

**Marketing
Cheshire**

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

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Board Papers

Thursday 3rd April 2025

Agenda
Thursday 3rd April 2025, 10am -12pm

Chester Zoo

Time		Item	Lead	Reference
09:00am	Optional	Tour of new Heart of Africa – please be at the zoo by 9am latest for the tour		
10:00am	1	Welcome and Apologies	TB	
10:05am	2	Declarations of Interest	TB	
10:10am	3	Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 13 th February 2025	TB	
10:20am	4	Board Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chair transition - Devolution Update 	TB / JC PC	
10:40am	5	Visitcheshire.com website demo	Pip Meachin	
11:00am	6	Visitor Economy funding and tourism tax	CM	(Board Paper 284)
11:20am	7	MD Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MC Awards 2026 proposal 	CM / LH	(Board Paper 285)
11.35am	8	Financials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget update position 	CM	
11:50am	9	A.O.B		
12:00pm	10	Meeting Close		

Marketing Cheshire Board Meeting CWTB NO. 5067662

Thursday 13th February 2025
0800-1000**Via Teams**

Present:
CWTB Directors**Attendees**
Trevor Brocklebank – Chair
Philip Cox
Sarah Callander-Beckett
Colin Potts
Mark Goldsmith
Jamie Christon
Steven Broomhead
Peter Mearns**In attendance:**Cristian Marcucci
Liam Hartzenberg
Jean Flaherty, Warrington BC (observer)
Hayley Owen, Cheshire West and Chester Council (observer)
Kathy McArdle, Cheshire West and Chester Council (observer)
Richard Milkins, Cheshire East Council (observer)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)**Apologies:**Debbie Simpson
Eleanor Underhill
Gemma Davies
Carole Hyde, Cheshire East Council (observer)**Opening by the Chair and Welcome**

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting

Declarations of Interest

Board members to advise Sharon of any declarations of interest.

Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting and Matters Arising

It was confirmed that all other actions from the previous meeting have been resolved, and the minutes were agreed to be an accurate representation of the meeting.

Board Matters**Joint Committee update**

PC provided the group with a Joint Committee update advising that Cheshire and Warrington have been put into the government's devolution priority programme. A meeting will take place later today between Leaders and Ministers and formal consultation is expected to start this week, which should conclude at the end of March. The government will then consider the consultation responses, a decision will then be made on whether we proceed to full devolution.

During the period of government consultation, we will be able to promote the benefits of devolution and CM has prepared an information pack including examples of devolution in other areas and identified a number of ambassadors

We are unlikely to have further information around the detail of the devolved powers and finances involved until September / October. When this information is available the three local authorities will need to make a final decision whether to proceed with full devolution.

A lot of work is currently taking place to map out the timetable and consultation plans.

CM is working closely with the local authority comms leads and has created a devolution website with positive media coverage. A public information campaign will be conducted over the next eight weeks to emphasise the benefits of devolution. We will be working with PR agency Social on the local engagement activity which will follow the government consultation.

From MC perspective CM is involved in the culture workstream which encompasses the visitor economy and as part of these discussions will be looking at opportunities for funding for the visitor economy through the combined authority for future years and also looking at the revenue streams for the Film office.

SB referred to the government consultation process, which is very high level, it is key that at a local level it needs to be referred to as engagement and not consultation.

CM advised that in terms of engagement he will collate a Marketing Cheshire response.

TB stated that both the rural and visitor economies feature heavily in our communications as they are an integral part of the engagement.

SB stated that at this stage of the devolution journey we will not see any fiscal responsibilities and questioned where we are on tourism taxes.

CP advised that there is currently no guidance from government that there is any anticipation that the same taxation powers will be given to England that exist in Wales and Scotland. There is a possibility this could become part of a devolution agreement, but government have stated they have no plans to implement at this stage. At the Chester visitor economy roundtable with the Chester North & Neston MP and Visit England it was advised that rather than waiting for any central government or devolution announcements individual areas should continue with their own arrangements should there be appetite for it. We are therefore looking at the possibility of implementing an Accommodation Bid (ABID) for the Chester area and are putting a shadow board in place to work out the detail of the proposal ahead of going to ballot later this year.

CM advised that a similar approach regarding the ABID across the wider geography of Cheshire and Warrington would be challenging, however we continue to liaise with Visit England to understand the government's longer-term plans around tourism taxes.

