

**Marketing
Cheshire**

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

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Board Papers

Thursday 5th June 2025

Marketing Cheshire Advisory Board Agenda Thursday 5th June 2025, 8am – 10am

[Join the meeting now](#) Meeting ID: 389 297 112 621 Passcode: A2oQs2 Dial in by phone [+44 161 250 8784,,916756637#](#)

Time		Item	Lead	Reference
08:00am	1	Welcome and Apologies	JC	
08:05am	2	Declarations of Interest	JC	
08:10am	3	Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 3 rd April 2025	JC	
08:15am	4	Board Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Terms of Reference update and future ways of working- Devolution and Joint Committee update- Future of Marketing Cheshire	CM PC CM	
08:45am	5	Destination Management Plan and MC Business Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Progress update one year on	CM	
09:00am	6	Travel Trade strategy and action plan	CM	
09:20am	7	MD Report <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Update from Destination Cheshire / Chester chairs	CM/LH (Board Paper 287)	
09:35am	8	Financials <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Financial Outturn 2024-25	CM	
09:50am	9	A.O.B		
10:00am	10	Meeting Close		

Marketing Cheshire Advisory Board Meeting CWTB NO. 5067662

Thursday 3rd April 2025
1000-1200
Chester Zoo

Present:
CWTB Directors
Attendees

 Trevor Brocklebank – Outgoing Chair
 Jamie Christon - Chair
 Philip Cox -part meeting
 Sarah Callander-Beckett
 Colin Potts
 Peter Mearns

In attendance:
Board Advisory Members

 Jean Flaherty
 Hayley Owen
 Cristian Marcucci

In attendance

 Richard Milkins, Cheshire East Council (observer)
 Phillippa Meachin (observer) – part meeting
 Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies:
Board Directors

 Eleanor Underhill
 Mark Goldsmith
 Steven Broomhead
 Gemma Davies

Board Advisory Members

Kenny Murray

Observers

 Carole Hyde, Cheshire East Council (observer)
 Liam Hartzenberg

Opening by the Chair and Welcome

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting

Declarations of Interest

Board members to advise Sharon of any declarations of interest.

Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting and Matters Arising

It was confirmed that all other actions from the previous meeting have been resolved, and the minutes were agreed to be an accurate representation of the meeting.

CP referred to the travel trade work and CM advised that a travel trade update will be provided at the June Board meeting

Action
CM

With regard to the finance update at the last meeting, CP stated that the board had concern over the finances but were content with the way in which the finances were reported.

Board Matters

Chair transition

TB advised the board that he will be officially stepping down as MC Chair and thanked the board for their commitment and for volunteering their time to support the work of Marketing Cheshire. TB handed over to the new Chair, Jamie Christon.

JC advised that he is delighted to be appointed as chair and commented that devolution will hopefully give us the opportunity to progress the work of the board. JC referred to the recruitment of new board members advising that the calibre of the candidates was exceptional in terms of representation across the visitor economy and geographically across the county, stating that we should be in a position to confirm the new board members early next week.

JC advised that Kenny Murray, Cheshire Oaks also interviewed for the chair position and was deemed to be a very strong candidate coming a close second to JC for the role. Kenny has agreed to join the advisory board as a board member.

PC and CM both thanked TB for his support and commitment to the LEP as deputy Chair and to MC as Chair of the board over the past years. PC advised that JC would become the official representative on the Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory board and TB will remain on the Business Advisory Board as an observer.

Board transition to an advisory board

CM advised the board of the transition process as follows:

- Board members agree to appoint 3 new directors to the CWTB board from the local authorities: The officers will be: Hayley Owen, Eleanor Blackburn and Charles Jarvis
- Board members will be required to sign the board resolution
- Board members are required to resign as directors of CWTB and confirm that they wish to continue as members of the Advisory Board (where applicable)– letters will be circulated to board members to sign.
- CM will update board members as soon as the new CWTB director appointments are formalised.

**Action
CM**

PC reiterated that the CWTB board will have legal responsibility for CWTB and will manage the governance of the company.

Board members present agreed unanimously to board transition process.

