when departments and Arm's Length Bodies share knowledge, skills and experience in order to enhance their impact and delivery. Arm's Length Bodies are able to contribute to policy making and departmental priorities. There is a focus on innovation, and on how departments and Arm's Length Bodies work together to deliver the most effective policies and services for its customers.</i>
ENGAGEMENT
<i>Partnerships work well when relationships between departments and Arm's Length Bodies are open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding about each other's objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.</i>

A full copy of the NI Code of Good Practice can be found at Annex 8.

1.3 This document should also be read in conjunction with [guidance on proportionate autonomy](#) which provides an outline of the principles and characteristics for proportionate autonomy. Guidance on proportionate autonomy has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance to be established between TNI and DfE and this is reflected in this agreement.

1.4 DfE and TNI are committed to:

- Working together within distinct roles and responsibilities;
- Maintaining focus on successful delivery of DfE's economic vision, the emerging NI Tourism Strategy, Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes and Ministerial priorities (see also paras 2.6 and 2.7);
- Maintaining open and honest communication and dialogue;
- Keeping each other informed of any issues and concerns, and of emerging areas of risk;
- Supporting and challenging each other on developing policy and delivery [when developing policy this may cut across more than one department];
- Seeking to resolve issues quickly and constructively; and
- Acting at all times in the public interest and in line with the values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

- 1.5 The effectiveness of the partnership and the associated Engagement Plan will be **reviewed each year** by the Department and TNI in order to assess whether the partnership is operating as intended and to identify any emerging issues/opportunities for enhancement. This can be carried out as part of existing governance arrangements. The Partnership Agreement document itself will be **reviewed formally at least once every three years** to ensure it remains fit for purpose and up to date in terms of current governance frameworks. The formal review will be proportionate to TNI's size and overall responsibilities and will be published on departmental and TNI websites as soon as practicable following completion.

- 1.6 A copy of this agreement has been placed in the Assembly Library and is available on the DfE and TNI websites.

TNI Establishment and Purpose

2. Statutory Purpose and Strategic Objectives

2.1 TNI is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB). It is overseen by a Board which is appointed by the Minister, employs its own staff and is allocated its own budget. For national accounts purposes TNI is classified to the central government sector.

2.2 TNI's functions, duties and powers are set out in the Tourism (NI) Order 1992 [The Tourism \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1992 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) and are as follows:

- (a) to encourage tourism;
- (b) to encourage the provision and improvement of tourist accommodation and tourist amenities;
- (c) to advise the Department generally on the formulation and implementation of its policy in relation to the development of tourism;
- (d) such other functions as are conferred on the Board by or under the Order or any other statutory provision.

It is the duty of the Board to establish machinery for consulting, and to consult regularly with, bodies appearing to the Board to have an interest in matters falling within the functions of the Board.

In exercise of its functions, the Board may:

- (a) provide advice and information about traveling to and holidays in Northern Ireland and publicise or advertise holidays in Northern Ireland;
- (b) provide or assist any event which appears to the Board likely to encourage tourism;
- (c) co-operate with persons or bodies training persons to do work wholly or mainly connected with tourism;

- (d) establish or assist in establishing any body in connection with tourism;
- (e) trade in any business associated with tourism;
- (f) accept gifts and donations and undertake and execute any trusts which may lawfully be undertaken by the Board and may be conducive to its functions;
- (g) make known the financial assistance which may be provided under the Order;
- (h) make charges for services provided by it and for any certificate or approval granted by it for the purposes of any statutory provision other than the Order;
- (i) carry out surveys and collect statistics and information relating to the tourist industry;
- (j) generally, assist in making Northern Ireland attractive to tourists;
- (k) co-operate with or assist any other body or association carrying out activities falling within the functions of the Board.

2.3 The Minister for the Economy (the Minister) is answerable to the Assembly for the overall performance and delivery of both DfE and TNI.

2.4 Effective delivery and high levels of importance require arm's length bodies and departments working collaboratively and together in a joined-up approach to improve overall outcomes and results.

2.5 To that end there is strategic alignment between the aims, objectives and expected outcomes and results of TNI and DfE.

2.6 In support of this, the overall strategic aim of TNI is to support the development of a thriving tourism ecosystem that enriches Northern Ireland, its people, and its guests. It is important that in delivering on this strategic aim, TNI's work supports and aligns DfE's developing 'Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland.'

TNI Governance Arrangements

3. Organisational Status

- 3.1 TNI is a legal entity in its own right, employing its own staff and operating at arm's-length from the Department. As a legal entity it must comply with all associated legislation including legislation relating to its employer status.

4. Governance Framework

- 4.1 TNI has an established Corporate Governance Framework which reflects all relevant good practice guidance. The framework includes the governance structures established within TNI and the internal control and risk management arrangements in place. This includes its Board and Committee Structure. Following review, DfE is satisfied with the framework.
- 4.2 An account of this is included in TNI's annual Governance Statement together with the TNI Board's assessment of its compliance with the extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI). Any departure from the Corporate Governance Code must be explained in the Governance Statement. The extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI) is available on the DoF website.
- 4.3 TNI is required to follow the principles, rules, guidance, and advice in *Managing Public Money Northern Ireland*. A list of other applicable guidance and instructions which TNI is required to follow is set out in Annex 6. Good governance should also include positive stakeholder engagement, the building of positive relationships and a listening and learning culture.

5. TNI Board

- 5.1 TNI is led by a Board, the non-executive members of which are appointed by the Minister for the Economy. The Board shall consist of a Chair and not more than 8 other members. The appointment process is in line with the Code of Practice

issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. The Board shall comprise such persons as the Minister may from time to time appoint.

