

**Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Board
Thursday 6th May 2021 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank – Chair (“TB”)
Joe Manning (“JM”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Andy Lyon (“AL”)
Rupert Collis (“RC”)
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
Jamie Christon (“JC”)
Peter Mearns (“PM”)
Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)
Rob McKay (“RM”)

In Attendance: Philip Cox (“PC”) (observer)
Nicola Said (“NS”)
Juliette Littleton (“JL”)

Apologies: Gemma Davies (“GD”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)

1. Opening by the Chairman and Welcome

TB thanked the board for joining the call and welcomed Board members to the meeting.

TB advised that Rupert Collis will be leaving the MC Board following his appointment to the LEP Board. TB thanked Rupert for his service over the past 4 years.

2. Declarations of Interest

TB asked Board members to advise of any declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 11th February 2021 were correct.

With regard to VIC’s best practice, NS advised that MC will be holding a session with CW&C to review the VIC to measure against best practice nationally and internationally.

NS confirmed that consumer research has been shared with partners and the Destination Chester network. NS to share the latest consumer sentiment wave with Board members once it has been when released.

ACTION NS

With regard to Further Education and funding short hospitality courses, PC advised one option could be through the Government Kick start scheme which includes £1500 support for the person on the programme and this could be used for training.

4. Board Matters

Purpose Pyramid

TB referred to the purpose pyramid circulated within the board pack advising that this is the first draft to start discussions.

JM introduced the pyramid advising that the LEP vision and language has been used to create the first draft.

Underneath this we have started to differentiate MC and have set out a range of deliverables with an emphasis on our key role for the visitor economy and broadening our work in the future. The core capabilities are included as leadership, influencing, networking, and engaging with partners, coupled with our in-house skills around brand design, marketing and digital.

Comments from Board

- It was suggested that we should replace 'to lead' with 'to empower'.
- Understand the overarching idea of linking up with the LEP's value but there is a need to be more specific to MC. The top 3 should centre around MC's purpose and vision and then behind that the LEP vision and purpose could be included.
- It was stated that MC alongside the critical role with the visitor economy, has a fundamental role to play in terms of place marketing to assist with encouraging people to relocate and work in the area.
- It was suggested that we should have a temporary short-term purpose for recovery of the visitor and hospitality sector, and then longer-term vision for the place. There is a need for a clear view of our component customers then create a 4-year plan.

It was agreed that TB/JM/NS would review the comments from the board and incorporate into the pyramid with an aim to share with the board before the end of May.

Action
TB/JM/NS

A conversation for the future would be to look at a sustainable inclusive Visitor Economy to take the breadth of the vision to make it real for our destination, stakeholders, and partnership networks.

5. Board Briefing Note / CEO Report

JM referred Board members to the report circulated within the Board pack and highlighted the following key items.

- We have received positive feedback on the initial reopening with a few businesses looking to diversify their offer.
- Cheshire Day in March was hugely positive with a significant number of businesses participating on social media.
- A list of press coverage was included within the paper detailing the local and national coverage we have received.
- We have continued the secondment of MC staff into the Growth Hub with MC employees being upskilled and supplying important business support via the Growth Hub.
- The Chester VIC reopened on the 12th April, footfall has been low, however the team remain engaged in other parts of the MC business.

Comments from Board

- It was advised that the National Trust visitor numbers have been quieter than expected the booking system has not helped as members tend to prefer spontaneous visits, the NT are now starting to allow walk in visits and are looking forward to indoor opening on 17th May, when the houses can reopen. Membership renewal is going well.
- Chester Zoo had positive visitor numbers when the weather was good, members must book online which is not popular with the membership. Will be removing the booking system for members. The Zoo is receiving lots of enquiries for 21st June onwards, there is a general assumption that all restrictions will be lifted. On average receiving 3K visitors a day and school visits are now also taking place.
- There is a need to capture the 'bank holiday every day feeling' throughout the summer, particularly for mid-week.
- Storyhouse are running at 90% ticket sales for the outdoor theatre and have extending outdoor summer season from May – September.
- 21st June will be a real challenge with the expectation that social distancing will end. It was felt that a lot of businesses will keep some of the social distancing in place to reassure visitors and we need to support these businesses.
- It was stated that working with the Growth Hub there is a huge crossover with partnerships, with one of the MC staff members returning to concentrate on Partnership renewals, there have been a few declines which are mainly due to commercial reasons or uncertainty when their sector will reopen.
- It was agreed that we would organise a specific MC induction session and it was suggested that this could be incorporated into one of our MC team meetings on a Wednesday AM.
- NS to circulate the partnership rate card to Rob McKay.

