

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams  
On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 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”)  
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)  
Cristian Marcucci (“CM”)

**In Attendance:** Liam Hartzenberg (“LH”)  
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

**Apologies:**  
None

**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**

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 were correct.

It was confirmed that the actions from the previous meeting have been dealt with.

**LEP Transition**

PC confirmed that the transfer of the LEP, and therefore by extension Marketing Cheshire over to local authority ownership has been approved. The first meeting of the local authority joint committee will take place on the 8<sup>th</sup> April. It will be a procedural meeting which will approve the change of name and ownership of the LEP and formally establish the joint committee and give authorisation for the creation of the Business Advisory Board.

The first meeting of the joint committee is likely to take place in June after the local elections.

There will be consequential changes to the MC board including moving the formal legal responsibilities across to the board of officers. The officers board (subject to final approval) will include Gemma Davies for CW&C, Charles Jarvis for Cheshire East, Eleanor Blackburn for Warrington and PC will be the ECW representative. All operational decisions will be overseen by the Local Authorities, Business Advisory Board and Marketing Cheshire.

The process of recruiting for the Business Advisory Board will take place after the Leaders and Chief Executives meeting on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

### **Comments from Board**

SCB raised concerns over the speed of decision making under the new structure and PC confirmed that ECW will have the delegated authority to made decisions within certain terms and conditions.

Both MG and GD assured board members that the local authorities already have Companies that work in this way and decisions are not held up by elected members and advised that the growth directors' group will support the new committee.

TB and PM thanked Philip and the team, including the Growth Directors for all the work on achieving the LEP Transition. It was emphasised that we are stronger all working together in a single structure.

IB advised that there will be some continuity with the MC board as PC and GD will remain, however resignation letters will need to be issued to the other MC Directors at some point in the future.

**Action  
IB**

### **Board Terms of Reference**

CM referred to the circulated Terms of Reference and advised that these are a first draft built on the workshop discussions and look at how we will operate under the new structure. These Terms are aligned to the Business Advisory Board Terms of Reference and the intention is once the MC Board agree to these, they are taken to the joint committee meeting for approval on the 8<sup>th</sup> April.

CM highlighted the key points as follows:

- Legal and financial responsibility is removed to give more time to concentrate on the Visitor Economy role.
- The role will be to represent the voice of the Visitor Economy through the Business Advisory Board
- It is proposed that there will be 12 members with the chair holding the non-voting role on the Business Advisory Board. There will be 5 reserved places, one each for a representative of each of the three Local Authorities and a place each for the Chair of Destination Chester and Destination Cheshire. PC and CM will attend the board but not as official board members.
- The aim is to ensure we have greater visitor economy representation on the board and ensure we have a balance around gender and geography expertise.
- Board members will be required to take a more strategic role in the development of new policies and projects.

### **Comments from the board**

EU requested for the role of the Vice Chair to be defined for example would the Vice Chair be able to cover for the Chair on the Business Advisory Board. With regard to the Board's role to monitor performance EU questioned whether this should be expanded to include performance against the business plan and KPIs and suggested that it should be the Chair's role to review the performance of Board members.

JC referred to the statement in the ToR stating that 'the membership will be representative of the visitor economy business community' and advised this does not correlate to the existing board membership and questioned whether we should take the opportunity now to address this.

SB stated that with regard to accountability the board should have at least two 6-month performance reports which should be presented to ECW. We should also have an annual report to be used by stakeholders to showcase our achievements.

PM emphasised that while the visitor economy is one of our key priorities we do have other functions around marketing Cheshire and Warrington for investment and business and marketing and comms for the new ECW structure. It is therefore important that when looking at the board membership we need review the skills and experience we currently have on the board and the gaps we need to fill. PM also stated that equality, diversity, and inclusion needs to be considered.

GD requested for an organogram to be included within the Terms of Reference.

JC stated that clarity is needed on the 3-year term for board membership.

SCB stated that it is important to look at the topographical structure in relation to board membership.

PC stated that going forward it will be important to have representation from the 3 local authorities on the board for decision making.

CP stated that currently MC is a membership organisation therefore the way in which commercial members views are transmitted into the board needs to be clarified. EU agreed and questioned how the voice of members is heard and stressed the need for this to be more visible.

The board members thanked CM for his work on the Terms of Reference and it was agreed that CM would incorporate the comments from today and circulate a revised ToR.

**Action  
CM**

### **Managing Director Report**

CM updated board on the MC report advising of the following key items:

- CM thanked the board for sending in their comments on the Destination Management plan and advised that we are now working towards a final version of document for publication early next month.
- MC Awards - 280 attendees booked and thanks to Jamie for putting us in touch with our headline sponsor.
- We have invested in better photography and videography to provide us with stronger content to use throughout the year and better promote next year's event.
- The Online packaging feasibility study is now complete, the proposal was to build a bespoke online booking system however this has created concerns and the recommendation from the study suggest that it would be more feasible to create a visitor pass.
- We have had strong performances from our campaigns with our transport partners, which has resulted in additional funding.
- The new 'visit' website invitation to tender is now live. It is important that we review dwell time going forward and this info will feed into our KPIs next year.
- Our annual conference will take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July at the Queen Hotel.