- 5.2 As Public Appointees, Board members are office holders rather than employees and they are not subject to employee terms and conditions. Board appraisal arrangements are set out in paras 17.1 and 17.2 and matters for consideration in dealing with concerns or complaints raised in respect of Board members are provided in Annex 5.
- 5.3 The Board's operating framework/terms of reference provides further detail on roles and responsibilities and should align closely with this Partnership Agreement.
- 5.4 The purpose of the TNI Board is to provide effective leadership and strategic direction to the organisation and to ensure that the policies and priorities set by the Minister for the Economy are implemented. It is responsible for ensuring that the organisation has effective and proportionate governance arrangements in place and an internal control framework which allows risks to be effectively identified and managed. The Board will set the culture and values of the organisation and set the tone for the organisation's engagement with stakeholders and customers.
- 5.5 The Board is responsible for holding the Chief Executive to account for the management of the organisation and the delivery of agreed plans and outcomes. The Board should also however support the Chief Executive as appropriate in the exercise of their duties.
- 5.6 Board members must act solely in the interests of TNI and must not use the Board as a platform to champion their own interests or pursue personal agendas. They occupy a position of trust, and their standards of action and behaviour must be exemplary and in line with the seven principles of public life (Nolan principles). TNI has a Board Code of Conduct and there are mechanisms in place to deal with any Board disputes/conflicts to ensure they do not become wider issues that impact on the effectiveness of the Board. A Board Register of Interests is

maintained, kept up to date and is publicly available to help provide transparency and promote public confidence in TNI.

- 5.7 Communication and relationships within the Board are underpinned by a spirit of trust and professional respect. The Board recognises that using consensus to avoid conflict or encouraging members to consistently express similar views or consider only a few alternative views does not encourage constructive debate and does not give rise to an effective Board dynamic.
- 5.8 It is for the Board to decide what information it needs, and in what format, for its meetings/effective operation. If the Board is not confident that it is being fully informed about the organisation this will be addressed by the Chair of the Board as the Board cannot be effective with out-of-date or only partial knowledge.
- 5.9 In order to fulfil their duties, Board members must undertake initial training, and regular ongoing training and development. Review of Board skills and development will be a key part of the annual review of Board effectiveness.
- 5.10 DfE shall have access to all Board papers including minutes at the same time as these are circulated to Board members and in advance of scheduled meetings.
- 5.11 DfE officials may attend TNI Board meetings in an advisory or observer capacity as appropriate.

6. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

- 6.1 A further important aspect of TNI's governance framework is its Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, established in line with the extant Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI).
- 6.2 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's purpose/role is to support the Accounting Officer and Board on governance issues. In line with the handbook the Audit and Risk Assurance Committees focuses on:
- assurance arrangements over governance; financial reporting; annual

reports and accounts, including the Governance Statement; and

- ensuring there is an adequate and effective risk management and assurance framework in place.

6.3 TNI and DfE have agreed arrangements in respect of Audit and Risk Assurance Committees which include:

- Attendance by departmental representatives in an observer capacity at TNI's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meetings;
- Access to TNI Audit and Risk Assurance Committee papers and minutes;
- Any input required from TNI's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to the departmental Audit and Risk Assurance Committee;
- DfE will review TNI's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee terms of reference;
- TNI shall notify DfE of any subsequent changes to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee terms of reference.

6.4 Full compliance with the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) [Audit committees | Department of Finance \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/audit-committees) is an essential requirement. In the event of significant non-compliance with the handbook's five good practice principles (or other non-compliance), discussion will be required with the Department and a full explanation provided in the annual Governance Statement.

6.5 The extant Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) is available on the DoF website.

7. Fraud

7.1 TNI shall report immediately to the Department all frauds (proven or suspected), including attempted fraud. DfE shall then report the frauds immediately to DoF and the

C&AG. In addition, TNI shall forward to the Department an annual fraud return, commissioned by DoF, on fraud and theft suffered by TNI.

7.2 The Department will review TNI's Anti-Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan. TNI shall notify DfE of any subsequent changes to the policy or response plan.

8. TNI Chair

8.1 The Chair is responsible for setting the agenda and managing the Board to enable collaborative and robust discussion of issues. The Chair's role is to develop and motivate the Board and ensure effective relationships in order that the Board can work collaboratively to reach a consensus on decisions. To achieve this, he or she should ensure:

- The Board has an appropriate balance of skills appropriate to its business;
- Board members are fully briefed on terms of appointment, duties, rights and responsibilities;
- Board members receive and maintain appropriate training;
- The Minister is advised of TNI's needs when Board vacancies arise;
- There is a Board Operating Framework in place setting out the roles and responsibilities of the Board in line with relevant guidance;
- There is a code of practice for Board members in place, consistent with relevant guidance.

8.2 The role also requires the establishment of an effective working relationship with the Chief Executive that is simultaneously collaborative and challenging. It is important that the Chair and Chief Executive act in accordance with their distinct roles and responsibilities as laid out in [Managing Public Money NI](#) and their appointment letters.

8.3 The Chair has a presence in the organisation and cultivates external relationships which provide useful links for the organisation while being mindful

of overstepping boundaries and becoming too involved in day-to-day operations or executive activities.

- 8.4 Communications between the Board, the Minister, and the Department on strategic matters relevant to the Board will normally be through the Chair. The Chair shall ensure that the other Board members are kept informed of such communications on a timely basis. In addition, the Chair will be invited to meet with the Minister at least once a year to keep him/her updated on key issues, objectives and targets relating to TNI and on wider tourism issues. Communications between the Board, the Minister and the Department on operations matters shall normally be through the Chief Executive.

9. TNI Chief Executive

- 9.1 The role of the TNI Chief Executive is to run TNI's business. The Chief Executive is responsible for all executive management matters affecting the organisation and for leadership of the executive management team.
- 9.2 The Chief Executive is designated as TNI Accounting Officer by the departmental Accounting Officer (see section 13). As Accounting Officer, they are personally responsible for safeguarding the public funds in their charge; for ensuring propriety and regularity in the handling of these public funds; and ensuring they are applied only to the purposes for which they were voted and more generally for efficient and economical administration.
- 9.3 The Chief Executive is accountable to the Board for TNI's performance and delivery of outcomes and targets and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and its Committees. They maintain a dialogue with the Chair on the important strategic issues facing the organisation and for proposing Board agendas to the Chair to reflect these. They ensure effective communication with stakeholders and communication on this to the Board. They also ensure that the Chair is alerted to forthcoming complex, contentious or sensitive issues, including risks affecting the organisation.