SB requested that report on the ABID is presented at the next board meeting

SCB advised that the rural strategy group has been revitalised and will meet at the end of the month, and this may be an opportunity to update members on the devolution benefits. TB suggested that SCB invites Steve Purdham to present at the Rural Strategy group meeting.

PC stated that it will be important to use the networks such as the DC groups and the Rural strategy group to communicate the devolution messaging. The BAB will coordinate approaches to the network groups.

TB reiterated the key priorities

- To communicate the benefits of devolution
- To obtain information from the community around what they expect from a mayor

PC stated that government is anxious that we do not ask these questions in the first 8 weeks of the consultation process.

MG advised that feedback from CE residents is that they don't understand what devolution is and there is concern that it is a merging of the councils so there is a need to communicate how devolution benefits the local community by bringing the decision making to the local area. It will be key to communicate that this will include better jobs and better transport.

**Action
CM**

TB reiterated that it is not another layer of government this is moving a layer nearer to where the decisions need to be made, Cheshire people making decisions about Cheshire.

Recruitment of new Chair and Board Members

CM confirmed that we are working with Sherrington and Partners to recruit the roles. The closing date for applications is the 28th February and we have already received strong interest from a variety of sectors for both the chair and member roles. In terms of the timetable Sherrington's will conduct the candidate recommendations after the 28th and interviews for the chair will take place w/c 10th March. The interview panel will consist of representatives from the three local authorities and the new chair will sit on the panel for the member interviews taking place w/c 24th March.

PC confirmed that Cllr Flaherty will chair the interview panel, the recruitment proposals will then go informally to the JC.

Concerns were voiced by Board members around the lack of private sector representation on the interview panel. PC advised that this board is an advisory board to the joint committee therefore the ultimate approval needs to come from the JC. However, the Chair who will be a VE expert will be part of the interview process for the other board appointments. CM and PC to discuss and circulate an update on the process to the MC Board

Following discussions, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to have private sector representation on the interview panel, whether that be an advisor outside Cheshire and Warrington or one of the Chairs of the DC groups. It was also suggested that we should liaise with the BAB to ensure the process is fully inclusive.

**Action
PC/CM**

Managing Director Report

CM ran through the following presentation highlighting the following key items

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGe5DwwdjI/EBcVb08VhwHTUJW3uOEPmQ/view?utm_content=DAGe5DwwdjI&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniqueLinks&utm_id=he9bcf65342

- Christmas has received some very good results from our activity including work with TfW around the unwrap Chester campaign and through our work with influencers
- Lots of positive PR in particular in the rural areas such as Tarporley, features in the Times, Condé Nast Traveller.
- The MC Awards are taking place on the 6th March at the Cathedral we have sold over 200 tickets, however have had challenges with generating sponsorship but continue to explore opportunities.
- Travel trade – commissioned Keith Blundell who has produced a three-year costed action plan which we are considering and looking to establish a travel trade group. The full report will be reported upon at the next board meeting.
- Visitor Pass – the feasibility report was circulated in the board pack. The report concludes that the visitor pass is not viable for C&W, the report has however suggested some other recommendations such as partnering with other areas, such as Liverpool and looking at more localised activity. We are reviewing these recommendations with colleagues at Cheshire West.
- Film office –the feasibility study is underway, and we held a workshop at the end of January with 15 of our partners. VisitBritain have also launched their Starring GB campaign including a film featuring Lyme Park.
- Website – we have a number of webinars in the pipeline with partners and stakeholders prior to launching the site in March and are currently refreshing the identity based on received feedback. Currently rewriting much of the site to align brand and tone of voice to ensure we have the best inspirational content for visitors. Aiming to launch the website w/c 24th March.