### **Comments from Board**

JC suggested that CM should have a discussion with Sam Dixon around the work we are undertaking with Avanti.

**Action  
CM**

JC also advised that the Zoo are working on a dual language campaign in Welsh and are also extending their market target area to Birmingham and requested that MC liaise with the Zoo's marketing team on this.

**Action  
LH**

### **Delivery Plan 2024/2025**

CM updated board members on the 2024/2025 delivery plan and ran through the attached presentation.

### **Comments from Board**

EU questioned how we will deliver this work and whether it will be prioritised against the business plan. EU also asked if we will be looking at duality in having separate plans for Chester and Cheshire.

PM stated making sure the Cheshire Brand and getting it properly defined is fundamental and with regard to the development of a film office suggested having a conversation with the Liverpool Film office.

SCB raised concern over the absence of the inclusion of the wider but smaller membership in the focus statements. SCB also referred to the trend for wellness and green spaces but there appeared to be a focus on the towns and asked for the balance of this to be reviewed.

LH emphasised that the towns provide a base for visitors to explore the rural areas and stressed that we are not excluding the rural areas we are complimenting these areas through the towns.

CM confirmed that the updated delivery plan will include a clearer timeline and proposed additional staffing resource. It will also include duality and the wellness offer will feed into our campaigns.

TB stressed that commercial sponsorship and ensuring our income streams allow us to deliver what we want to do it very important, and the positioning of the Cheshire brand is crucial. It will be important to identify the initial things we can do that will really make a difference.

CM advised that he will be producing an updated delivery plan to circulate ahead of the next meeting.

**Action  
CM**

### **Company Finances**

#### **Preliminary Budget 2024/2025**

IB updated Board members on the budget paper advising that this was presented to the recent Audit meeting.

The budget was prepared before CMs appointment and was produced as part of the LEP transition process which was presented to the LAs as a high-level indicative plan.

The budget will be revisited in July and the aim is to have the budget at a breakeven level.

There will be opportunities within the LEP for MC via PR and place marketing activity.

The new website would be treated as capital investment spread over the period in which it has value.

IB /CM will update the budget over the coming weeks to incorporate CMs business plans.

**Action  
IB/CM**

### **Comments from Board**

EU suggested that it would be helpful to have comparisons in the budget to previous years and voiced concern that we are being over optimistic with the increase in partnership income.

DW advised that this was discussed at the audit meeting and will be quite challenging. DW referred to the reserve levels and suggested that this is something that board members should keep under review going forward.

TB reiterated that the board will not be micromanaging debts but will be ensuring plans are sustainable going forward.

CP advised that when we look at what we are spending income on, the majority would be concentrating on marketing, PR and research as these are areas with direct outputs against commercial income and suggested this raises questions that need to be considered in forward planning.

IB advised that we could look at the presentation side of the teams that spend time on marketing activity to show as marketing spend. The inclusion of the VIC was also questioned; however, it was advised that some of the strategic funding for the VIC comes from the LEP.

TB advised that once the transition is complete, we will look to align the economies of scale with the 3 local authorities to work more efficiently with the funds available.

#### **Overview of the company finances.**

IB referred Board members to the current YTD report included within the board pack and updated on the financials within the paper. IB emphasised that the operating reserves remain above the minimum required level and there are no issues with solvency.

IB advised that the employment terms of conditions within the LEP and MC have been aligned and will be effective from April 2024.

#### **Comments from Board**

EU suggested that there should be a comparison against last year and voiced concerns around the reducing reserves level and questioned how we will address this going forward.

TB advised that the finances have been well managed internally however it is not good to see a below budget performance and felt that the cause of this is the lack of a leadership MD role over the past 12 months. There is a need to perform commercially going forward.

PC advised that it is Ian's final meeting before leaving his role on the 30<sup>th</sup> April and thanked Ian for all of his hard work over the years. An interim will be recruited for a one-year period while long term requirements are assessed.

TB also advised that David Walker will be resigning from the board and thanked David for all of his hard work over the years especially in chairing the Audit Committee. It was confirmed that David will resign after the Audit meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> March.

#### **Any Other Business**

GD advised that CW&C won an award yesterday evening with regard to their work in Northwich this includes a £15k prize fund to spend on a community led project.

SCB referred to the Chancellor's budget and the decision around furnished holiday lets advising that there are a number of petitions being circulated to request the chancellor reconsiders his decision. SCB requested that MC communicate reassurance to our members that we are working with them on this - SCB/CM to discuss.

CP referred to the work undertaken by MC under CMs leadership and stated that it is connecting into the work in Chester regarding the One City Plan and development of a Tourism Plan.

**Action  
CM/SCB**

**Future Board Meetings**

16<sup>th</sup> May 2024

27<sup>th</sup> June 2024

5<sup>th</sup> September 2024

17<sup>th</sup> October 2024

12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date