- 9.4 The Chief Executive acts as a role model to other executives by exhibiting open support for the Chair and Board members and the contribution they make. The Chair and Chief Executive have agreed how they will work together in practice, understanding and respecting each other's role, including the Chief Executive's responsibility as Accounting Officer.
- 9.5 Further detail on the role and responsibilities of the Chief Executive are as laid out in [Managing Public Money NI](#) and their Accounting Officer appointment letter.
- 9.6 The Chief Executive is the Principal Officer for handling cases involving the NI Public Sector Ombudsman. They shall advise the departmental Accounting Officer of any complaints about TNI accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation, and about the proposed response to any subsequent recommendations from the Ombudsman.

Role of DfE

10. Partnership Working with TNI

- 10.1 DfE and TNI are part of a total delivery system, within the same Ministerial portfolio. The partnership between DfE and TNI is open, honest, constructive, and based on trust. There is mutual understanding of each other's objectives and clear expectations on the terms of engagement.
- 10.2 In exercising its functions, TNI has absolute clarity on how its purpose and objectives align with those of DfE. There is also a shared understanding of the risks that may impact on each other, and these are reflected in respective Risk Registers.
- 10.3 There is a regular exchange of skills and experience between DfE and TNI and where possible joint programme/project delivery boards/ arrangements. TNI may also be involved as a partner in policy/strategy development and provides advice on policy implementation/ the impact of policies in practice.
- 10.4 The Department of Finance (DoF) has established, on behalf of the Assembly, a delegated authority framework which sets out the circumstances where prior DoF approval is required before expenditure can be occurred or commitments entered into. The Accounting Officer of DfE has established an internal framework of delegated authority for the Department and its Delivery Partners [DAO \(DoF\) 08/21 - Delegated Limits/requirements for DoF approval \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#) which apply to TNI. Other specific approval requirements established in respect of TNI are set out at Annex 3.
- 10.5 Once TNI's budget has been approved by the Minister and formally allocated to TNI, TNI shall have authority to incur expenditure approved in the budget without further reference to the Department. Inclusion of any planned and approved expenditure in the budget shall not however remove the need to seek formal departmental approval, in a timely manner and before expenditure is incurred, where proposed expenditure is outside the delegated limits (as laid out in Annex 3) or is for new schemes not previously agreed.

Nor does it negate the need to follow due processes laid out in guidance contained in [Managing Public Money NI](#) and the [Better Business Cases NI](#).

11. Lead Official

11.1 DfE has appointed a lead senior official (Grade 5 level) to manage the relationship with TNI and ensure effective partnership working. Engagement between the Department and TNI will be co-ordinated, collaborative, and consistent. A clear sense of collaboration and partnership will be communicated to staff in both the Department and TNI in order to promote mutual understanding and support.

11.2 The lead senior official is the policy lead for the policy area relating to TNI's business and has a clear understanding of TNI's responsibilities for policy implementation/operational delivery and the relevant audiences/stakeholders involved. They are supported by the Partner Team which includes Tourism & Telecoms Division Finance, and by key contacts within the wider Department such as Finance Division and Corporate Governance Division, and others as required.

11.3 The lead senior official will ensure that where there are departmental staff changes, time is taken to ensure they have a full understanding of TNI's business and challenges.

12. Annual Engagement Plan

12.1 The Department and TNI will agree an engagement plan **before the start of each business year**. The Annual Engagement Plan (Annex 2) will set out the timing and nature of engagement between TNI and the Department. The engagement plan will be specific to TNI and should not stray into operational oversight.

12.2 Engagement between the Department's lead official, their teams and TNI will be centred on partnership working, understanding of shared risks, and working together on business developments that align with policy objectives.

12.3 In line with relevant guidance¹, TNI will work in collaboration and partnership with the Department to prepare corporate and business plans. Once approved by the Board, TNI will formally submit it to the Department for approval. There should be clear, high level strategic alignment between departmental and TNI plans, including DfE's developing 'Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland'. Indeed, TNI's corporate and business plans are the vehicle by which TNI will play a leading role in delivery of the vision, mission and strategic aims outlined in the Tourism Strategy. It will be the Board of TNI that primarily holds the Chief Executive to account for delivery and performance. The Department will engage with TNI on areas of strategic interest, linking departmental policy and TNI delivery of policy intent.

12.4 The Annual Engagement Plan will also reference the agreed management and financial information to be shared over the course of a year. The aim will be to ensure clear understanding of why information is necessary and how it will be used. Where the same, or similar information is required for internal governance, information requirements will be aligned so that a single report can be used for both purposes. In addition, the engagement plan should consider opportunities for learning and development, growth and actions which could help achieve better outcomes.

13. Departmental Accounting Officer

13.1 The DfE Accounting Officer is accountable to the NI Assembly for the issue of grant in aid to TNI. They have designated the Chief Executive of TNI as TNI Accounting Officer and respective responsibilities of the DfE Accounting Officer and the TNI Accounting Officer are set out in Chapter 3 of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. The DfE Accounting Officer may withdraw the TNI Accounting Officer designation if they conclude that the TNI Accounting Officer

¹ Guidance issued by TEO on NICS Work Programme which includes guidance on business planning for an outcomes-based PfG/ODP

is no longer a fit person to carry out the responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, or that it is otherwise in the public interest that the designation be withdrawn. In such circumstances the TNI Board will be given a full account of the reasons for withdrawal and a chance to make representations. Withdrawal of TNI Accounting Officer status would bring into question employment as Chief Executive and the Chair should engage with the Department should such circumstances arise.

13.2 As outlined in section 9, the TNI Chief Executive is accountable to the TNI Board for his/her stewardship of TNI. This includes advising the Board on matters of financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency and effectiveness.

13.3 While ordinarily, the DfE Accounting Officer does not have day-to-day involvement with TNI or its Chief Executive, they must be informed in the event that the judgement of the TNI Accounting Officer (on matters for which they are responsible) is over-ridden by the TNI Board. The TNI Accounting Officer must also take action if the TNI Board is contemplating a course that would infringe the requirement for financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency, or effectiveness. In all other regards, the departmental Accounting Officer has no day-to-day involvement with TNI or its Chief Executive.

