

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams  
On Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023 – 8am**

**Present:** Trevor Brocklebank – Chair (“TB”)

Joe Manning (“JM”)

**Marketing Cheshire  
Directors**

Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)

Andy Lyon (“AL”)

Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)

Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)

Rob Charnley (“RC”)

Steven Broomhead (“SB”)

Jamie Christon (“JC”)

David Walker (“DW”)

Peter Mearns (“PM”)

Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)

Philip Cox (“PC”)

**In Attendance:** Ian Brooks (“IB”)

Nicola Said (“NS”)

Sharon Pond (minute taker)

**Apologies:** Rob McKay (“RM”)

- **Opening by the Chairman and Welcome**

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting. It was confirmed that apologies had been received from RM.

- **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 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 were correct.

NS advised that she had attended a meeting with the other Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) regional leads for Visit England and part of the discussions that took place were around how to improve data and intelligence and it was agreed that this will be picked up as part of the LVEP rollout over the next few years.

- **Recruitment update**

PC updated Board members on the recruitment progress for JM and NC roles advising that we will be creating a Managing Director role for MC which will encompass parts of Joe and Nicola’s roles.

Recruitment consultants, Odgers, have been appointed to recruit for the role, the advert will be circulated to Board shortly.

We will be going out to market for an interim MD in the next couple of days and this position will be filled prior to NS leaving MC. Discussions are taking place on the best way forward with the recruitment for the Head of Marketing.

**Action  
PC/IB**

### **Comments from Board**

Concerns over commercial income were voiced at a recent audit meeting and it was questioned whether we are looking for a Managing Director with commercial experience and operational expertise. PC advised that the aim is to recruit an individual that has experience across the whole spectrum and emphasised the importance of partnership engagement, delivery, and relationship building skills. It was agreed that the person will also need to have the ability to manage diversified income streams from public and private sources.

It was confirmed that JM leaves the business on the 7<sup>th</sup> Feb and NS leaves 9<sup>th</sup> March.

SCB stressed that the visitor economy collaboration and networking with MC is essential as our partners act as our PR agents for Cheshire therefore it is very important that they are not forgotten in the process. This includes the strength of both Destination Chester and Destination Cheshire.

With EU retiring assurance was sought on the future of the Destination Cheshire Group. NS advised that we will aim to arrange an additional meeting of the group at the end of February and confirmed that Destination Cheshire activities are written into the job role for the interim MD. It was emphasised how valuable the networks are and we will look to recruit a new chair from the existing Destination Group.

JC advised that he will remain as chair of Destination Chester until after the elections in May. We discussed opportunities for finding someone to chair Destination Chester in the future.

- **Board thank you**

TB thanked Eleanor Underhill for her 5 years' service on the board and Andy Lyon for his 6 years' service. Eleanor and Andy then gave their observations on their time served on the board.

- **CEO Report**

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

- There is still a mixed picture within the Visitor Economy which remains a challenging environment. Footfall numbers are holding up well, the big challenge will be getting through the next quarter due to the difficulty of the operating environment with cost-of-living crisis, increasing energy costs, etc.
- The Christmas Market has had very positive reviews and high footfall. A testament to Nicola and the Team on how well the shift to a commission model has worked.
- Over recent months we have received very positive PR activity and we are starting to see real diversity in the coverage we are receiving. In particular the Time Out top 15 destinations coverage across the wider Cheshire area providing the Destination Cheshire network with validation of the work they are undertaking as individual organisations. Also, the responsible business PR around accessibility in Chester and Warrington was positive.
- Plans are developing for Cheshire Day and we will update the board further on this when plans are finalised.
- We are also planning for International women's day and the VIC are doing a fantastic piece of work on researching the leading women in Chester through the ages.

**Action  
NS/SP**

- **Draft Delivery plan**

JM ran through the delivery plan advising that the plan is a work in progress and the reason for bringing to the board meeting today is to provide further reassurance to the recruitment discussions. We have been working with our operational contacts in the Local Authorities and our partnership networks have been doing work on producing the plan to ensure the new MD will inherit a really strong delivery plan.

Before this comes to the Board for sign off, there is a need to ensure that the plan is fully integrated into the wider LEP's delivery plan and a workshop is taking place with the full LEP and MC teams to work together on the plan in the week commencing 6<sup>th</sup> February.