Devolution update

PC advised that the devolution work is ongoing, some of the public profile around devolution has not been as positive as hoped this is thought to be due to the government consultation which concludes on the 13th April. The Runcorn and Helsby by-election is also hindering our communications around devolution, however we should be in a position to hold stakeholder engagement focus groups to convey the benefits that devolution will bring to the sub region after the 1st May.

It is not possible to have a definitive timetable for devolution at this stage, but the current thinking is that once we have confirmation that the Secretary of State is happy for Cheshire and Warrington to move forward the three local authorities will formally be asked to give their consent to the Secretary of State. A skeleton combined authority will then be formed in January/February. Work is taking place in the background on future operating models and due diligence and a review will be undertaken to ensure there is a clear understanding of the finances and work currently being undertaken.

Preparation work has also been undertaken over the past several months with regard to the expected powers and funding devolution will provide. PC confirmed that the rural strategy group will also be consulted in this work; **Action SCB to provide PC with the Rural Strategy Group meeting dates.**

TB stated that it is imperative that devolution is achieved as we are missing out to Liverpool and Manchester who both have mayors with strong voices, and it will therefore be vital that we appoint the right person as mayor for Cheshire and Warrington to enable us to compete.

SCB referred to the scepticism in rural areas particularly the Parish councils as they see devolution as adding another layer of bureaucracy. SCB stressed the need for the stakeholder engagement to have a very clear message to public and businesses in these areas to ensure they understand the benefits of devolution.

HO advised that from a Cheshire West perspective conversations are taking place and there is an understanding that there is a huge amount to do particularly at town council level but reassured the board that this is being looked at.

TB highlighted the need for board members to take part in the consultation and CM stated that he will be drafting a response on behalf of Marketing Cheshire which will state the case for the visitor economy to be included within the devolution plans and the developing growth plan.

PM questioned where MC will sit in a new mayoral model. PC advised that further thought needed to be given to this as government has not communicated that DMOs should be part of combined authorities, however, they are in Manchester but not in other parts of the UK. If MC were to go out on its own, they would have to compete for contracts and funding. If MC is part of the CA one of the core activities could be the visitor economy and place marketing.

JC stated that it is important that board members are ambassadors for devolution, CM confirmed that the ambassador pack had been circulated to board members.

SCB questioned whether we should be looking at the true value of what the visitor economy contributes to the economy of Cheshire and Warrington which is substantial. PC advised that there is a possibility that the new mayor may want to create a 'MIDAS' equivalent organisation for Cheshire, and this could be an opportunity for Marketing Cheshire to undertake this role.

JC stated that it will be important for the new Cheshire mayor to build relationships with the Mayors of Manchester and Liverpool.

JF advised that the Joint Committee have prepared the themes in preparation for the mayor being appointed. Culture and tourism are part of these themes, and it is hoped that the mayor will adopt all of the themes.

VisitCheshire.com website demo

Pip Meachin, Digital Comms Lead provided board members with a demonstration of the new VisitCheshire.com website

Visitor Economy funding and tourism tax

CM provided the board with an overview of tourism taxes highlighting the following key items

- Compared to our neighbours in Europe the UK does not invest as much into tourism development and promotion. Obtaining funding for tourism development has been a challenge in the UK for a number of years.

- The development of the LVEP programme included piloting two destination development partnerships which brought together a number of LVEPs and were in receipt of core funding from DCMS, however there is no indication on the future funding of LVEPS.
- Other funding options have been looked at across the UK, with Edinburgh introducing a visitor levy of 5% per person per night in October. This money goes to the council to

reinvest in services used by visitors. There is a proposal in Wales to introduce a tourism tax on accommodation including hotels, hostels and campsites, this revenue will be managed by the councils.

- There are currently no proposals for councils or combined authorities to be given powers around a visitor levy in England.
- English towns are looking at more creative ways to generate funding such as accommodation bids. Manchester for the past few years has been charging £1 per night and are looking to increase this to £2 when the ballot is renewed.
- We have been looking at a proposal in Chester to introduce a £2 per room per night visitor charge on 27 hotels in the city centre and periphery. The introduction of this ABID would need the hotels to vote in favour with a majority in number of voters and rateable value to enable the bid to come into force. The hoteliers would decide how this money is spent.
- A shadow board has been formed for the Chester ABID and there have been concerns from hoteliers around equity and fairness and impact on business. We continue to work with the hoteliers on these concerns.
- Other areas across the UK are exploring introducing an ABID as highlighted in the circulated report.