13.4 In line with DoF requirements, the TNI Accounting Officer will provide a bi-annual declaration of fitness to act as Accounting Officer to the departmental Accounting Officer through the Assurance Statement exercise as at 31 March and 30 September each year.

14. Attendance at Public Accounts Committee

14.1 The TNI Chief Executive/Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as Accounting Officer (as laid out in their Accounting Officer appointment letter) on issues arising from the C&AG's studies or reports following the annual audit of accounts.

14.2 The Chair may also, on occasion, be called to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on such relevant issues arising within the C&AG's studies or reports, in relation to the role and actions taken by the Board, where appropriate.

14.3 In addition, the DfE Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as departmental Accounting Officer with overarching responsibility for TNI. In such circumstances, the DfE Accounting Officer may therefore expect to be questioned on their responsibilities to ensure that:

- there is a clear strategic control framework for TNI;
- sufficient and appropriate management and financial controls are in place to safeguard public funds;
- the nominated Accounting Officer is fit to discharge his or her responsibilities;
- there are suitable internal audit arrangements;
- accounts are prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and any accounting direction; and
- intervention is made, where necessary, in situations where TNI's Accounting Officer's advice on transactions in relation to regularity, propriety or value for money is overruled by the body's Board or its Chair.

Assurance Framework

15. Autonomy and Proportionality

15.1 DfE will ensure that TNI has the autonomy to deliver effectively, recognising its status as a separate legal entity which has its own Board and governance arrangements. [Guidance on proportionate autonomy](#) has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance established between TNI and DfE and is reflected in this agreement.

15.2 A proportionate approach to assurance will be taken based on TNI's overall purpose, business and budget and a mutual understanding of risk. The approach will include an agreed process through which the TNI Accounting Officer provides written assurance to the Department that the public funds and organisational assets for which they are personally responsible are safeguarded, have been managed with propriety and regularity, and use of public funds represents value for money.

15.3 Recognising the governance arrangements in place within the organisation, the TNI Accounting Officer will arrange for their written assurance to be discussed at the TNI Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and presented to the TNI Board prior to submission to the Department where possible. If not possible, or practicable, the Chair of the TNI Board should have sight of the assurance statement, prior to being submitted to the Department.

15.4 The TNI Chair will provide written confirmation that the TNI Accounting Officer's formal assurance has been considered by the Board and is reflective of TNI's current position.

15.5 In addition to the TNI Accounting Officer's written assurance, the Department will take assurance from the following key aspects of TNI's own governance framework:

- Annual Review of Board Effectiveness;

- Completion of Board Appraisals which confirm Board member effectiveness;
- Internal Audit assurance and External Quality Assessment of the Internal Audit function;
- Externally audited Annual Report and Accounts, reviewed/considered by the TNI Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

16. Board Effectiveness

16.1 The TNI Chair will ensure that the TNI Board undertakes an annual review of Board Effectiveness² which encompasses committees established by the Board under Article 11 of Schedule 1 of The Tourism (NI) Order 1992.

16.2 The Chair will discuss the outcome of the annual review of Board Effectiveness with the lead official to ensure a partnership approach to any improvements identified. This will inform the annual programme of Board training/development and discussions in respect of Board composition and succession.

16.3 In line with any parameters set out in founding (or other) legislation, the Chair in conjunction with the Department, and Ministers where appropriate, will consider the size and composition of the TNI Board, proportionate to the size and complexity of TNI and keep this under review.

16.4 In addition to the annual review of Board Effectiveness TNI will undertake an externally facilitated review of Board effectiveness **at least once every three years** covering the performance of the Board, its committees and individual Board members. The Chair will liaise with the Department to identify a suitably skilled facilitator for the external review (this can be a peer review and should be proportionate) and will share the findings/outcome report with the Department on completion of the review.

² NIAO Good Practice Guide on Board Effectiveness

17. Board Appraisals

- 17.1 The Chair of TNI will conduct an annual appraisal in respect of each Board member which will also inform the annual programme of Board training/development. The Chair will engage with the Chief Executive/lead official as appropriate on improvements identified through the appraisal process and the annual training/development programme.
- 17.2 The Chair's annual appraisal will be completed by the Grade 3 of the Economic Strategy Group within the Department. The appraisal will take account of the Key Characteristics of a good chairperson (particularly for the Chair to have well developed interpersonal skills) set out in the NIAO Good Practice Guide on Board Effectiveness which is available on the NIAO website. There will be close engagement between the Chair and the lead official on improvements identified through the appraisal process.

18. Internal Audit Assurance

- 18.1 TNI is required to establish and maintain arrangements for an internal audit function that operates in accordance with the [Public Sector Internal Audit Standards](#) (PSIAS). DfE must be satisfied with the competence and qualifications of the Head of Internal Audit and that the requirements for approving appointments are in accordance with PSIAS.
- 18.2 If the internal audit function is contracted out, TNI shall ensure that DfE is satisfied that the contract specification for the internal audit service meets the requirements of PSIAS.
- 18.3 TNI will provide its internal audit strategy, periodic audit plans and annual audit report, including the Head of Internal Audit's opinion on risk management, control, and governance to the Department. TNI will ensure the DfE's Internal Audit team have complete right of access to all relevant records. This applies whether the internal audit function is provided in-house or is contracted out.

- 18.4 TNI will ensure regular, periodic self-assessments of the internal audit function in line with PSIAS and will share these with DfE. TNI's internal audit function is provided by DfE Internal Audit Service in accordance with PSIAS and is subject to regular impartial review, at least once every five years.
- 18.5 TNI will alert DfE to any less than satisfactory audit reports at the earliest opportunity on an ongoing basis. TNI will also alert the Department to a less than satisfactory annual opinion from the Head of Internal Audit at the earliest opportunity. TNI and the Department will then engage closely on actions required to address the less than satisfactory opinion in order to move TNI to a satisfactory position as soon as possible.
- 18.6 DfE will take assurance from the fact that TNI has met the requirements of PSIAS and has a satisfactory annual opinion from the Head of Internal Audit as part of its overall assurance assessment.

