

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams
On Tuesday 31st October 2023 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank – (“TB”) - Chair
Philip Cox (“PC”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)
Jamie Christon (“JC”)
Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
Peter Mearns (“PM”)
Ian Brooks (“IB”)

In Attendance: Diane Cunningham (“DC”)
Keith Blundell (“KB”)
Cristian Marcucci (“CM”)
Colin Potts (“CP”)
Roz Munslow (“RM”)
Liam Hartzenberg (“LH”)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies: Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Gemma Davies (“GD”)

Opening by the Chair and Welcome

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting. It was confirmed that apologies had been received from Eleanor Underhill and Gemma Davies. TB also welcomed the newly appointed Marketing Cheshire MD, Cristian Marcucci, Colin Potts, Chair, Destination Chester, and Roz Munslow, representing Gemma Davies to the meeting. This was followed by round table introductions.

The Board unanimously agreed to the appointment of Colin Potts to the Marketing Cheshire Board.

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 7th September 2023 were correct with one adjustment to change the Chair to Peter Mearns and confirmed that all actions had been addressed.

SB referred Board members to the comment on Page 4 of the minutes regarding hosting a stage of the tour of Britain. It was agreed that this would be reviewed further.

**Action
LH**

TO referred to discussions at the last meeting regarding holding a Board workshop tied in with the budget cycle. LH confirmed that background work has taken place to start to pull plans together for the workshop. LH to agree progress and date of workshop.

**Action
LH**

It was also suggested that we should hold a couple of small Christmas get togethers for Board Members to meet with Cristian.

LEP Transition

PC confirmed that work continues on the LEP transition, the Local Authority Leaders met at the end of September and agreed that the LEP will be transferred into their ownership as a company. A clear governance structure will need to be implemented to replace the existing LEP Board with a joint shareholder committee of the three local authorities. This is all subject to cabinet approval by Warrington and Cheshire West and Chester Council and full council approval by Cheshire East Council.

With regard to timelines, full approval will be sought in February however there may be delays in implementation due to Warrington's pre-election phase.

Marketing Cheshire will remain part of the LEP in this process, for the time being as a separate company. There will be an opportunity to review this at a later stage.

It was stated that Marketing Cheshire's identity is much clearer than the LEP's and therefore we can continue to drive forward with our strategy.

Recruitment update

PC confirmed the appointment of Cristian Marcucci as MD for Marketing Cheshire and thanked members of the Board for giving up their time to attend the recruitment panel. PC confirmed that it was unanimously agreed that Cristian was the right candidate for the role and paperwork is being processed to officially appoint Cristian.

IB advised that Interviews took place last week for a Digital Content Lead, LH confirmed that we have appointed Jon Robinson who will start work with MC in two weeks' time. This appointment will allow LH to refocus his attention to his marketing role.

CEO Report

DC referred Board members to the CEO report circulated within the Board pack and referred Board to the attachment detailing the timing of meetings for next year which also ties into the stakeholder feedback that will be covered later in the meeting. The intention is to discuss the Board's role in these projects at the December Board meeting.

DC also referred to the MC funding and spend allocation document circulated with the Board paper, stating that the purpose of this paper is to clarify to the Board where the funding is coming from and how much is already ringfenced for specific work. The funding therefore does not leave a lot of room for creative plans as there are a range of agreements linked to the funding.

Comments from Board

Concerns were voiced that the funding appears to be Chester focussed and it was questioned how we will be supporting the wider county initiatives. DC advised that conversations are taking place around this.

TO stated that it would be beneficial to discuss these issues at the board workshop and questioned in terms of governance are all the relationships contractually with MC. IB confirmed that the relationships are with MC.

PC reiterated that table identifies where the income comes from not how we spend it and advised that within the Local Authority grant there is funding from Cheshire East and Warrington to be used for marketing in the wider Cheshire area and some core funding from Cheshire West is used to market Cheshire West, outside of Chester.

TB stated that this reinforces the work Joe Manning started on commercial income and that it is critical that we have income that we have control of strategically. We also need to investigate if we can work closer with Mark and his team around visitor information centres in Cheshire East. Relying on Local Authority funding is not realistic in the current environment, and we need to be more creative with our thinking around funding streams.

IB advised that there is a challenge around the budgets for next year and requested that if Local Authority representatives could provide any insight of the funding MC will receive that it would be really helpful with future planning. IB to consult with the Local Authorities.

**Action
IB**

SB stated that each of the Local Authorities will have budget constraints particularly around social care. RM advised that CW&C are putting markers down within the internal processes to see if there is SPF funding available. In wider budget setting the SLA with CW&C details the funding for MC in year 3.

DC referred to the SLA meetings that took place with the Local Authorities this month and advised that funding allocations were discussed and will be included in the write-up of the stakeholder work.

Stakeholder Engagement

DC referred to the stakeholder list of 25 contacts and advised that the Oneday Team have been contacting the Stakeholders with assistance from Liam and Philip. An email letter, from Trevor, has also gone out to additional stakeholders offering a meeting with the team.

Oneday have had 18 responses, 1 decline and 7 no responses, the no responses have had 3 opportunities to meet. 10 meetings have taken place with 7 further meetings booked in the next couple of weeks, once these meetings have taken place a report will be provided to the Board with recommendations.

