



Board Papers

Thursday 14th March 2024

Agenda

Virtual Board Meeting

Thursday 14th March 2024 8am

[Click here to join the meeting](#) Meeting ID: 390 195 823 216 Passcode: YQLQk7

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Time		Item	Lead	Reference
08:00am	1	Welcome and Apologies	TB	
08:05am	2	Declarations of Interest	TB	
08:10am	3	Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 14 th December 2023	TB	
08:15am	4	Board Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none">- LEP transition update- Terms of Reference	TB PC CM	
08:45am	5	MD Report <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Forward Plan- KPIs	CM	(Board Paper 268)
09:30am	6	Company Finances <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Financial Report to 31 December 2023- Preliminary Budget 2024/2025		
09:50am	7	A.O.B		
10:00am	8	Close		

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams
On Thursday 14th December 2023 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank – (“TB”) - Chair
Philip Cox (“PC”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Jamie Christon (“JC”)
Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
Peter Mearns (“PM”)
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Gemma Davies (“GD”)
Ian Brooks (“IB”)
Colin Potts (“CP”)

In Attendance: Keith Blundell (“KB”)
Cristian Marcucci (“CM”)
Liam Hartzenberg (“LH”)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies: Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)
Diane Cunningham (“DC”)

Opening by the Chair and Welcome

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting.

TB advised Board members that Tracey O’Keefe has made the decision to step down from the Board. TB thanked Tracey in her absence for the support and commitment she has given both the Board and Audit Committee.

TB also advised that Peter Mearns has agreed to become Vice Chair of the Marketing Cheshire Board.

DW stated that with Tracey leaving it creates a vacancy on the Audit committee and requested a volunteer for the role. PC suggested that with the LEP transition it might be better to discuss this at a later stage.

Declarations of Interest

Board members to advise Sharon of any declarations of interest.

Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 31st October 2023 were correct.

In relation to the comments from Stakeholders LH requested further context on the point ‘Some concern over negativity around the team in the context of capabilities and workload.’

LH advised that regarding the Tour of Britain he has emailed the event organisers and has had a preliminary meeting with Thrive. LH stated that it would be helpful if council colleagues were able to assist to get this to the next steps.

LH confirmed that he has been preparing for the proposed Board workshop. It was agreed that we will turn the Feb Board meeting on the 8th to an afternoon workshop – action SP to liaise with PC on timings and make arrangements.

IB advised that conversations are ongoing with the Local Authorities around budgets.

LEP Transition

PC confirmed that work continues on the LEP transition and at their meeting on 12 December LEP Board members were given a presentation about the process from Sandra Rothwell, one of the consultants working on it.

PC reported that, although in principle what is being proposed is very simple (increasing each LA's share of the LEP from 20% to 33%), the process is much more complicated as it must comply with legislation governing companies wholly owned by local authorities (the Teckal regulations) and includes the formation of a new legal entity (a Joint Shareholder Committee) to control the LEP. A detailed report covering all of this will be submitted for formal approval to all three local authorities for their February Cabinet / full Council meetings. Assuming approval is given, the legal transfer of ownership will take place no later than 31 March.

PC said that the Joint Shareholder Committee will have ultimate responsibility for directing the LEP (which will be known as Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington) and Marketing Cheshire, but the Teckal regulations also require that the LAs establish an officer led client function to provide day to day oversight of ECW's operations. Against this background, the February report to elected members will propose that the board company board of ECW should be responsible only for "hygiene issues" i.e. only those issues required by company law, and that its members should be LA and ECW officers.

PC asked Board members for their views on whether a similar model could be used for MC, transferring the legal elements company governance to a Board of officers whilst retaining the existing MC Board to set the strategic direction for the organisation.

Comments from Board

EU suggested that we would benefit from a Terms of Reference review as it was felt that the MC Board had become more of an advisory board. TB advised of the benefits of the LEP becoming an advisory board as it will allow them to speak as the business voice without any conflicts of interest, stating that this will be a similar position for the MC Board.

EU questioned whether the MC board will continue to look at strategy. PC confirmed that the MC Board will continue to discuss strategy but will not be responsible for legal or day to day financial issues.