Action
NS/SP

Action NS

6. DMO Review Position Paper

JM introduced the paper which had been included in the board pack advising that the key item is that we have had the deadline for the first round of feedback and evidence gathering and we anticipate it will go quiet now while the responses are reviewed.

With regard to the MC model, we can advise that after speaking to BEIS and DCMS officials regarding the LEP integration we do have a more sustainable business model that alleviates duplication of work.

If DMOs are to be strategic they do need some form of funding otherwise DMOs will be operating year to year looking for other ways of earning income.

Comments from Board members

- It was stated that as well as the DMO review, the potential role between DMOs and LEPs is mentioned in the LEP review.
- It was acknowledged that the transition of MC from a standalone company to merging with the LEP has provided MC with a much better financial position, and a strong platform to continue engaging with our partnership network.
JM stated that network engagement is critical to our future model, in terms of both delivery and intelligence gather.
- It was questioned if there is a need to wait for the outcome of the DMO review to inform our strategy going forward?
JM advised that there is a lot of policy and economic uncertainty this year and suggested we should balance our long-term vision with a one-year delivery plan.

- JM advised that the intention is to issue a local press release regarding the appointment of new board members and in doing this we can start to get these subliminal messages out.

7. Destination Chester and Cheshire

Jamie Christon updated the board on the progress advising that Chester has lots of different organisations trying to do different things with limited success. We have therefore pulled together every group in Chester that plays a part in the VE including the council, MC, LEP, BID etc.

With the emergence of a roadmap out of Covid earlier this year and the funding opportunities, we formed a steering group within the network to put together a bid for funding. It had to be sustainable and with the possibility of being used within other towns in the county.

JM advised that the concerted effort around Chester incorporates the Chester cluster including the Zoo, Cheshire Oaks, National Waterways Museum, etc. This is not being done at the expense of the wider Cheshire area where we do see a number of opportunities, and we intend to develop our Destination Cheshire work with a new Chair.

We are also engaging with Warrington regarding the Welcome back funding.

We also recognise the importance of supporting businesses in the rural area and have set up a rural task group including officer and Councillor representatives for both Cheshire East and Cheshire West.

JM advised that the proposition differs greatly across Cheshire, therefore we are engaging at officer level with the different organisations to ascertain what role MC can undertake.

It was suggested that Destination Cheshire consider a different approach i.e., use the great place to live, work etc as it will be a less targeted approach than in a city, creating a shared view to act as a hub.

The Board thanked Jamie Christon for all the work he has put into Destination Chester.

8. Company Finances

TB introduced DW give an overview of the company finances.

DW gave an overview of the draft year end results for 31st March 2021 stating that MC is set up as a not-for-profit organisation. In past years MC has generating a profit and in doing so has built up reserves which has helped us through the pandemic.

DW advised that Marketing Chester was set up to deal with the Christmas market, due to the cancellation of the Christmas Market in 2020 Marketing Chester does not have sufficient assets to repay Marketing Cheshire. Following discussions with our auditors it was agreed to recommend that a provision is taken on this asset reducing our profits.

The Audit Committee are happy to recommend to the board that the accounts are forwarded to the auditors. The board agreed that we are in a satisfactory position to continue trading.

It was Confirmed that JL/NS are in the process of producing a cash flow that reflects when income comes into the business – to be circulated to the board in the next 2 weeks.

**Action
NS/JL**

The Audit Group continue to update and monitor the cashflow and reserves situation to ensure we do not put ourselves in a position where we do not have adequate reserves required for wind up costs.

PC advised that the LEP and MC use the same auditors therefore the Auditors have requested a set of consolidated accounts. There will still be a set of separate MC accounts.

JM thanked David and Jules for their hard work on the finances.

9. Budget 2021/22

DW advised that the budget for 2021/22 has changed slightly from showing an operating loss to a small operating profit, cashflow has been built around this and sees us remaining in a healthy position, therefore there are no concerns over our ability to trade over the period.

10. Any Other Business.

RC thanked the board members and advised he looks forward to working with the board through his work on the LEP Board, as he is now standing down from the LEP board TB and JM thanked RC for all his hard work to date.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on the Thursday 2nd September 8am 2021 – via Microsoft Teams.

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

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