- Cheshire Day is on the 30th March, the day commemorates when King Edward granted Cheshire its charter of liberties. This year we are calling the campaign a bounty for the county to celebrate the food and drink producers in the county. Toolkits have been sent out to all businesses this week and the public have been asked to save the date. Plans are in place for a press trip and influencer activity with a walking food tour. CM is in discussions with VisitEngland to see if we can do a social media takeover of their channels on Cheshire day.
- Media Getaway – The event was due to go to Bradford this year however due to issues with venues the organisers have decided to hold the event in Chester. The event will bring 100 travel journalists from around the world to Chester. It will be a 3-day programme from the 7th to 9th July and there will be an opportunity to do a number of FAM trips to showcase the destination.
- Chester has been named by Booking.com as the most welcoming city in Britain and one of the ten most welcoming in the world. Booking.com are keen to host a celebration event in the city to include invites to visitor economy and civic leaders along with MPs and the tourism minister.
- Hotel occupancy has been challenging seeing a mixed picture, higher end hotels are performing well, and budget hotels are seeing some real challenges. Airbnb data shows a 40% increase in availability, we will review the impact this is having on hotel occupancy when we receive the data from VisitEngland.
- We have a range of new offers for our partners and have repurposed our partnerships packages renaming levels to, inclusive, signature and Artisan packages. We are working closer with the BIDs and town councils.
- The work on Devolution will take a lot of CMs time therefore CM is liaising with Philip regarding securing assistance from Keith Blundell on some of our key activity.
- English Tourism week is taking place 14-23rd March and the theme is around how the visitor economy and tourism supports growth.
- Lapland UK has received planning permission for 10 years at Capesthorpe Hall and tickets will go on sale in March. It will bring an economic benefit to the area of around £25Million a year and 1200 seasonal jobs. A large proportion of visitors will travel some distance to attend so we will be working with local accommodation and F&B businesses on how they can benefit from this. We will also do some itinerary building to encourage longer stays in the area.

Comments from Board

KM referred to the visitor pass and asked if we have an understanding of why York is so successful. CM advised that it is attributed to the fact that they have a condensed number of attractions within the city and therefore a number of attractions can be visited in one day.

CP referred to the visitor pass report which he found disappointing, however does not disagree with the outcome but felt there was a gap in the report that has resulted in questions around how conclusions were drawn.

CP referred to the Media Getaway visit stating that it is great to see the partnership approach across the city with regard to funding. Booking.com should also be worked into the Media Getaway opportunity.

CP referred to the Gladiators of Britain exhibition taking place at the Grosvenor Museum and around Chester and Cheshire September – January. It is a touring British Museum exhibition, and it would be good to get activity across the county.

SB stated that MC is a place-based marketing organisation, and we need to understand how we put more balance into our work. CM advised that it is a resource and priority issue at the moment with work around UKREiF and devolution. CM stressed that we continue to work with our towns via town councils and Bids to promote the wider Cheshire area.

TB advised that a lot of his time as Chair has been focussed on place marketing which is something for consideration when recruiting the new Chair as their skillset will be visitor economy based.

CP highlighted the issue around the balance between visitor economy and place marketing development and the fact that MC does not have the resources to deliver both comprehensively. This was apparent

even before LVEP status increased the range of visitor economy work expectations and is a fundamental issue to our work planning as we go forward with devolution adding another expectation.

PC advised that we would pick this up in the work we are doing on forming the Combined Authority models.

Financials

TB confirmed that the board will not be making long term financial decisions going forward as we move to become an advisory board. PC stressed that the board still have financial responsibility for the next few weeks until plans to move to an advisory board are finalised.

CM ran through the circulated financial report advising that there has been a small increase in the projected deficit partly attributed to a reduction in sales at the VIC. We continue to keep watch on our expenditure and are looking at increasing profit margins and sales in the VIC.

Work is taking place on next year's budget

Comments from Board

CP voiced concern around the VIC's performance and the impact it has on the overall finances of MC and suggested that the board should have more of a say in what happens at the VIC to ensure informed decisions are made. TB suggested this should be something that the new Chair reviews.

TB questioned what do we stop doing, where do we get the best ROI for Cheshire and Warrington.

PC stated that it will be for the mayor and the combined authority to decide what budgets they want to set but the intention is not to refer to the new Marketing Cheshire Board as an advisory board and that the company board will be referred to as the CWTB board. The reason for this is that the board will consist of experts who can advise the JC.

TB advised that there needs to be a broader conversation on our strategy across Cheshire and Warrington as we need a unified approach.

CM referred to ROI and felt that the Travel Trade strategy will bring will it a lot of reward.

The board confirmed that they are content with the MC finances

AOB

TB thanked the board and the MC team for their input and continued hard work

Future Board Meetings

1000 -1200 Thursday 3rd April – Chester Zoo

0800-1000 Thursday 5th June – online

1000 -1200 Thursday 4th September – in person

0800-1000 Thursday 27th November – online

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

Date

Marketing Cheshire Board

Report 284

Visitor Economy Funding and Tourist Taxes

Introduction

Public sector finances nationally and locally are under significant pressure. Apart from significant bounce-back grants post covid, public funding for tourism and the visitor economy has reduced significantly over the last decade. Across the UK, a growing number of destinations and devolved areas are turning to tourist taxes to address that shortfall and find the resources to invest in tourism.