19. Externally Audited Annual Report and Accounts

- 19.1 TNI is required to prepare an Annual Report and Accounts in line with the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by the Department of Finance (DoF) and the specific Accounts Direction issued by DfE, and in accordance with the deadlines specified.
- 19.2 The Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) will arrange to audit the TNI's annual accounts and will issue an independent opinion on the accounts. The C&AG passes the accounts to DfE who shall lay/present/deposit them before the NI Assembly together with TNI annual report.
- 19.3 The C&AG will also provide a Report to Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG) to TNI which will be shared with DfE.
- 19.4 TNI will alert DfE to any likely qualification of the accounts at the earliest opportunity. In the event of a qualified audit opinion or significant issues reported in the RTTCWG, DfE will engage with TNI on actions required to address the qualification/significant issues.

19.5 DfE will take assurance from the external audit process and an unqualified position as part of its overall assurance assessment.

19.6 The C&AG may carry out examinations into the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness with which TNI has used its resources in discharging its functions. The C&AG may also carry out thematic examinations that encompass the functions of TNI.

19.7 For audit and any other examinations, the C&AG has statutory access to documents as provided for under Articles 3 and 4 of the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

19.8 Where making payment of a grant, or drawing up a contract, TNI should ensure that it includes a clause which makes the grant or contract conditional upon the recipient or contractor providing access to the C&AG in relation to documents relevant to the transaction. Where subcontractors are likely to be involved, it should also be made clear that the requirements extend to them.

20. EXPENDITURE ON STAFF

Staff costs

20.1 Subject to its delegated limits of authority, TNI shall ensure that the creation of any additional posts does not incur forward commitments which will exceed its ability to pay for them.

Pay and conditions of service

20.2 The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 provides that the Tourism NI may appoint such officers, on such terms and conditions of service, as the Department may determine. The staff of TNI, whether on permanent or temporary contract, shall be subject to levels of remuneration and terms and conditions of service (including superannuation) within the general NICS pay structure and in line with NICS HR Policy. TNI has no delegated power to amend these terms and conditions. Exceptionally, where TNI recruits local staff to work in offices outside

the United Kingdom, TNI may appoint such staff in a manner appropriate to local labour market conditions or requirements, and which facilitates the achievement of its objectives, provided it operates within the resources allocated for salaries and wages. The approval of the Department must be obtained where it is proposed to recruit a local member of staff at a salary more than the maximum of the salary scale for NICS Deputy Principal or equivalent (see paragraph 42 below). TNI shall benchmark salaries against salaries paid to staff employed in comparable public sector organisations in the country concerned. Where incremental pay scales exist, the presumption is that staff will commence on the minimum point of the pay scale. Any proposals to pay such staff at a rate above the scale minima should be justified by a business case which should be approved by appropriate officials within TNI.

20.3 Civil Service terms and conditions of service apply to the rates of pay and non-pay allowances paid to TNI's staff and to any other party entitled to payment in respect of traveling expenses or other allowances. Payment shall be made in accordance with the NICS Staff Handbook except where prior approval has been given by the Department and DoF to vary such rates.

20.4 Current terms and conditions for staff of TNI are set out in TNI's Employee Handbook. TNI will provide the Department with a copy of the Handbook and subsequent amendments.

20.5 Annual pay increases of TNI staff must be in accordance with the annual FD letter on Pay Remit Approval Process and Guidance issued by DoF. Separate proposals for pay awards should be made for TNI staff equivalent to NICS Senior Civil Service grades, TNI staff below NICS Senior Civil Service grades based in the UK and locally recruited TNI staff based outside the United Kingdom. Therefore, all proposed pay awards must have the prior approval of the Department and the Minister for Finance before implementation.

20.6 The travel expenses of Board Members shall be tied to Departmental rates. Reasonable actual costs shall be reimbursed.

20.7 The Chief Executive may create posts up to and including NICS Grade 7 equivalents. The creation of posts above NICS Grade 7 level or equivalent shall be subject to the approval of the Department.

20.8 TNI shall operate a performance related pay scheme which shall form part of the annual aggregate pay budget approved by the Department and DoF. This means that a formal performance management system should be embedded, and staff must be able to demonstrate a satisfactory level of performance in order to progress through pay scales.

20.9 TNI shall comply with the EU directive on contract workers “Fixed Term Employees Regulations (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment)”.

Signatories

TNI and DfE agree to work in partnership with each other in line with the NI Code of Good Practice '**Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies**' and the arrangements set out in this Agreement.

Signed (TNI Chair)

Date 11 March 2024

Signed (TNI Chief Executive)

Date 11 March 2024

Signed (DfE Senior Lead Official (G5))

Date 13 March 2024

Annex 1 - Applicable Legislation

Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI) is the trading name of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). NITB is a statutory Non-Departmental Public Body originally established under The Development of Tourist Traffic Act (NI) 1948. Its constitution and continuation were affirmed in The Tourism (NI) Order 1992. TNI does not carry out its functions on behalf of the Crown. Tourism Northern Ireland is funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE) under Article 7 of the Order, from monies voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

TNI has responsibility for the development of the tourism product and experience across Northern Ireland, and is also responsible for the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to visitors within Northern Ireland and from the Republic of Ireland.

Article 3(1) of Schedule 1 of The Tourism (NI) Order 1992 states that TNI’s Board shall consist of a Chair and not more than eight other members.

Annex 2 – Annual Engagement Plan

Good engagement is one of the key principles in the Partnership Code, underpinning the other principles of: Leadership; Purpose; Assurance; and Value.

As laid out in the Code, partnerships work well when relationships between departments and ALBs are open, transparent, honest, constructive, and based on trust and when there is mutual understanding of each other’s objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.

The template provided outlines the key areas of engagement between Departments and ALBs. The template is not intended to be prescriptive and should be completed collaboratively and agreed between DfE and TNI.