CP added that an extension to the funding for existing Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs) in the Northeast and West Midlands has just been announced but will only be in the region of £1.35M split between 5 LVEPs.

CP raised concern that funding coming into Wales, Manchester and Liverpool will put Cheshire at a significant competitive disadvantage.

CP advised that part of the issue in Chester is that the hotel group head offices make the final voting decision and indications are that some of these will vote against an ABID.

If the ABID does not go ahead it will put pressure on devolution-based arguments that mayors are given the powers as per the arguments taking place in Manchester, Liverpool and West Yorkshire.

JC asked how the zoo can get involved with their new accommodation offer and CP advised the decision will be based around trading and when the rateable value is established, this would require clarification from CW&C.

It was confirmed that Keith Blundell has met individually with hoteliers to ensure consistency in our approach.

CP stated that one difficulty is that whilst the organising bodies in Manchester are very positive around what the ABID has achieved the hoteliers are arguing that they are not seeing any identifiable benefits. The business plan however did state that the benefits won't be demonstratable for the first few years.

CP advised that the next hotelier shadow board meeting will take place on Monday 28th April at which we will seek agreement on a series of recommendations. If the recommendations are approved, we will announce the intention to go to ballot to the Secretary of State. The

vote would then take place in the Autumn and a decision will need to be made when the levy is put in place, if the vote is successful.

It was questioned whether we could enlist an advocate from one of the hotel chains in Manchester to speak to the reticent hotel groups. CP advised that a number of the hotel chains in Manchester voted against the ABID in Manchester. CM advised that the GM at the

Grosvenor used to work at the Midland in Manchester so is an advocate for the ABID but again there is the issue that the GMs do not make the final decision.

Managing Director Report

CM highlighted the following key items from the MD report

- Cheshire Day took place on Sunday 30th and focussed on showcasing the food offer across Cheshire and Warrington. We received coverage on Granada TV, the Sunday Telegraph travel section, iNews and had lots of activity across social media channels with 98 pieces of content with an organic reach of over 130k.
- We have an ambition through the Destination Cheshire Group to form a Cheshire Day subgroup who will look at implementing a 3-5 year strategy plan.
- As part of English Tourism week, we arranged several MP visits across Cheshire including Cholmondeley, Walton Hall and the Chester VIC.
- MC Awards received very positive feedback with one negative aspect being the temperature in the Cathedral
- The film office feasibility study has been concluded and provides us with a clear business case on the benefits of a film office for Cheshire and Warrington. An investment of £100k per annum will provide us with the potential to generate £3-5 Million a year economic impact for the area, in terms of venue location hire, casting crew accommodation etc. In addition further benefit will come from screen tourism. We are working with the 3 local authorities, the Zoo, Bolesworth and Tatton Estates to get a film office launched this year and through devolution see long-term sustainable funding. It will be essential that the film office continues past the first year.

There will also be an opportunity for the Cheshire film office to combine with Liverpool and Manchester film offices to showcase the northwest internationally. We would also work with the education sector to build the skills in this area so that we can provide a comprehensive offer to film and TV companies.

- Printed What's On guide goes live imminently and continues to grow with each issue.
- Media Getaway conference is coming to Chester on the 7-9th July and the programme is now confirmed with delegates arriving on the 7th with FAM trips ahead of the reception dinner at the Town Hall. Connection Zone at the Racecourse on Tuesday and FAM trips arranged for Wednesday.
- We have secured several new members and the creation of Lapland Manchester has helped us attract the new members.
- UKREiF is taking place in Leeds 20th – 22nd May
- We are working to improve our connections with Liverpool and Manchester Airports and meetings will take place with them later this month
- The Booking.Com event will take place on the evening of Wednesday 4th June

Comments from Board

SCB stated that the person running the film office would need to be very experienced to assure its success.

RM and CP stated that it would be important that the local authorities are responsive to the film production requests.

SCB referred to the PR company we use and questioned if there is an appetite at the end of the current agreement to look at using a local Cheshire PR company as it was felt their knowledge of the Cheshire area would be better. CM confirmed that this is definitely something we could look at when the contract comes up for review.