Marketing Cheshire is currently working with partners in Chester on a business case for an Accommodation Business Improvement District (ABID) to generate additional funds to invest in tourism in the city.

Meanwhile, through the VisitEngland LVEP programme, two pilot Destination Development Partnership (DDPs) have been created in the North East and West Midlands, clusters of LVEPs that receive central government funding to grow their visitor economies. The long-term ambition is for DDPs to be formed across the country, but we await the outcome of the pilots before any further decisions on next steps and long-term funding.

Following discussion at the February Board Meeting, the following paper provides a snapshot of the current approach to tourist taxes in the UK and across Europe.

UK Tourist Taxes

Scotland

- The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in May 2023, giving local councils the power to introduce a visitor levy. Councils must consult with local communities, businesses, and tourist organizations before introducing a levy.
- Edinburgh's city council has approved the first visitor levy in Scotland. It will be applied to bookings made on or after October 1, 2025, for stays on or after July 24, 2026. The levy will be 5% of the cost of the accommodation, with a cap of five consecutive nights, and funds raised will be reinvested locally on facilities and services used by visitors. Glasgow is considering implementing a similar levy.

Wales

- The Welsh government is proposing a visitor levy, or tourism tax, to be charged on overnight stays in visitor accommodation at the following rates:
 - Most accommodations: £1.25 per person per night.
 - Hostels and campsites: £0.75 per person per night.
- Local authorities will decide whether to introduce the levy in their areas and must consult with communities first. The earliest possible introduction for a visitor levy would be in 2027.

- The money raised from the levy is intended to fund services in popular tourist areas and promote the Welsh language. Although some critics say the tax may deter tourists and harm Welsh tourism.
- A bill has been introduced to the Senedd and will be scrutinized, with a decision on whether it will become law expected in 2025. A statutory registration scheme for all accommodation providers is expected to start operating in 2026 to support the collection and administration of a visitor levy.

England

- At present, neither central government nor local councils have the power to levy a tourist tax and primary legislation would be required to do this. Despite speculation and warnings from various industry groups, there are no indications that government is considering an English tourist tax.

Tourist Taxes in Europe

- Approximately 150 European destinations charge a tourist tax, which usually consist of a fee that applies per person per night. The tourist tax is payable locally, and usually at check out from your accommodation. The snapshot of current taxes includes:
 - Amsterdam – 12.5%, or €21.80 on an average room rate of €175.
 - Paris – there's a tourist tax, plus a regional tax, dependent on type of accommodation; eg five-star hotel is €11.38 per person per night, while four-star is €8.45 pppn.
 - Venice - introduced a daily €5 tourist charge in 2024. This doubles to €10 for those who visit last-minute, booking less than four days ahead.
 - Barcelona – visitors pay a regional tax and a city tax of €4 pppn for up to seven nights.
 - Greece - between November and February, you will be pay a daily tax of €2. Visiting in high season the fee rises to €8 daily between April and October, an extra €56 per person for a week.
 - Portugal – at least 26 municipalities charge a tax to visit, between €1-€2 pppn.

Taxes on accommodation through Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

- In the absence of powers to levy a tourist tax in England, both Manchester and Liverpool have introduced a tourism-based BID, as a form of tourist tax.
- **Manchester** introduced an 'accommodation BID' in April 2023, following a ballot of hotels. The BID levy is payable by hotels and serviced apartments with a rateable value of £75,000 or more, in an area within Manchester city centre and a small adjoining part of Salford.
- Like a typical tourist tax, the BID levy amount for individual properties is based on the occupancy of the accommodation. It is known as the "City Visitor Charge" and participating businesses are encouraged to itemise it on guests' bills. The charge is £1 per room, per night.

