

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams
On Thursday 5th September 2024 8am**

Present:

Attendees

Trevor Brocklebank – Chair
Philip Cox
Mark Goldsmith
Sarah Callander-Beckett
Peter Mearns
Liam Hartzenberg
Debbie Simpson
Colin Potts
Eleanor Underhill
Jamie Christon
Steven Broomhead
Gemma Davies, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Richard Milkins, Cheshire East Council (observer)
Nicola Said, VisitEngland

Apologies:

Cristian Marcucci
Carole Hyde, Cheshire East Council (observer)

Opening by the Chair and Welcome

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting. TB also welcomed Nicola Said, VisitEngland to the meeting.

TB advised that CM will be off work for approximately 4-6 weeks due to personal circumstances. PC explained that plans have been put in place to cover CM's role in his absence.

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 25th July 2024 were correct.

It was confirmed that the actions from the previous meeting have been dealt with apart from the board recruitment discussion which will resume when CMs returns to work.

ECW update

TB introduced PC who provided the board with the following update.

PC advised that a statement was issued on the afternoon of Wednesday 4th September following a meeting with Jim McMahon MP, local government minister. Link to statement [Cheshire & Warrington devolution statement - Cheshire and Warrington](#). At the meeting the Minister updated attendees on the new government's devolution objectives and plans to introduce a white paper later this year which will be followed by a devolution bill. The key point being that the devolution bill will include a presumption in favour of devolution. Cheshire and Warrington will be meeting with government officials to explore what can be achieved through devolution as a sub region and will only enter into an agreement if it is the right way forward for Cheshire and Warrington.

A growth plan is being put together which will lay out what we want to achieve as a sub region over the next 5 -10 years in order to deliver the sustainable, inclusive, healthy and fast-growing vision. From this we can start to identify what we will need from a devolution agreement to make this effective.

It was advised that GD will be chairing the Growth Directors Group who will be responsible for taking this forward and a small negotiating team will be put together, led by the Leaders and Chief Executives.

SB confirmed it was a very productive meeting with the Minister and emphasised the need for accelerated discussions. It will be important for us to identify our ambitions for place-based marketing, tourism and hospitality, to ensure these are included within the deal. The Government and the 3 councils are open minded about devolution but felt that there is a need to pursue the mayoral model option.

GD advised that the local authorities have been working on devolution plans over the past few months and the meeting with the minister came about at his request which was a real positive. A workshop took place yesterday to start to put plans in place and a meeting will take place next week to identify how we will work with government officials going forward.

SCB asked where tourism and rural tourism sits within the process of defining our ambition and raised concerns around transport cuts in rural areas.

GD reassured the Board that the rural economy does feature in the C&W proposition and the Minister picked up on this in the meeting. MG added that Cheshire East had requested that the rural economy was included in the draft letter to the Minister.

MG referred to the bus cuts in the Nantwich area advising that this was a decision made by the operator however part of the devolution deal will cover transport and with it the opportunity to control the franchise and bus routes. MG will be on Radio 4 Today programme on Monday 16th September discussing these issues.

SB stated that this does give us the opportunity to look at developing a sub-regional place development promotional project.

TB emphasised the need to secure a strong devolution deal stating that the risks of not having a deal will leave us low down on the government's priority order, so this is a major step forward. TB thanked everyone involved in taking this forward for their hard work to get to this stage.

VisitEngland Update

TB introduced Nicola Said who ran through the attached presentation

Comments from Board

JC questioned the lack of LVEPs in Wales. NS advised that Visit England work closely with Visit Britain who cover the whole of the UK. The tourism structure in Wales is very supportive of the LVEP scheme but operate a different system in Wales which has devolved funding.

EU questioned the spend growth figures 2023 vs 2022 of 47% and NS advised that the figure is correct but is worked off a low base and referred to the proportional split of international visitors across the country, showing London getting 60% of all visitors while C&W get 0.6%.

This data provides us with levers to identify markets to focus on in relation to our travel trade work.

SCB confirmed that she has seen an increase in American visitors, however with two airports in our region was surprised that there did not appear to be an increase in European visitors.

EU asked how we can share this data with members, NS advised that she is working with members of the MC team to look at quarterly reporting and felt this could then feed into a members' report.

SCB referred to the short term lets data and voiced concern around operators selling their premises due to the government decision to remove the tax efficiencies. SCB emphasised the need for more consultation on this and asked what the LVEPs are doing to assist. It was agreed that SCB and NS would take this matter offline.

NS advised that the ABID paper has been produced and she will speak to colleagues to find out what is available to share with external partners, including data on the two failed ABID Ballots.

TB thanked Nicola for her presentation and stated that it is great to see how much progress has been made especially with the available data.

Cheshire & Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Delivery Plan

PC referred to the decision to set up a Business Advisory Board (BAB) when ECW and MC moved over to local authority ownership. The role of this board is to provide the leaders with advice and support on how the economy should be developed. A fundamental principle of this is that the BAB and MC Boards would get involved at the first stages of any work regarding the future economy and visitor economy.