Engagement Plan 2023/24		
Policy Development and Delivery		
Policy Area	Frequency/Timing	Lead Officials (DfE may assign alternative official as appropriate)
Policy areas in TNI and Partner Team to liaise on Policy Development as a matter of course	As required	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Tourism Strategy Development	Ongoing	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Events Framework Development	Ongoing	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Review of Legislation	Ongoing	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Implementation of Recommendation 6 from Review of Invest NI (Transfer of Functions).	Ongoing	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Meeting of Minister and TNI Board to discuss TNI's performance, current and future activities and any policy developments relevant to those activities.	Annual	DfE Minister DfE G5 TNI Chair
Strategic Planning		
Activity	Date	Lead Officials
Engagement on the draft Corporate Plan	Autumn 2024	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Operating Plan	Commissioned in January, submission in March and approval in April	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Engagement on areas of strategic interest to the Department to inform further scheduled engagement during the year	Quarterly O&L meetings/as required	DfE G5 TNI CEO

Joint Working		
Activity	Frequency/Timing	Lead Officials
Industry Engagement on Tourism Strategy	As necessary during development of the Strategy.	DfE G5 TNI CEO
TNI catch-up meetings	Quarterly	DfE G3 TNI CEO TNI Chair
Perm Sec meetings with TNI Board	Bi-annual	Perm Sec TNI Board
TNI Bi-monthly meeting	Bi-monthly	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Major Events Scoping/ Steering Groups	As required	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Finance meeting	Monthly	DfE Finance Managers TNI Finance Managers
Board Appointments		
Activity	Date	Lead Officials
TNI Board Member Competition appointments	As required	DfE G5 TNI Chair
Leadership Appointments		
Activity	Date	Lead Officials
TNI Director (G5) appointments	As required	DfE G3
Assurances		
Action	Date	Lead Officials
Review of Board Effectiveness	Externally facilitated review of Board Effectiveness at least once every three years.	TNI Chair DfE G5

Board Appraisals and planned training/development for Board members	Following the end of the Business year	TNI Chair DfE G5
Chair Appraisal	Following the end of the Business year after Board Appraisals have been completed by the Chair	DfE Permanent Secretary DfE G3
Gifts & Hospitality for Board & SMT	Annually as part of the Risk Assessment	DfE G5
Meeting between Minister and Chair (and Board if appropriate)	Annual and more frequently as necessary	DfE Minister TNI Chair
Departmental Attendance at ARAC	Quarterly Attendance as observer	DfE G5 DfE to confirm
Assurance Statement	Bi-annual	DfE Permanent Secretary TNI CEO
Draft Governance Statement	Year end 31 March	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Annual Report and Accounts	Annual	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Report to those Charged with Governance	Annual	NIAO DfE G5 TNI CEO
Engagement on other planned NIAO reports	As required	NIAO DfE G5 TNI CEO
Head of Internal Audit Annual report/Opinion	Annual	DfE Head of Internal Audit DfE G5 TNI CEO

Internal Audit Strategy and Plans	Annual	DfE Head of Internal Audit DfE G5 TNI CEO
Internal Audit External Quality Assessment	To be conducted at least once every five years	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Casework Committee for Major Projects	As required	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Budget Management		
Item and Purpose	Date	Lead Officials
Engagement on budget requirements and Forecast Expenditure for the Financial Year	Monthly	DfE to confirm
Departmental approval of the annual budget	Annual, through business plan approval	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Monthly Financial Management Returns	Monthly	DfE to confirm TNI G7
Monthly Cash Forecast	Monthly	DfE to confirm TNI G7
Monitoring Round Returns	Three times a year as required	DfE to confirm TNI G7
Provisional Outturn	Annual	DfE to confirm TNI G7
Final Outturn	Annual	DfE to confirm TNI G7

DoF Guidance e.g Finance Director letters/DAO letters	As issued	DfE G7
Finance Director letters – Pay Remits	Annual	DfE G7
Chair and Board Member Remuneration	Annual	DfE DP
Processing of L1 Write Off forms in consultation with DoF	DfE to confirm	DfE to confirm
Other		
Item and Purpose	Submission Date	Lead Officials
Accounting Officer - Fitness to Act as Accounting Officer	TNI Accounting Officer will provide a bi-annual declaration of fitness to act as Accounting Officer to the departmental Accounting Officer through the Assurance Statement exercise as at 31 March and 30 September each year.	DfE Permanent Secretary TNI CEO
Fraud Reporting	Immediate reporting of all frauds - proven or suspected including attempted fraud	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Annual Fraud Reporting	Annual fraud return commissioned by DoF on fraud and theft suffered by TNI.	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Whistleblowing cases/ Speaking Up/Raising Concerns.	As required following TNI policy on whistle blowing	DfE G5 TNI CEO

Media management protocols – independence of ALB to engage with media/announcements of corporate and policy communications significant to ALB - arrangements to share press releases where relevant – ensure no surprises.	As required	DfE G5
Assembly Business – Assembly Questions, Debates, Committees etc	As required	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Period Products (Free Provision) Act 2022	As required	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Direct Award Contracts	Bi Annual	DfE G5 TNI CEO
External Consultancy Costs	Bi Annual	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Procurement Plan.	Bi Annual	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Review of the Partnership Arrangement		
Item and Purpose	Date	Lead Officials
Light touch review of the Partnership Agreement	Schedule following the end of the Business Year	DfE G5 TNI CEO
Formal review of the Partnership Agreement	To be conducted once every three years – next due 2026.	DfE G5 TNI CEO

Annex 3 - Delegations

Delegated Authorities

TNI shall obtain the Department's prior written approval before:

- entering into any undertaking to incur any expenditure that falls outside the delegations, or which is not provided for in the TNI's annual budget as approved by DfE;
- incurring expenditure for any purpose that is or might be considered novel or contentious, or which has or could have significant future cost implications;
- making any significant change in the scale of operation or funding of any initiative or particular scheme previously approved by DfE;
- making any change of policy or practice which has wider financial implications that might prove repercussive, or which might significantly affect the future level of resources required; or
- carrying out policies that go against the principles, rules, guidance and advice in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland.

TNI Specific Delegated Authorities

Economic Appraisal

The principles of economic appraisal should be applied in all cases where expenditure is proposed, whether the proposal involves capital or current expenditure, or both. The effort put into economic appraisal should be commensurate with the size or importance of the needs or resources under consideration. However, TNI should undertake a comprehensive business case of all projects involving expenditure of £250,000 or over. TNI should use the appropriate **Better Business Cases NI** template.