- The Manchester ABID business plan expects the levy to raise £3.5m to £3.8m per year between 2023 and 2028. A BBC report in April 2024 stated that the levy had raised £2.8 million in the first year.
- The ABID in **Liverpool** was also established in April 2023, with the levy payable by accommodation properties with a rateable value of £45,000 or more, capped at £50,000 per property. The BID covers the whole of the city of Liverpool. The levy is 1.6% of a property's rateable value, rising to 4.5% in 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- Accommodation providers are set to hold a new ballot to change move to the Manchester ABID model, and charge £2 per room per night, to raise additional income and switch the burden of payment from the business to the visitor.
- We are aware that a number of other areas are considering or developing proposals for an ABID, including Newcastle, Nottingham, Norwich
- An ABID in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole was narrowly approved by hoteliers in 2024 but rejected on appeal by the Deputy Prime Minister, due to an administrative error in the ballor process. An ABID proposal in Cambridge was rejected by hoteliers in a May 2024 ballot.
- A number of other destinations including Blackpool and Great Yarmouth have introduced Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDs). All businesses within a defined area and above a set rateable value pay a levy.
- In **Blackpool** the levy is 1% for those with a rateable value over £10,000 in an area around the Promenade and its leisure hinterland. It generates c. £300,000 per annum to spend on business support, marketing and promotion and destination development.

Chester Accommodation Business Improvement District (ABID)

- Since 2023, Marketing Cheshire has been working with Destination Chester, Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Chester Hospitality Association on a Chester ABID. The proposal is to levy a £2 per room per night charge on around 30 hotels in and around the city centre.
- The business plan aims to arrest the steady decline in Chester hotel occupancy and reductions in funding for tourism in the city, exacerbated by the pandemic. The charge would raise over £1m per annum to fund new events and festivals, a conference bureau, improved visitor services, and destination marketing.
- A ballot of hoteliers was due to take place in July 2024 but was postponed due to the pandemic. We have now formed a shadow Chester ABID board with hoteliers and are working on a more detailed business plan with a view to going out to ballot in 2025.

April 2025

MD Report

3rd April 2025

Period February - March

Paper 285

Visitor Economy

Marketing Campaigns and Content

Cheshire Day, 30 March – a bounty for a county

- Featured in ITV Granada News, evening of Saturday 29 March, featuring Colin Potts and traders from Chester Market (audience of 900k)
- Feature in the [Sunday Telegraph travel section](#) on 30th March
- Collaboration with businesses across the county and notable Chester brands – we provided a toolkit for businesses, with information on the day and how to get involved
- Collaboration with WLGT to create content with local Chester businesses such as Krum Gelato, Pars Kahve and Chester Fields, in addition to our own outreach with Chester Market, Spookton Brewery and the Chester Grosvenor.
- Numerous businesses developed Cheshire Day specials, from unique menus to limited edition beers, to give residents and visitors a good excuse to sample what Cheshire has to offer, eg the Pheasant Inn, Tattenhall, Three Wrens Gin, Forest Gin and Providence Gin.
- Our Cheshire Day competition secured more than 1,000 entries, encouraging residents to enter and share their best place for food and drink in Cheshire.
- Secured press trips with the Times and Telegraph with the support of Combermere Abbey. Both writers experienced a weekend in the south of Cheshire visiting Nantwich, Beeston, Peckforton, Tarporley and Malpas - Cheshire's foodie triangle - discovering local produce and the people behind them, alongside notable attractions and sights.
- Issued 98 pieces of content across MC social channels, with an organic reach of 130,000
- Full impact report to follow.

Find your Chester:

- National Chester-focused campaign run in partnership and funded by major attractions and transport providers. Negotiations are ongoing to finalise budgets and contributors.
- Find your Chester will showcase the city's best experiences, working with content creators on a narrative of personal discovery. From finding your thrill at the racecourse, to your style at Cheshire Oaks or your wild side at the zoo.

Public Relations: significant regional coverage across the period, and ongoing national activity.

Highlights included:

MD Report

- Marketing Cheshire Award [Winners](#)
- English Tourism [Week](#)
- [Appointment](#) of new MC Board Chair
- Spring statement reaction on Global Radio – interview with MD
- Cheshire Day – feature on ITV News Granda; interview on BBC Radio Merseyside

We also supported Visit Britain's GREAT campaign through Manchester's gateway fund for the US market, hosting a high-profile influencer couple in Chester, with support from partners. Influencers @glamdapper are aligned our target market and provide an excellent opportunity for us to attract a new US audience alongside our neighbouring cities.

Marketing Cheshire Tourism Awards, Chester Cathedral, Thursday 6th March 2025

- We were delighted to welcome over 260 guests to the Marketing Cheshire Tourism Awards at Chester Cathedral on Thursday 6 March, hosted by Hollyoaks actor Ashley Taylor Dawson.
- The event was a celebration of the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy with near universal feedback – except for the temperature in the cathedral. The press release including full list of winners and highly commended from the evening can be seen [here](#).
- Further details and proposals for the 2026 awards are an appendix to this report.