Comments from Stakeholders include the following.

- Concerns over weak brand.
- Confusion around what the offer is in Chester.
- Lack of brand and lack of identity.
- Some concern over negativity around the team in the context of capabilities and workload.
- Key gap is in availability of data.
- The governance around the group structures is not clear therefore work needs to take place to make this clearer including how they engage with visitors and the Board. (Some of the VIC work will pick this up)
- Marketing Cheshire should be the facilitator for activity and not expected to deliver everything.
- There is a need for more strategic projects and messaging.

Comments from the Board

SCB commented that this reinforces the incredibly important job that Cristian needs to undertake on his arrival.

SB stated that one of the things we should be doing is capturing the wide range of events and activities that are taking place in Cheshire which are not necessarily associated with the three councils. DC agreed that it is stronger for the place as a whole if you profile everything that is happening in the area and not just what partners are paying for.

TO stated that we need to have an ongoing communication channel with stakeholders/partners.

LH stated that the biggest problem from an internal perspective has been resources, but we are looking at KPIs dashboards. Conversations are taking place with Destination Chester regarding this work which will set the template for what we do across Cheshire. We are also doing work on a members insight report to highlight the benefit of the PR work we do. A new PR agency, Julia Spence, has been appointed (<https://juliaspencepr.com/>). We will be looking at providing monthly bulletins to partners and a website specifically for MC to reference projects on which we are working.

TO stated that this illustrates the issues around resourcing and the importance of the strategic choices we make to look at a resourcing structure to support it otherwise we could find ourselves pulled around by the funding streams and the requirements of the different groups, rather than being in control of it.

TB reiterated that the team are working very hard and there are a lot of quick wins we can work on in the new year.

DC stated that a piece of work needs to take place to ensure the right people in the organisations are receiving the MC communications.

**Action
Ashley
Shacklady**

DC reiterated that today's feedback is a small snapshot and the full feedback will highlight that we have a small team and a small budget, and the team are working incredibly hard.

Strategic Project updates

Keith Blundell ran through his presentation (attached) updating the board on the following projects.

- Growth Action Plan
- Destination Management Plan including survey results.
- Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)
- Visitor Information Review

Comments from Board

JC stated that the number of responses to the survey is disappointing and questioned if there is a way to obtain more feedback. It was felt that there is nothing inspiring with the responses we still have not found the unique Cheshire brand, this needs more work and is very underwhelming. There were concerns that we have not got the right answers from the right people.

KB advised that there are two particularly strong products that make Cheshire different, family market and luxury market. KB reiterated that this is the start of the process that will be refined following next week's workshop we can then consider wider consultation. KB to double check the responses from Board members.

**Acton
KB**

LH advised that we will be appointing an agency to work with on the narrative and proposition for the region in tandem with the work Keith is undertaking and we will be looking at a wider stakeholder group to get views and feedback on what the proposition should be to build on the Cheshire story. Concerns that our website infrastructure is outdated were voiced.

CM stated that it is fundamental that we get the story for Cheshire absolutely right and the process we follow to engage with our stakeholders. Need to think bigger on how we engage with people, and it was felt that a survey is not the right way. Need a rethink on how we go about creating this brand and use this to set what MC is about.

TO stated that once we have done the consultation the information should be databased and evidenced and then taken forward, we need to have more confidence and reiterated the importance of communication.

KB stressed that this is the beginning of the process to obtain views and works in tandem with the piece of work Liam is undertaking. It will be fundamental to get buy in at various stages throughout the process.

Company Finances

TB introduced IB to give an overview of the company finances.

IB referred Board members to the current YTD report included within the board pack advising that the forecast for the half year is for a small deficit, mainly attributed to reduced funding and timings. The Company solvency position is not an issue, it will however be important to review income streams for next year to achieve a balanced budget as it is not a sustainable position going forward. The operating reserves remain above the minimum required level and IB noted that the Audit Committee are comfortable with the cash position and use of reserves.

The review of the VIC will bring forward recommendations that we will need to consider, such as replacing outdated IT systems and we may need to look at a solution to making these investments.

Comments from Board

SB questioned if there is any risk involved with the treasury function for the Historic Cities. IB advised that we have invoiced £15k. However, in terms of governance IB would like to see more structure around who authorises spend etc. LH is discussing this with the HC partnership.

Risk Register

IB referred to the report within the pack and advised that there have been two main conversations, one being around the LEP transition and how MC fits into this. There are three key areas including staff terms and conditions and identifying comparability between Local Authority terms and conditions with LEP and MC Terms and conditions. It is not clear if fair pay comparisons can be done between different companies so legal advice is being sought around this.

With regard to Teckal exemption IB advised that we are in a position whereby MC and the LEP can be seen as a group therefore we are within the Teckal limits regarding commercial activity.

Funding arrangements for next year, there will be a need to scale our resources and activity in line with funding.

Any Other Business

KB confirmed that we have appointed Ekosgen as the TBID consultants, (Ekosgen is owned by the Manchester Growth Company) Keith is meeting with Ekosgen and the TBID steering group on Thursday to progress work.

Future Board Meetings

14th December 2023

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