Procurement Control Limits

TNI shall observe the procurement control limits set out in PPN 04 /21– Procurement Control Limits and the basis for Contract Awards. The level of internal approval required is set out in TNI's Financial Procedures Manual.[[PPN 04 21 Procurement Control Limits pdf \(3 May 2022\).PDF \(finance-ni.gov.uk\).](#)]

Delegations – General Principles

All delegations and limits exclude VAT. This Appendix conveys delegated authority to commit and incur expenditure subject to the restrictions set out in the following paragraphs, ie TNI has full delegated authority to commit and incur expenditure except in relation to the areas listed in the following paragraphs. The delegations are also subject to the general requirement that DoF approval is always required for any proposal in any of the categories in *MPMNI* Annex 2.3, Box A.2.3B, i.e. any proposals which:

(a) could create pressures which could lead to a breach:

- (i) in Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL);
- (ii) in administration cost limits, resource limits, capital limits and capital grant limits; or
- (iii) Estimates provision.

(b) would entail contractual commitments to significant levels of spending in future years for which no plans have been set;

(c) could set a potentially expensive precedent;

(d) could cause repercussions for others;

(e) exceed the general threshold for major capital expenditure projects currently in force (unless other delegations specifically allow); or

(f) are novel and/or contentious.

TNI – DfE Casework Committee

All TNI projects and programmes (excluding consultancy) in excess of the delegated limits for TNI Board approval or expenditure that is novel, contentious, repercussive, sets a precedent (or subject to Ministerial Direction) irrespective of level of expenditure if appropriate following consideration by the Finance and Corporate Governance Directors will be subject to consideration by the TNI - DfE Casework Committee (“the Casework Committee”) and DfE Grade 3. The remit of the Casework Committee, which comprises representatives from the Department’s Board and Senior Management Team (SMT), is to consider any such proposals collectively with a view to reaching agreement on the merits of a project. By subjecting projects to scrutiny and endorsement by the Casework Committee, the process leading to formal approval by DoF, and the Minister should be streamlined. DoF officials may also attend in an observer capacity.

TNI projects that are submitted for Casework Committee consideration must have already received approval from the TNI Board.

Where the proposed level of financial assistance or sponsorship exceeds the delegated limits for DoF approval, formal DoF approval will be sought following consideration of the case by the Casework Committee, provided the Casework Committee endorses the case. DoF approval must be sought and approved before the case is submitted to the Minister.

Delegations: Specific Delegations Given by DoF and Detailed in DAO (DOF) 08/21
[DAO \(DoF\) 08/21 - Delegated Limits/requirements for DoF approval \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

DAO (DOF) 08/21 sets out the following specific delegations under Article 11 of the Tourism (NI) Order 1992:

These delegations apply unless approval has been given for specific schemes.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

Private Sector	
Grant Loan Interest Relief Grant Acquisition of shares	Over 30% of eligible costs <i>or</i> over £0.75m.
Total Assistance	Over 30% of eligible costs for projects <i>or</i> over £0.75m.
Public and Voluntary/Community Sectors	
50% of eligible costs (EU and IFI contributions included in limit) <i>and</i> over £0.75m.	

REVENUE BASED PROJECTS

Tourism Innovation Fund	
Private Sector projects	Over 50% of eligible costs
Public and Community and Voluntary Sector projects	Over 75% of eligible costs
Events Fund	
Revenue Grant	Over 50% for Private Sector and Public Sector projects
	Over £500k in relation to any one event

Delegations: Consultancy, Capital Expenditure and IT Projects

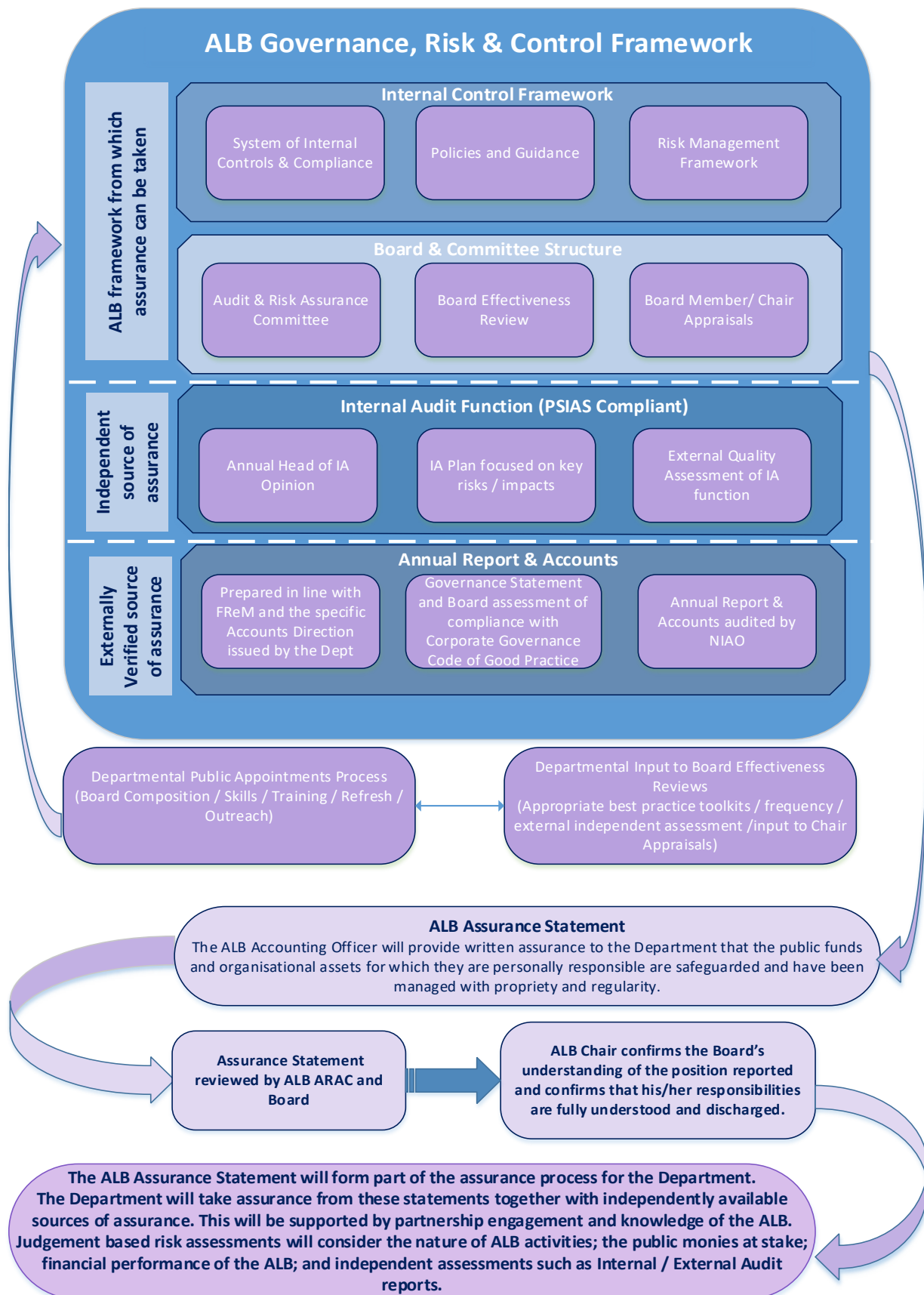
The following delegations will apply in respect of expenditure in the following categories: -