English Tourism Week 2025

- Annual VisitEngland campaign to promote the importance and value of tourism and the visitor economy. This year's theme was how tourism supports people and places to drive growth. Key activity:
- Wrote to all C&W MPs to explain the size and impact of the region's visitor economy
- Attended VisitEngland Parliamentary Reception in February and met several MPs and staffers
- Arranged three MP visits: Sam Dixon to the Chester VIC, Sarah Hall to Walton Hall and Gardens; Aphra Brandreth to Cholmondeley Estate.
- Delivered a two-week burst of social media content and media releases, securing regional coverage, including an MD interview on BBC Radio Merseyside (Monday 17th March).
- Lapland UK webinar saw more than 50 businesses sign up to hear about the opportunity to them with more than 170,000 guests coming to the region in November and December.

Strategic Projects

Film Office

- Feasibility study completed and presented back to the council visitor economy leads on 28th March. The full report is included in the papers.
- The report recommends the establishment of a Cheshire Film Office at a cost of c. £110k per annum, offset by significant income generation.
- An established film office could unlock £3m - £5m in economy impact across the region per annum through increased TV and film production. In addition, locations across the county could benefit through the growth in screen tourism

- Next steps: to discuss the findings with councils and partners on funding to establish a Film Office in 2025/26, while seeking long-term funding through the new Combined Authority and Growth Plan.

Travel Trade

- Media Getaway will be the first scheduled FAM trip as part of our travel trade activity to raise awareness of the region in this sector. More on this later.
- As part of the new website development, the Travel Trade section will form phase two, with new content and itineraries to be added as a resource to help the sector promote the destination to potential visitors.

What's On – April to June: The latest edition introduces new advertisers: Festival of Ideas, Delamere Forest Live, Chester Racecourse, The Danny, Royal Cheshire Show and Cheshire Concerts, plus food-themed editorial aligned with our focus on restaurants, and an updated cover design to improve visibility when displayed in situ. View the latest version [here](#).

Visitor Pass: Acting on the results of the feasibility study, we are working on alternative options. Following a positive conversation with Marketing Manchester about including more Chester businesses on the Manchester Pass (which already includes Chester Zoo), we are exploring the potential for a 'Chester Day' element to the pass.

There would be no financial risk to joining the Manchester pass. However, there would be costs involved for updating our website and for promotional activity if it goes ahead. We have secured a further £10k of UKSPF from CWAC for this activity.

Visit Cheshire Website

- Launched on 27 March, pre-Cheshire Day. Demo by Pip Meachin in the Board meeting.
- We held two successful webinars in February and March with Destination Core, key stakeholders and some of our signature partners, to demonstrate the new functionality and layout. Feedback was excellent.
- A big thank you to Pip who has led the project, with support from the team. While the site will continue to undergo improvements and iterations, we have an excellent product to work with and showcase the region.
- Due to the web launch, we are not providing web stats for this meeting but will update at our June meeting.

Outreach and Events

Media Gateway – 7-9 July 2025

- Chester confirmed as host city for [Media Getaway](#). The event unites travel media from across the UK & Ireland, with PR representatives of travel brands from all over the world.
- This event act as a showcase for Chester's attractions and hotels and we are arranging fam trips for journalists and travel writers with numerous partners.

MD Report

Event schedule:

Monday 7 July

- Fam trips (pm)
- Welcome reception and drinks at Chester Town Hall
- Informal Dinner at Rooftop Social, Chester

Tuesday 8 July

- Connection Zone, Chester racecourse
- Dinner – Chester Zoo

Wednesday 9 July

- Fam visits to Chester and Cheshire attractions

Destination Chester Showcase, 10th March, Storyhouse

- 5th annual Spring/Summer Showcase providing an invaluable opportunity for front-of-house staff in Chester to gain insights into upcoming events for the season. With over 60 attendees, the event was buzzing with energy and networking.
- The event featured a welcome address from Storyhouse, followed by updates on; Chester Zoo's Heart of Africa & New Lodges; Chester Racecourse schedule; Food Tours; new restaurant Salthouse Tapas; and a Marketing Cheshire Update
- Additionally, attendees had the chance to share details about their own upcoming events, creating a platform for collaboration and new partnerships.