DW requested clarity around the status of the people who will sit on the advisory board. PC confirmed that MC board members would no longer be company directors under this new structure. TB advised that the strategy board would still want to set the overall strategic direction for MC's finances, but that the company board would take responsibility for day-to-day management and audit.

CP advised of the need for the MC board to continue to have the power to make strategic business decisions and not to be just an influencing group. PC advised that the local authorities have the final say but the aim would be for the MC board to be involved in decision making.

SCB voiced concerns about the financial difficulties that several LAs are encountering. PC said that it is not possible to provide a guarantee that the local authorities will not encounter financial difficulty, however if it did happen, ECW and MC, as legal entities separate from the LAs, would be insulated from direct consequences, although such problems would inevitably

have an indirect impact through the amount of funding the LAs could provide to MC, for example.

PC also advised that separate to the LEP transfer the Local authorities are looking at a devolution deal with government after the general election. As a first step the LAs are considering establishing a series of portfolios within the Joint Shareholder Committee (JSC) to enable its members to have more detailed oversight of a subset of the committee's responsibilities. If these are established, it is likely that one of them will cover MC.

TB reiterated how important our independent commercial funding will be going forward. The LEP has worked sub regionally and we are one of the last regions in the Northwest without a devolved deal. It is important to keep up our sub regional role such as our work on the Life Sciences, Enterprise Zone, Skills Bootcamp.

PM voiced concerns over the danger of the MC board becoming a talking shop with no real influence and stressed the need for us to retain influence over our budgets and work. PM also requested that the MC Board members have sight of the role description of the new MC board and the opportunity to approve it before it is finalised in March.

JC stated that there is a benefit that comes with being a director of MC and the authority this provides over decision making. JC also voiced concerns over the possible changes in council and personnel at the local authorities. It was stressed that the members of MC do not want to see Marketing Cheshire run by councils therefore members of the board were appointed to undertake this role due to their visitor economy experience and was concerned that being an advisory board takes this away. As a company director we need to ensure that this is the correct way forward before any decisions are made. Assurance that the advisory board will be listened to will need to be written into the agreement.

GD reiterated the commitment from the LAs that MC will be driven by what the board want and stressed that we need to be careful using the language around the LAs running MC. GD also advised that the three local authorities have very good working relationships in place.

TB advised that it is critical that we continue to drive the strategy and it cannot be led by the LAs as they are not the experts in this area it needs to continue to be member led. It is essential that MC continue to lead on this.

EU stated that it is fundamental that we understand the drivers and we need to also consider VisitEngland's perspective on what is required of DMOs. TB suggested that this would be a good discussion to take to the workshop and stressed that we cannot change what the government has decided regarding LEPs.

PC agreed that this will be taken offline, and a discussion will take place with the lawyers to take this forward, we need to understand how much detail is required for the report. PC suggested producing a set of slides to circulate to board members mid-January.

SCB and EU referred to a meeting they have in the MC offices with members of the MC team on the 16th Jan. It was agreed that we would look into the possibility of holding a board catch up session that afternoon to discuss these issues as the February workshop will be too late given the timing of LA approvals – SP to liaise with TB/PC.

**Action
SP/PC**

Visitor Economy Projects

TB introduced Keith Blundell, Oneday who ran through his presentation – attached.

Comments from the board

EU questioned whether the £1 per bed night charge is for Chester and not Cheshire. KB advised that the study is a council wide study for Cheshire West and Chester and is funded

by them. There is a leaning towards a more manageable option which involves just the Chester City Centre hotels, however this has not been agreed. KB emphasised that it is a Destination Chester project.

EU stated that the key question is what the destination is, should it be Chester or if it is supported by MC should it be Cheshire, requesting that there is coherence in the strategy to reflect the rest of Cheshire and Warrington. KB stated that it is important to separate out the strategic direction of the destination, branding and the marketing stating that should it be successful it will provide a sustainable medium term financing approach that will benefit a range of partners including MC. The implication of this project to the rest of Cheshire is being considered.

TB voiced concerns that making this pan Cheshire will cause delays therefore if we localise this to Chester, we can then use this model as the framework to rollout across the sub region.

