

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams  
On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – 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”)

**In Attendance:** Keith Blundell (“KB”)  
Cristian Marcucci (“CM”)  
Liam Hartzenberg (“LH”)  
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

**Apologies:** Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)  
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)  
Diane Cunningham (“DC”)

**Opening by the Chair and Welcome**

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting.

TB advised Board members that Tracey O’Keefe has made the decision to step down from the Board. TB thanked Tracey in her absence for the support and commitment she has given both the Board and Audit Committee.

TB also advised that Peter Mearns has agreed to become Vice Chair of the Marketing Cheshire Board.

DW stated that with Tracey leaving it creates a vacancy on the Audit committee and requested a volunteer for the role. PC suggested that with the LEP transition it might be better to discuss this at a later stage.

**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 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 were correct.

In relation to the comments from Stakeholders LH requested further context on the point ‘Some concern over negativity around the team in the context of capabilities and workload.’

LH advised that regarding the Tour of Britain he has emailed the event organisers and has had a preliminary meeting with Thrive. LH stated that it would be helpful if council colleagues were able to assist to get this to the next steps.

LH confirmed that he has been preparing for the proposed Board workshop. It was agreed that we will turn the Feb Board meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> to an afternoon workshop – action SP to liaise with PC on timings and make arrangements.

IB advised that conversations are ongoing with the Local Authorities around budgets.

### **LEP Transition**

PC confirmed that work continues on the LEP transition and at their meeting on 12 December LEP Board members were given a presentation about the process from Sandra Rothwell, one of the consultants working on it.

PC reported that, although in principle what is being proposed is very simple (increasing each LA's share of the LEP from 20% to 33%), the process is much more complicated as it must comply with legislation governing companies wholly owned by local authorities (the Teckal regulations) and includes the formation of a new legal entity (a Joint Shareholder Committee) to control the LEP. A detailed report covering all of this will be submitted for formal approval to all three local authorities for their February Cabinet / full Council meetings. Assuming approval is given, the legal transfer of ownership will take place no later than 31 March.

PC said that the Joint Shareholder Committee will have ultimate responsibility for directing the LEP (which will be known as Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington) and Marketing Cheshire, but the Teckal regulations also require that the LAs establish an officer led client function to provide day to day oversight of ECW's operations. Against this background, the February report to elected members will propose that the board company board of ECW should be responsible only for "hygiene issues" i.e. only those issues required by company law, and that its members should be LA and ECW officers.

PC asked Board members for their views on whether a similar model could be used for MC, transferring the legal elements company governance to a Board of officers whilst retaining the existing MC Board to set the strategic direction for the organisation.

### **Comments from Board**

EU suggested that we would benefit from a Terms of Reference review as it was felt that the MC Board had become more of an advisory board. TB advised of the benefits of the LEP becoming an advisory board as it will allow them to speak as the business voice without any conflicts of interest, stating that this will be a similar position for the MC Board.

EU questioned whether the MC board will continue to look at strategy. PC confirmed that the MC Board will continue to discuss strategy but will not be responsible for legal or day to day financial issues.

DW requested clarity around the status of the people who will sit on the advisory board. PC confirmed that MC board members would no longer be company directors under this new structure. TB advised that the strategy board would still want to set the overall strategic direction for MC's finances, but that the company board would take responsibility for day-to-day management and audit.

CP advised of the need for the MC board to continue to have the power to make strategic business decisions and not to be just an influencing group. PC advised that the local authorities have the final say but the aim would be for the MC board to be involved in decision making.

SCB voiced concerns about the financial difficulties that several LAs are encountering. PC said that it is not possible to provide a guarantee that the local authorities will not encounter financial difficulty, however if it did happen, ECW and MC, as legal entities separate from the LAs, would be insulated from direct consequences, although such problems would inevitably

have an indirect impact through the amount of funding the LAs could provide to MC, for example.

PC also advised that separate to the LEP transfer the Local authorities are looking at a devolution deal with government after the general election. As a first step the LAs are considering establishing a series of portfolios within the Joint Shareholder Committee (JSC) to enable its members to have more detailed oversight of a subset of the committee's responsibilities. If these are established, it is likely that one of them will cover MC.

TB reiterated how important our independent commercial funding will be going forward. The LEP has worked sub regionally and we are one of the last regions in the Northwest without a devolved deal. It is important to keep up our sub regional role such as our work on the Life Sciences, Enterprise Zone, Skills Bootcamp.

PM voiced concerns over the danger of the MC board becoming a talking shop with no real influence and stressed the need for us to retain influence over our budgets and work. PM also requested that the MC Board members have sight of the role description of the new MC board and the opportunity to approve it before it is finalised in March.

JC stated that there is a benefit that comes with being a director of MC and the authority this provides over decision making. JC also voiced concerns over the possible changes in council and personnel at the local authorities. It was stressed that the members of MC do not want to see Marketing Cheshire run by councils therefore members of the board were appointed to undertake this role due to their visitor economy experience and was concerned that being an advisory board takes this away. As a company director we need to ensure that this is the correct way forward before any decisions are made. Assurance that the advisory board will be listened to will need to be written into the agreement.