Booking.com

- Celebration event on Chester being named among top ten most welcoming destinations worldwide, will be held on Wednesday 4th June at Chester Zoo.
- Around 100 guests including MPs, Lord Mayor and senior figures from the Chester and Cheshire visitor economy will be invited.
- MC providing support on invite list, event schedule, PR opportunities and goodie bags – all costs funded by Booking.com.

North Cheshire Chamber Business Club Lunch, Bollington, 19 March: I gave a presentation to around 60 business representatives on the work of Marketing Cheshire and the opportunities of devolution. As a result, I have a meeting scheduled with a hotel in Buxton to explore MC membership.

Data and Insight

Q4 data and insight report to be shared with the board towards end of April.

Social Media

- We are now just a few dozen short of 50k followers across our Meta accounts (Facebook and Instagram). In addition to ongoing growth, we are seeing very high engagement rates with

our content: 7% on Facebook and 9% on Instagram in March, boosted by Cheshire Day content including food bloggers.

- 51k organic Facebook reach on a Chester image-based post and 42k organic Facebook reach on the Cheshire Day competition post.
- In addition, we have 53k followers on X with a 7% engagement rate.

Commercial

- A new Pitch deck and rate card are underpinning partnership renewal activity. We have also introduced Stripe to allow faster payments, reduce invoicing and admin, combat late payments, and sync payment information with our CRM.
- Increased focus this year on eateries and bars to provide a complete offering to visitors. The new Artisan package is tailored for these businesses.
- New partners over the period include Blue Planet Aquarium, Hover Force, Gauntlet Prey and Ring O'Bells in Christleton.
- Commercial revenue for 2024-25 is £175,848 (Target £170,280).

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington / Place Marketing

Devolution Communications & Engagement

- Ongoing support to the Communications Group, including web updates, stakeholder engagement and advice.
- Local engagement to be delivered in May/June with the support of Social PR.

UKREiif - Tuesday 20 – Thursday 22 May 2025

- The MC team is coordinating the C&W stand and presence at the UK's biggest property and regeneration event.
- Speaking slots secured for several Cheshire and Warrington contacts on topics including net zero, new homes, cleaning the waterways, and transport.
- Warrington Borough Council and Peel are co-sponsoring a drinks reception to launch the new town centre development and Cheshire East are sponsoring a private one-hour roundtable session on the future and vision for Crewe, which will include guests from central government.

Cheshire and Warrington Place Brand

- Developing a new place brand for the region is a priority in the MC Business Plan. Following discussions with Growth Directors, this work is on hold until after the 2026 mayoral election, to enable the new mayor to play a key role in its development.

Partner Meetings

Destination Chester, University of Chester, 20 March

- Including a look at current tourism performance, the One City Plan, intelligence, an MC update featuring a demo of our new website, and the forthcoming Gladiator exhibition at Grosvenor Museum.

Destination Cheshire

- Following agreement of a new Terms of Reference and priority list for the group, the new steering group met on 24 March, ahead of the next full meeting on Tuesday 29 April at the Park Royal Hotel.
- The three key areas of focus in 2025 will be the development and promotion of Cheshire Day; championing the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy; and Christmas in Cheshire and Warrington.
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Look ahead – April - June 2025 priorities

- Appointment of new MC board members
- Partnership renewals
- Heart of Africa opening at Chester Zoo
- Promotion of Cheshire and Warrington accommodation and attractions to Lapland UK visitors – tickets on sale on 31 March.
- Easter promotion
- MD and Ashley meeting with Liverpool John Lennon Airport
- 20-22 May – UKREiiF
- 4 June Booking.com celebration event

I will also be meeting with MDs of the northwest LVEPs on 22 April in Windermere to discuss collaboration and the future of the Destination Development Partnership (DPP) programme. During English Tourism Week, DCMS announced £1.35 million for the North East and the West Midlands Destination Development Partnerships (DDP) to help the regions attract even more tourists and investment to the UK. The pilot DDP schemes can operate for another year before assessing whether to roll the scheme out more widely. [LINK](#)

Appendix 1: Marketing Cheshire Tourism Awards 2026 - proposals

April 2025

Introduction

After another successful Marketing Cheshire Tourism Awards at Chester Cathedral on 6th March, we are now planning the 2026 Awards and proposing several changes to continue improving the event and better align the awards with business priorities.

We have received near unanimous feedback on the 2025 Awards, from the venue to the food, the host, and the organisation of the event itself. The only significant feedback – including from board members – was how cold the venue was, particularly later in the evening.

