

**Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Board
Thursday 2nd September 2021 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank – Chair (“TB”)
Joe Manning (“JM”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Andy Lyon (“AL”)
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
Jamie Christon (“JC”)
Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)
Rob McKay (“RM”)
Gemma Davies (“GD”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)

In Attendance: Nicola Said (“NS”)
Ian Brooks (“IB”)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies: Peter Mearns (“PM”)
Philip Cox (“PC”) (observer)

- **Opening by the Chairman and Welcome**

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

TB stressed the importance of holding an ‘in person’ board meeting at a future date. It was agreed to aim to do this either at the December meeting or in the new year, depending on the Board’s preference.

**Action SP to
poll Board
members**

- **Declarations of Interest**

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

- **Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting**

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 6th May 2021 were correct.

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

- **Board Matters**

Purpose Pyramid

JM referred to the purpose pyramid circulated within the board pack and advised that a session had taken place with the MC team members to review the pyramid.

Following feedback from board members it was agreed that we will include outcomes and visitor experience in addition to financials within the pyramid. The pyramid is a work in progress, and we should amend and refresh the pyramid as we move forward. The pyramid will be discussed in more detail at the ‘in person’ board meeting.

JM confirmed that the team will start to use the top line of the pyramid to ensure consistent messaging.

- **Discussion around support to businesses over Autumn / Winter**

JM asked Board members for an update on business performance

EU advised that the National Trust is very encouraged by visitor numbers particularly over the bank holiday, not quite at the levels of several years ago.

SCB advised that Combermere holiday lets and B&B offer is incredibly busy, weddings are also performing well. The intention is to start work on promotion of breaks again mid-September to promote forward bookings.

JC advised that the Zoo has had a very good summer, with August receiving a record number of visitors, 14-15k visitors every day. Spend has also been very good. Pandemic has caused issues with staffing so have had to over recruit to compensate for this. Forward bookings are also looking good with lantern tickets 70% sold. Visitor 80% staycation 20% members.

Hotel Occupancy for June /July is back at 2019 levels with the average cost per night increasing. Forward bookings are slower to recover. Mid-week stays remain a challenge. Occupancy is a lot higher than in Manchester and Liverpool and on par with other historic cities.

We are now working on promoting forward Autumn and Winter bookings and we have lots of programmes in place to increase interest over the Autumn / Winter period.

JC advised that the Destination Chester programme is also supporting forward bookings using the ARG grant which is moving ahead in terms of planning with a programme manager and PR team. Programme has been scheduled through the Autumn /Winter and into next year, putting additional spend into the city to aid recovery.

- **Reappointment of Directors**

TB advised that David Walker and Eleanor Underhill have completed a 3-year term and proposed that they are reappointed for a further 3 years. The MC Board members unanimously recommended the reappointments to the LEP board. This will be tabled for discussion at the LEP board on the 15th September.

- **Board Briefing Note / CEO Report**

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

- Tour of Britain is taking place in Cheshire on the 9th September starting at Alderley Park and finishing in Warrington. The team have been working on the promotion of this event. We will also use this event to promote cycling, active travel, and enjoying the great outdoors throughout the autumn.
- We have received Good PR coverage, including Chester Staycation Award and the Telegraph feature. PR pack to be circulated to the board.
- EU has kindly agreed to Chair the Destination Cheshire Group and we are holding a workshop on the 20th of September to look at how we position the wider Cheshire offer including looking at sustainability and the family friendly offer.
- MC Awards will be launched next week, this will be tied into the national awards and will include a few new awards linking to the pandemic.

**Action
NS/SP**

- VIC have received increasingly positive footfall numbers, last week had their best day since 2019 in terms of footfall and takings. Lots of positive feedback on the parklets and the outdoor theatre.
- We have 97 Partnerships signed up including a few new partners.
- Christmas Market – In addition to the original budget we will be purchasing a number of new chalets to replace damaged chalets. We will then conduct a full review looking at options that will allow us to recoup the outlay of the chalets this year and assess potential commercial agreements for the future. We will also look at opportunities to hold Christmas markets in other towns to encourage visitor numbers.
- Operationally the market this year will be delivered by an external company.
- NS confirmed that she is working with travel operators including Avanti to minimise travel disruption into the city and looking at ways to keep visitors informed.
- TB and JM had a very positive visit to Macclesfield and were encouraged by the level of enthusiasm by partners. We are using our channels to promote Macclesfield.
- With regard to Government policy, we have not received feedback yet on the Destination Management Organisation review.