	Consultants	Capital Expenditure*	IT Projects*
Departmental approval required in all cases above these amounts	£10,000	£200,000	£100,000
Ministerial approval required in all cases above these amounts	£10,000	£1,000,000	£1,000,000
DoF approval required in all cases above these amounts	£n/a	£5,000,000	£5,000,000

Note: * on a single project

These delegations shall not be altered without the prior agreement of the department and, where applicable, DoF.

Annex 4 – Illustrative System of Assurance



Annex 5 – Concerns/Complaints in respect of Board members

In line with the NI Code of Good Practice and the arrangements in this Partnership Agreement the approach to concerns/complaints raised in respect of TNI Board members should be transparent and collaborative. The principle of early and open engagement is important, with DfE made aware of any concerns/complaints as soon as practicable.

While Board Members are Public Appointees/office holders rather than TNI employees, a TNI employee may utilise TNI's grievance procedure/other HR procedure to raise a complaint against a Board member. The TNI employee raising the grievance should expect this to be handled in line with TNI's HR procedures.

Concerns/complaints might also be raised through:

- Raising Concerns/Whistleblowing arrangements;
- Complaints processes;
- Directly with TNI or the Department.

Where a concern/complaint is received within TNI in respect of an individual Board Member this should be provided to the TNI Chair who should notify DfE at the outset in order that lead responsibility for handling the complaint/concern is clear in advance.

Where a concern/complaint relates to the TNI Chair, TNI should notify DfE Fraud & Raising Concerns Branch at raising.concerns@economy-ni.gov.uk or 02890257422 for the 24hr message service.

Differences of view in relation to matters which fall within the Board's responsibilities are a matter for the Board to resolve through consensus-based decision making in the best interests of TNI.

Exceptionally a concern/complaint may be raised by a Board Member about a fellow Board Member or a senior member of TNI staff. The TNI Chair should notify DfE at the outset to ensure that arrangements for handling the concern /complaint are clear. DfE may determine that it should make arrangements to deal with the concern/complaint. This will be agreed at the outset.

Arrangements for concerns/complaints in respect of Board members should be reflected in all relevant procedures, including Standing Orders and Board Operating Frameworks.

Annex 6 - Applicable Guidance

The following guidance is applicable to TNI:

Guidance issued by the Department of Finance

- [Managing Public Money NI \(MPMNI\)](#)
- [Better Business Cases NI \(BBCNI\)](#)
- [Public Sector Internal Audit Standards \(PSIAS\)](#)
- DoF guidance on [Governance and Risk](#)
- [Anti-Fraud Guidance](#)
- [Dear Accounting Officer Letters](#) and [Dear Finance Director Letters](#), where these are applicable to NDPBs
- Dear Consolidation Officer and Dear Consolidation Manager Letters
- The Consolidation Officer Letter of Appointment
- [Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy](#) including Procurement Guidance Notes (PGNs), Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs) and Procurement Advisor Notes (PANs)
- Public Bodies – A Guide for NI Departments [Public bodies guidance including On Board Guide and public bodies guides](#)
- Corporate Governance in central government departments – code of good practice [Corporate governance guidance](#)
- HMT Orange Book [The Orange Book – Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts](#)
- The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook [Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook](#)

- Accounting Officer Handbook – HMT Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money [Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money - Treasury officer of accounts](#)
- Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) [The Government Financial Reporting Manual 23/24 \(FReM\)](#)
- Guidance for preparation and publication of annual report and accounts
- Procurement Guidance Notes [Procurement Advisory Notes \(PANs\)](#) and Procurement Policy Notes [Procurement Policy Notes \(PPNs\)](#)
- Guidance issued by the Executive's Asset Management Unit
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland [Equality Commission, Northern Ireland](#)

Other Guidance and Best Practice

- Specific guidance issued by DfE
- Recommendations made by the NI Audit Office/NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee [Public Accounts Committee \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](#)
- NIAO Good Practice Guides [Northern Ireland Audit Office - Good Practice Guides](#)
- NI Public Services Ombudsman guidance [Information and Guidance | NIPSO](#)

Annex 7 – Role of the Minister

Role of the Minister

The Chair of TNI is responsible to the Minister. Communication between the Board and the Minister should normally be through the Chair. The Minister normally meets the Chair at least once a year to discuss key issues. The DfE Accounting Officer is responsible for advising the relevant Minister on a number of issues including TNI objectives and targets, budgets and performance.

In addition to being answerable to the Assembly as laid out in paragraph 2.3, the Minister is also responsible for:

- Setting the strategic direction and overall policies and priorities for TNI;
- Approving TNI's Corporate and Business Plans;
- Setting TNI's budget; and
- Appointment of the Chair and non-executive board members. The Minister may also be involved in considering the size and composition of the TNI Board – see para 16.3.

Annex 8 – Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice

NI Code of Good Practice - [NI Code of Good Practice](#)