PC stated that we need to be clear on how this will work. It will be a business improvement district over a geographical area, if the businesses vote in favour, they become the owners of the income and will decide on how this money is spent emphasising that it will not be MC's role to decide on how this money is spent. To date this study has been carried out by Cheshire West, if this is extended to Cheshire East or Warrington then a separate piece of work would need to be undertaken involving the relevant council.

KB advised that a shadow board will be established, this then normally forms the board. In terms of any scalability the legislation does allow for cross boundary so if there was a second process then it could be run in the rest of Cheshire and Warrington simultaneously. The scope is remarkably flexible however there is at statutory process that needs to be followed, this normally takes about a year.

MG advised that CE have no plans at the moment to undertake a TBID as they are currently concentrating on town centre bids which is a 5-year commitment if it is agreed to, this is generally renewed as members see the value to it. CE will watch what happens with the Chester T/ABID and if it is successful, they will be interesting in doing something similar in Cheshire East.

With regard to the VIC review IB confirmed that the LEP are looking at improving the till system at the VIC and will also look to resolve any operational procedures. This may require closing the VIC for a few days for implementation.

Chester Visitor Economy

Colin Potts ran through his presentation (attached).

Comments from Board

It was questioned who is leading on the festival of ideas event in July, CP advised that it is a University of Chester initiated project but will be run in conjunction with partners in the city. A website will go live in January with a call for event ideas.

EU stated that it would be great to see MC support the same activity in the rest of Cheshire. SCB highlighted that there is a remarkable opportunity for the rest of Cheshire as Destination Chester has set down the groundwork for this to be scaled into Destination Cheshire.

Any Other Business

CP referred to the STEAM data and ran through the attached STEAM data slides for 2021-2022 which is due to be published on the LEP site shortly.

Comments from Board

EU stated that the STEAM data figures from 2019 demonstrates the size of the opportunity for 2024/2025 and we need to get everyone aligned against the size of the opportunity. We need to consider how we communicate this opportunity to partners. TB emphasised the need to push how important the visitor economy sector is across the sub region and the need to keep driving the sector forward.

It was questioned whether the use of hybrid meeting facilities had impacted the figures, is there a split between business and leisure visits and is business supressing some of this recovery? CP advised that the business market has recovered more slowly than the leisure market and felt that hybrid working will continue to affect the market.

SCB stated that Cheshire West and Chester figures were substantially higher than Cheshire East and questioned if there is a way to extract the Chester figures for a better comparison. CP advised that Cheshire West have also carried out an urban Chester study so the Chester data can also be isolated.

LH referred to the online packaging study looking at making it easier for consumers to book a complete package to drive overnight stays. LH stated that it would be good to have the Zoo involved in this project and will raise with JC.

LH also advised that the Bid are doing work around invest Chester and we are working on UKREiiF it would be good to be connected on this.

TB thanked the MC team for their work over the past year during this uncertainty. There has been a gap with Joe and Nicola leaving but the team have done a huge amount of work in this time.

Future Board Meetings

- 8th Feb 2024
- 14th March 2024
- 16th May 2024
- 27th June 2024
- 5th September 2024
- 17th October 2024
- 12th December 2024

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

Visitor Economy

1. **Destination Management Plan (DMP):** The draft DMP was issued to the MC Board, Destination Cheshire/Chester members and all remaining Marketing Cheshire members for comment. KB has received 19 responses and is working through the comments to refine the document and create the 'final' version by end of March.
2. **Marketing Cheshire Awards:** The MC team is working flat out to prepare for the event at Chester Cathedral next Thursday, 21 March. A total of 256 tickets have been sold (including sponsors), which is a near 25% increase in sales compared to 2023. We have also secured a headline sponsor, the construction firm McPhillips (thank you Jamie), and one other additional late sponsor. We are investing in improved photography and videography at this year's event to support promotion of the application process for 2025, sell more tickets next year, and also aid our search for sponsorship.
3. **LVEP Partnership:** A Visit England LVEP session took place on 28 March in Birmingham. The key themes were: latest tourism trends and insights; accessible tourism; sustainability; and political engagement – I spoke on a panel around the importance of engaging with local authorities and MPs. Visit Britain provided an update on international marketing plans, including a 'Starring Great Britain' campaign promoting filming locations. An abridged slide deck with headlines and industry data is available.
4. **Data and Insight:** Visit England have this month released new national data on short-let accommodation, providing additional insight on the accommodation picture across the sub-region. I am currently speaking to several commercial organisations and LVEP partners about options to improve our data capture and reporting across Cheshire and Warrington. We have also commissioned a STEAM report for 2023, with a view to having the final report and data significantly earlier than last year.
5. **Destination Chester Spring/Summer Showcase Event:** Held at Chester Racecourse on 12 February to update front of house teams on the array of activity in the city over spring/summer.