Work has been undertaken on the sustainable and inclusive plan for Cheshire and Warrington and the first draft will soon be ready for consultation. Alongside this, consideration is being given to longer term plans for the next 5-10 years. The process has been accelerated due to government legislation that requires combined authorities and other areas to produce growth plans.

The first 10 members of the BAB have been recruited which include TB and members of the business representative organisations. The process continues to recruit the Chair and the final 10 members of the BAB.

A meeting with the first 10 members of the BAB took place recently at which the growth plan was discussed.

PC ran through the attached presentation to update Board members advising that there is no prioritisation order to the transformational priorities.

Comments from Board

EU questioned why active travel and public transport were missing from the decarbonisation slide. EU also asked to what extent in practical terms are we inhibited and compromised by limited local authority funding and how does this affect our level of ambition with this plan. PC advised that if we are successful in agreeing a devolution deal then we will be able to achieve a large proportion of this plan. Under the last government one of the things that came with a mayoral devolution deal was a £20M a year growth fund over 30 years (we would need confirmation that this is in the new government's plans). Combined authorities also have other opportunities such as investment / innovation zones that offer tax benefits and the ability to retain business rates for investment.

SB stated that unfortunately giving devolved powers to local authorities also comes with enormous problems in terms of deliverability and capacity and the sustainability is a separate and important part that needs to run in parallel to the devolution discussions.

CP asked whether we were compromised by having retail and hospitality linked together in the plan and questioned whether these can be separated out. PC advised that this would be possible and CM is working with the Culture and Visitor Economy strand who have been given funding to review the data.

CP stated it would be good to have a standard approach, NS advised that she would ascertain whether this can be implemented into the VE visitor economy research work.

TB advised that one of the issues is that it is a very strategically focussed document with infrastructure challenges and operational implications that we need to address.

Managing Director Report

LH updated board as follows

- We have refined the second issue of the What's On guide following feedback from partners and have printed 25 thousand copies of the 32-page guide.
- The Connect event will take place on the 2nd October and we have approx. 120 attendees registered for the event.
- MC Awards will take place at Chester Cathedral, and we have 88 nominations this year including nominations from 22 new businesses. Work continues on identifying potential sponsorship opportunities.
- We have started to produce a monthly Data and Insight report.
- National campaign with TfW has seen a 20% increase on engagement and Avanti have confirmed for the next campaign burst. Journey figures into Chester from TfW are showing a 36% increase in July and June 26% on last year.
- Christmas campaign toolkit has been produced for partners to ensure we have a unified approach to the campaign.
- Work continues on PR press trips and articles recently published include Wet Weather and Macclesfield Joy Division Day.
- Jamie Christon is leading on the roundtable event on the 16th September with Sam Dixon MP.
- We have commissioned Keith Blundell to work on our travel trade strategy
- We are developing a feasibility study for the visitor pass using UKSPF funding
- Work on the website continues and it is hoped we will be able to share the design with partners at the Connect conference
- Work continues with Chester Zoo and Tatton Estates on film office proposals
- Digital performance for July and August saw a 50k increase on web views, social is down however this could be attributed to people being abroad on summer holidays.
- To date we have 97 partnership renewals

Comments from Board

SB requested that major event evaluation reports are captured within the MD paper.

**Action
CM/LH**

SB highlighted that financial meetings will be taking place between the three local authorities, and it will be important for us to demonstrate the value of MC at these meetings.

**Action
LH**

TB requested that the board have visibility around future events in Cheshire and Warrington

**Action
LH**

EU thanked LH and requested that the Destination Cheshire plan is included in the reporting going forward and also requested a revision to the Connect Agenda to include Cheshire. PC confirmed that the wider Cheshire work we undertake is very important.

SCB stated that the meetings with EU and CM have been incredibly productive and highlighted that a lot of the conference attendees will be our smaller partners from the rural areas so it will be important to take this into consideration.

AOB

Nicola Said advised that the VisitEngland Chair, Lady Borwick, is keen to visit Cheshire and Warrington in March 2025 for English Tourism Week and would be good to include MPs in this visit – NS will liaise with CM on this.

CP advised that he attended the Palasis Conference in Liverpool yesterday which focussed on the collaboration between destinations and a number of Cheshire organisations were in attendance. The Destination Chester Showcase event will take place on the 24th September at Chester Town Hall.

CP updated on performance over the Summer in Chester which has seen significant recovery in accommodation occupancy and city centre footfall, ahead of national performance, however there is a challenge with the accommodation room rates.

JC advised that Chester Zoo has had a record month in August with income 21% ahead of August 2021 however visitor numbers are down. It was reported that Alton Towers footfall was down in August despite 40% discount offers and other Zoos in the country have struggled in August.

EU asked if it would be feasible to have visitor numbers included within the Board reporting –LH to review what data is available. NS advised that LVEPs are looking at a model to capture attractions data and will liaise with LH on this.

**Action
LH**

TB thanked the Board for their contributions to the meeting and closed the meeting.

Future Board Meetings

17th October 2024 - 10am, Walton Hall and Gardens

12th December 2024 - 8am, Via Teams

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

.....

Date