The event was delivered at a cost of just over £5,000 to Marketing Cheshire, in large part due to lower than anticipated sponsorship income. While there is an argument that this cost is justified given the importance of the event to the region, we will aim to at least break even in 2026.

Winners from most of the MC Awards categories are automatically entered into the national VisitEngland Awards, which take place in Brighton on 4th June. We are awaiting publication of the shortlisted businesses.

Marketing Cheshire Awards – objectives

- To celebrate the best of the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy
- To help raise standards across the region's visitor economy businesses
- For Cheshire and Warrington businesses to receive national profile by being shortlisted in the VisitEngland Awards

In addition, for 2026, we will aim for a year-on-year increase in:

- The number of award entries, and number of businesses entering
- Increased sponsorship income
- Increased ticket sales

Proposed changes for 2026

1. **A name change:** We are proposing to change the name of the awards to the Visit Cheshire Tourism Awards 2026, to better align with our consumer-facing Visit Cheshire brand. This will allow for greater promotion across our new website and associated channels – with the awards themselves acting as a driver to the [visitcheshire.com](https://www.visitcheshire.com) website and social media accounts.
2. **Date:** To align with the VisitEngland Award process, holding the awards in March means that the deadline for entries is end of August. This means that we are asking many attractions and venues to submit entries during the summer, their busiest season. We are therefore proposing to hold the 2026 awards at the end of January to a) bring the entry deadline forward to end June, and b) offer hospitality venues the opportunity for a post-Christmas

MD Report

celebration with their staff. We are currently considering either Thursday 22nd or Thursday 29th January for next year's event, subject to the availability of the venue. This will require an awards launch in April and a revised timetable as follows:

Key Dates 2025/26	
28 April 2025	Nominations live
May 2025	Sponsor packages launched
30 June 2025	Nominations Deadline
w/c 7 July 2025	1st round Judging / Remote Judging (2 weeks)
w/c 21 July 2025	Final push for sponsors prior to ticket launch
w/c 28 July 2025	Finalists announced and ticket sales launched
1 September - 30 October 2025	2nd Round judging / Mystery Shopping
22 or 29 January 2026	Awards Night 2026

3. **Venue:** After two successful years at Chester Cathedral, the time is right to move the event outside of the city. The main challenge is the lack of suitable venues across Cheshire and Warrington, capable of catering to c. 300 guest. However, we are currently in negotiations with Walton Hall and Gardens to hold the event in the [Old Riding School](#) – a great space. We have also been assured that the venue will be well heated...
4. **Sponsorship:** income of £6k for 2025 fell short of target, although a number of contra deals on sponsorship did reduce operating costs. Following a review, we feel this is due to setting category sponsorship levels too high. We are therefore reducing the cost of award category sponsorship to £500 for 2026 (17 categories, so income potential of £8,500) while also seeking a headline sponsor, a welcome drinks sponsor and other opportunities, with the aim to generate £10k in 2026 with a stretch target of £12k.
5. **Ticket prices:** We are very conscious of the rising costs that our partners and businesses are contending with in 2025. We will therefore be freezing ticket prices for 2026, underpinned by increased sponsorship income and seeking further reductions in operating costs.

Early bird	Post early bird	Early Bird - table	Post early Bird - table
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Partner	Non Partner	Partner	Non Partner	Partner	Partner	Non Partner	Non Partner	Partner	Non Partner
£90	£100	£120	£130	£850 x 10	£1045 x 12	£950 x 10	£1165 x 12	£950	£1,050

6. **Increasing entries:** The MC awards have historically received a far higher number of entries from Cheshire West and Chester, than Warrington and Cheshire East. We will be engaging with BIDs, Town Councils, and groups including the chambers to encourage a far greater number of entries from across the region.

Award categories 2026

All category winners are automatically entered to the National VisitEngland Awards except for those marked (MC).

- Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award
- Best Tourism Marketing Project of the Year (MC)
- Business Events Venue of the Year
- Camping, Glamping and Holiday Park of the Year
- Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Award
- Event and Festival Award (MC)
- Experience of the Year
- Large Hotel of the Year
- New Tourism Business of the Year
- Pub of the Year
- Self Catering Accommodation of the Year
- Small Serviced Accommodation Provider of the Year
- Taste of Cheshire Award
- Team of the Year (MC)
- Unsung Hero Award
- Visitor Attraction of the Year
- Wedding Venue of the Year (MC)