GD reiterated the commitment from the LAs that MC will be driven by what the board want and stressed that we need to be careful using the language around the LAs running MC. GD also advised that the three local authorities have very good working relationships in place.

TB advised that it is critical that we continue to drive the strategy and it cannot be led by the LAs as they are not the experts in this area it needs to continue to be member led. It is essential that MC continue to lead on this.

EU stated that it is fundamental that we understand the drivers and we need to also consider VisitEngland's perspective on what is required of DMOs. TB suggested that this would be a good discussion to take to the workshop and stressed that we cannot change what the government has decided regarding LEPs.

PC agreed that this will be taken offline, and a discussion will take place with the lawyers to take this forward, we need to understand how much detail is required for the report. PC suggested producing a set of slides to circulate to board members mid-January.

SCB and EU referred to a meeting they have in the MC offices with members of the MC team on the 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. It was agreed that we would look into the possibility of holding a board catch up session that afternoon to discuss these issues as the February workshop will be too late given the timing of LA approvals – SP to liaise with TB/PC.

**Action  
SP/PC**

### **Visitor Economy Projects**

TB introduced Keith Blundell, Oneday who ran through his presentation – attached.

### **Comments from the board**

EU questioned whether the £1 per bed night charge is for Chester and not Cheshire. KB advised that the study is a council wide study for Cheshire West and Chester and is funded

by them. There is a leaning towards a more manageable option which involves just the Chester City Centre hotels, however this has not been agreed. KB emphasised that it is a Destination Chester project.

EU stated that the key question is what the destination is, should it be Chester or if it is supported by MC should it be Cheshire, requesting that there is coherence in the strategy to reflect the rest of Cheshire and Warrington. KB stated that it is important to separate out the strategic direction of the destination, branding and the marketing stating that should it be successful it will provide a sustainable medium term financing approach that will benefit a range of partners including MC. The implication of this project to the rest of Cheshire is being considered.

TB voiced concerns that making this pan Cheshire will cause delays therefore if we localise this to Chester, we can then use this model as the framework to rollout across the sub region.

PC stated that we need to be clear on how this will work. It will be a business improvement district over a geographical area, if the businesses vote in favour, they become the owners of the income and will decide on how this money is spent emphasising that it will not be MC's role to decide on how this money is spent. To date this study has been carried out by Cheshire West, if this is extended to Cheshire East or Warrington then a separate piece of work would need to be undertaken involving the relevant council.

KB advised that a shadow board will be established, this then normally forms the board. In terms of any scalability the legislation does allow for cross boundary so if there was a second process then it could be run in the rest of Cheshire and Warrington simultaneously. The scope is remarkably flexible however there is at statutory process that needs to be followed, this normally takes about a year.

MG advised that CE have no plans at the moment to undertake a TBID as they are currently concentrating on town centre bids which is a 5-year commitment if it is agreed to, this is generally renewed as members see the value to it. CE will watch what happens with the Chester T/ABID and if it is successful, they will be interesting in doing something similar in Cheshire East.

With regard to the VIC review IB confirmed that the LEP are looking at improving the till system at the VIC and will also look to resolve any operational procedures. This may require closing the VIC for a few days for implementation.

### **Chester Visitor Economy**

Colin Potts ran through his presentation (attached).

### **Comments from Board**

It was questioned who is leading on the festival of ideas event in July, CP advised that it is a University of Chester initiated project but will be run in conjunction with partners in the city. A website will go live in January with a call for event ideas.

EU stated that it would be great to see MC support the same activity in the rest of Cheshire. SCB highlighted that there is a remarkable opportunity for the rest of Cheshire as Destination Chester has set down the groundwork for this to be scaled into Destination Cheshire.

### **Any Other Business**

CP referred to the STEAM data and ran through the attached STEAM data slides for 2021-2022 which is due to be published on the LEP site shortly.

**Comments from Board**

EU stated that the STEAM data figures from 2019 demonstrates the size of the opportunity for 2024/2025 and we need to get everyone aligned against the size of the opportunity. We need to consider how we communicate this opportunity to partners. TB emphasised the need to push how important the visitor economy sector is across the sub region and the need to keep driving the sector forward.

It was questioned whether the use of hybrid meeting facilities had impacted the figures, is there a split between business and leisure visits and is business supressing some of this recovery? CP advised that the business market has recovered more slowly than the leisure market and felt that hybrid working will continue to affect the market.

SCB stated that Cheshire West and Chester figures were substantially higher than Cheshire East and questioned if there is a way to extract the Chester figures for a better comparison. CP advised that Cheshire West have also carried out an urban Chester study so the Chester data can also be isolated.

LH referred to the online packaging study looking at making it easier for consumers to book a complete package to drive overnight stays. LH stated that it would be good to have the Zoo involved in this project and will raise with JC.

LH also advised that the Bid are doing work around invest Chester and we are working on UKREiiF it would be good to be connected on this.

TB thanked the MC team for their work over the past year during this uncertainty. There has been a gap with Joe and Nicola leaving but the team have done a huge amount of work in this time.

**Future Board Meetings**

- 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024
- 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024
- 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