#### **Comments from Board**

- It was questioned whether commercial drivers are included within the plan. JM advised that commercial income is embedded into the partnerships and policy elements of the plan as well as draft KPIs. Commercial revenue for the Visitor Information Centre is also included. Line items such as the Tourism Business Improvement District could be a way to create significant income if this is something that we pursue. The Cheshire Science Corridor could also be a way to diversify by looking at sponsorship opportunities in the future. NS advised that the commercial income is included in the individual objectives for several of the MC team members and that she will be meeting individually with the team members to discuss this.
- Establishing MC as an LVEP will also contribute to MC's commercial activity.
- With regard to International Women's Day, it was questioned whether it would be possible to include Cheshire and specifically the Science corridor element. It was advised that we are looking at how we reposition the Science Corridor as a place to live, work and invest, concentrating on the innovative work people in the area are undertaking. We are aiming to hold a symposium event mid-June at Chester Zoo. IB advised that the LEP has invested into 2 Life Sciences funds and there may be examples where we can tie the investee companies into the International Women's Day campaign. It is about shifting the science corridor from land and property to be about the individuals in this industry. This does also link into the Visitor Economy with the Zoo and Jodrell Bank.

- **Visit Britain Priorities and DMO review.**

NS updated Board members highlighting the following key items: -

- Patricia Yates, CEO Visit Britain visited Cheshire on the 18<sup>th</sup> January. The visit included a tour of the Zoo, tour of Jodrell Bank and a roundtable with partners. We were very grateful to all our partners for helping to show the best of the county. Patricia also met the Chair of the Hospitality Association and the GM of the Chester Grosvenor as part of the visit. Patricia advised that the VE goal is to be more outward facing and we are one of the first places that Patricia has visited. At the roundtable Patricia updated on VE's priorities such as driving international visitors back to the UK and the importance of data and intelligence, getting more real time analysis. Another priority was, improving the structural England landscape for tourism policy, and implementation of the Government recommendations of the DMO review.
- We have submitted our Expression of Interest to become a LVEP and have been green lighted to take our application forward.

- VE are developing a new training platform for staff which will be accessible to the MC team members.

- **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 operating result is better than budgeted returning a small deficit and that operating reserves remain above the minimum required level. IB ran through the key elements of the report noting that the Audit Committee are comfortable with the cash position and use of reserves.

- **Approach to budgeting 2023/2024**

IB referred Board members to the report circulated within the Board pack and highlighted the following key items: -

- The purpose of the paper is to provide a working plan and reassurance to the board. Operational integration between the two organisations is part of the ongoing agenda and that financial integration with the LEP will continue into 2023/2024.
- It is proposed that the MD role will be on the LEP payroll and billed to MC as a management cost.
- We will target a balanced budget and maintain a level of reserves within the legal entity to allow focus on the strategic position of MC.
- The Local Authorities have emphasised the importance of MC and are supportive of further investment into MC from Enterprise Zone receipts, as well as renewal of their separate Service Level Agreements for grant funding.
- Discussions have taken place around other income sources, but these have not been budgeted as it was felt that this is something that we should be working towards in the future which means we have provided a balanced budget without these additional income sources.

### **Comments from Board**

- The formal governance of the structure was questioned and it was advised that when MC merged with the LEP there was a clear sense from BEIS that funds should not be spent on tourism. Now it is clear that place and visitor marketing are both very important to support the economy as a whole. It was confirmed that MC will retain its separate legal status from the LEP.
- Half of MC's expenditure is staff related and it was stated that we need to be seen to be an excellent employer and it is important that we develop and reward staff to ensure staff retention, for example through L&D activity.
- A discussion took place at the audit meeting around the risk register and it was agreed that we should increase the risk level around staffing with JM and NS leaving the business

- **Any Other Business**

JC advised that the Government have issued their environmental improvement plan 2023 which could have a positive impact for MC. JC to send the plan to SP to share with the Board.

**Action  
JC/SP**

EU asked who will be managing the MC Awards with NS leaving. NS advised that Fiona Bebbington, Head of Corporate Events, is managing the awards and we have sold approx. 90 tickets so far, but we do tend to get a lot of people buying tickets later on in

the process. MC Board members will be invited to attend the awards ceremony and meet our wider partner networks.

**Action SP**

Both JM and NS thanked the Board and staff for their support over the years and emphasised that MC is a fantastic organisation. NS will circulate details of her leaving party on the 8<sup>th</sup> March to the Board.

TB thanked JM and NS for all their hard work and dedication to the company and to Cheshire and Warrington over the years.

**Future Board Meetings**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023

Thursday 14 December 2023

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date