Comments from Board

It was stated that Macclesfield have a good town centre recovery plan and similar schemes are being rolled out to other towns in the East. Crewe has received £25M funding to be used over the next 3 years.

There is a huge opportunity to share best practice across Cheshire and get everyone to work together in the individual towns and it was suggested that Destination Cheshire could look at this as part of their programme to create a towns strategy.

It was suggested that once developed the towns strategy could be presented to the Rural Business Forum.

Tour of Britain was highlighted as a real opportunity to promote Cheshire and launch other activities to help with the recovery. Warrington will conduct an evaluation report after the event.

Cultural events such as Creamfields are very significant to Cheshire and there is a need to be clearer on our support of these events. Also, the 'Making tracks' exhibition at the Cathedral was a great success, bringing in 45k visitors. Pete Waterman is looking to run the event again next year, and we should support this.

The appointment of Social as the PR company was referred to. JM advised that Social replace a temporary agent for the LEP and will work with Marketing Cheshire to build PR expertise within the team. We will continue working with specialist PR agents such as Traveltrappers. It was confirmed that recruiting an external agent is more affordable than recruiting a dedicated employee for this role.

JM advised that we are not looking to grow the organisation with regards to staffing at this time, we may wish to bring in specialist skills for the short term or look to return employees seconded to the Growth Hub.

- **Draft Destination Management Plan**

JM introduced the paper which had been included in the board pack advising that the historically the plan is produced on an annual basis, however due to the pandemic a plan was not developed last year. We have worked with the 3 local authorities to produce the plan and feedback from our partner networks has been included.

NS reiterated that the plan is a destination management plan for the whole destination that connects into the LEP, Government and local recovery plans.

NS ran through 10 priorities which will be refreshed and built upon over time.

Following the feedback from Board members the following was agreed

- The importance of supporting recruitment across all sectors and the big employer branding and sector branding challenge, due to the career change paths of employees due to Covid was recognised
- It was agreed that a clear prioritised action plan should be developed with KPIs
- NS agreed to present the plan to the Covid Recovery Group, SB to agree with Group Cheshire East Chair.

**Action
SB/NS**

The board agreed to support the plan and its publication on the website and to conduct further discussions with partners.

- **Company Finances**

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

IB referred Board members to the July YTD report included within the board pack advising that the operating result is ahead of budget and ran through the key elements of the report noting that the Audit Committee are comfortable with the cash position, level of debtors and reserves position.

IB advised that going forward the intention is to be more strategic with the financial reporting, focussing on the material issues.

IB referred to the proposed grant agreement with CW&C for the delivery of the DC project and sought agreement from the Board to enter into this agreement with CW&C, noting the possible risks. IB advised that he is comfortable with the cash flow analysis and associated risks.

NS stated that the funding is via ERDF and has been fully supported by CW&C to ensure guidance is followed.

TO questioned how MC / LEP currently manage risks. TB advised that he is in discussions with IB regarding managing risk registers as part of the LEP governance.

NS to share the original application and focus of activity in relation to the grant and programme of activity - action NS

Action NS

The board confirmed their approval to enter into the grant funding agreement.

Approval of the 2020/2021 Statutory Accounts

DW updated Board members on the CWTB's financial position at the year end and advised that the Statutory accounts have been approved by the Audit Committee and moved for the Board to approve and sign the accounts.

The report highlighted one issue regarding expense approvals – IB will be putting in measures to deal with this issue.

Action IB

The Board Members present approved the Management letter, the Audit Representation letter and the Audited accounts for 2020/21 for CWTB.

The Chair advised that he is happy to sign the accounts which will be filed at Companies House. IB to liaise with Murray Smith to arrange.

Action IB

- **Any Other Business.**

None

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on the Thursday 4th November 2021 – 8am via Microsoft Teams.

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date