Strategic projects

6. **ABID:** Consultation with hoteliers and development of the ABID business plan is underway, including outline proposals for the role of MC in marketing, promotion and product development. Proposed activity, which will be refined and costed in the final business plan focuses on five key areas:
 - Business Conferences and Events
 - Destination Marketing
 - Product Development
 - Consumer and Cultural Events
 - Travel TradeSubject to approval, this will have significant resource requirements, which are being built into the business case and costings.
7. **Online packaging tool:** The feasibility study has now been completed but there are concerns around the cost, capacity and liability of developing a tool in line with the original brief. The MC view is that such a tool is unproven, costly and will have significant ongoing legacy and maintenance costs. We are however, exploring the potential for a Chester/Cheshire visitor pass, having discussed similar products with counterparts in York and Manchester, and will be progressing this opportunity.
8. **Visitor Information Review:** A new EPOS system has now been installed in the VIC to improve stock management and reporting, and new digital screens and a footfall counter will shortly be installed. An

Marketing Cheshire – MD Report – 14 March 2024 – Board Paper 268

action plan is in development in light of the review and will come to the board following discussions with CWaC.

9. **New Visit Website:** An ITT has now been issued to replace the visitcheshire.com website and improve the user experience and our ability to collaborate with partners and members. We are also building a new corporate Marketing Cheshire website as part of the LEP transition (See below), that will support activities including the annual MC Awards.

Marketing Campaigns and content

10. **Transport for Wales and Avanti Meta Campaigns:** Burst one concluded, Burst two continuing with remaining budget until end of the month.

TfW

Total Reach: 1,450,513

Total Impressions: 2,814,560

Total Clicks: 2,159

Cost per click £1.89

Avanti

Total Reach: 1,668,303

Total Impressions: 2,701,330

Total Clicks: 1,494

Cost per click £2.41

11. **Organic social:** working on Easter content, continuing to share linked stories on Instagram (and continuing to see an increase in clicks to the website)
12. **January consumer round up.** Sent 13th Jan to 14,696 contacts: 33% open rate, 2% Click Through Rate. Most clicked link “24 things to do in 2024 blog”. Solus eshot sent for Discovery by Luxmuralis at Chester Cathedral. Sent to 14,644 contacts 32% open rate 2% CTR
13. **Website:** 180,000 visits in the last 60 days with an average dwell time of 1 minute 5 seconds, and average user visiting 3 pages

CWLEP / Enterprise Cheshire + Warrington

14. **LEP > ECW Transition:** Developing comms plan to manage transition through the purdah period, with official launch in June/July following confirmation of new Warrington BC Leader.
15. **UKREiiF:** Following successful sponsor launch event at Knights in Chester in January, work is ongoing on the conference stand build, events and activity programme. We have secured a space at a regional leaders lunch on 21 May, where a select group of LA Leaders and Chief Executives will meet with Government Ministers and representatives.

Partnerships

Income and renewals

16. A new commercial rate card has been produced this year to support renewals and new partnerships
 - **Renewals and income:** Against a target of £72k: £59,707 invoiced, £5,860 unpaid
 - **New partnerships:** Moxy, Chester Fields, Roadchef, Norton Priory and Wychwood Park

Marketing Cheshire – MD Report – 14 March 2024 – Board Paper 268

Partner meetings

- **Destination Chester:** Meeting took place on 7 March and included the first draft of the Chester Tourism Plan. Colin Potts will update the board
- **Events:** Let's Talk Sustainability conference held at Tatton Park in February 2024, over 60 partners in attendance
- **MC Conference:** Annual MC Conference will take place at The Queen at Chester Hotel on Wednesday 3 July. The agenda is in development and welcome the Board's recommendations on content. This year's event will be more interactive with breakout sessions planned.