Marketing Cheshire Awards

CM referred to the circulated paper advising that we are looking at ways to build on the awards to attract more entries and attendees, particularly from across Cheshire East and Warrington.

The awards cost MC approx. £5k a year to run and going forward we will be looking at our sponsorship approach to help us to achieve a break-even position or even a small profit.

As Visit Cheshire is our public facing brand, we are suggesting changing the name of the awards to the 'Visit Cheshire Tourism Awards' – Board members unanimously agreed to this approach.

Following feedback from partners around the need to complete submissions by August which is the busiest time for attractions it is suggested that we move the event from March to the end of January so the awards submission deadline would be end of June.

JC voiced concerns over changing the submission deadline date to June as this would mean the submission would only cover half the year and would not include the busy summer period which is the most important time for a lot of venues and questioned why such a long gap is required between the submission date and the event. CM advised that there is a Visit England process that we have to follow which takes a number of months but will liaise with colleagues to review what is possible and report back to the board.

**Action
CM**

TB also felt that waiting 6 months for feedback on an awards submission is a barrier to entering the awards.

RM questioned if there is a way to simplify the submission process, CM advised that submissions have to follow the Visit England process but will pass this feedback onto VE.

With regard to the venue, we are currently looking at Walton Hall and Gardens. TB emphasised the need to ensure the venue has the wow factor and JF stated that Walton Hall is a different offer to the Cathedral but is a very impressive venue.

We have reviewed the sponsorship packages and feel that reducing the category sponsorship cost to £500 will attract more sponsors. We will also look to have an overarching sponsor. It is hoped that we will then be able to freeze ticket prices for next year.

Financials

CM provided the board with an update on our financial position, advising that the operating deficit has increased very slightly by £1k. confirming that the reserves still remain within the required operating levels. Debtor information includes the local authority funding, so the position is better than suggested in the report.

We are doing a lot of work to ensure we are in a much stronger financial position as we move to the new financial year and have better management on income and expenditure we need to deliver key activity throughout the year. It is not where we want to be at the end of the year but there is mitigation to ensure we can deal with the financial position as we move into the transition with the combined authority.

We are looking ahead to next year's budget to aim for a break-even position.

CP requested clarity on the impact the performance the VIC is having on the overall performance of MC. It was agreed that CM would provide this breakdown to board members.

**Action
CM**

It was also suggested that we should have a more in-depth discussion around the VIC at a future board meeting.

PM questioned whether we have an idea of the projected deficit for 2025/26 and CM advised the deficit is expected to be approx. £20k

AOB

JC referred to comments from EU in advance of the board and CM confirmed that he will be responding direct to EU.

CM advised that we will be looking to hold a board workshop in advance of the June meeting – SP to circulate potential dates once the new board members are appointed.

**Action
SP**

Future Board Meetings

0800-1000 Thursday 5th June – online

1000 -1200 Thursday 4th September – in person

0800-1000 Thursday 27th November – online

Actions	Owner
An update on Travel Trade to be provided at the June Board meeting	CM
CM to provide board members with an update once the new CWTB director appointments have been formalised.	CM
SCB to provide PC with the Rural Strategy Group meeting dates.	SCB
CM to provide the Board with an update on the awards timetable following discussions with colleagues	CM
CM to provide the board with a breakdown of the VIC financials	CM
SP to circulate potential dates for the Board Workshop once the new board members are appointed.	SP

Signature (Jamie Christon, Chair)

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Date

Marketing Cheshire Advisory Board

MD Report

Thursday 5th June

Period April - May

Paper 287

Visitor Economy

Marketing Campaigns and Content

- A national Chester-focused campaign is being delivered in partnership with key attractions and transport providers. Avanti and Transport for Wales have contributed £35,000 in total to fund a display advertising campaign via travel specialist Sojern. The platform will retarget users actively planning trips, tracking engagement from ad click to arrival at the destination.
- Titled “Find Your Chester,” the campaign highlights the city’s top experiences. Content creators will share personal discovery stories – from thrills at the racecourse and fashion finds at Cheshire Oaks, to wildlife encounters at the zoo. Chester Zoo, Chester Racecourse, and Jodrell Bank are all participating, with a mix of programmatic advertising across the Northwest and North Wales. A new partnership with Merseyrail will also enable digital advertising at railway stations.

Public Relations

- We’re collaborating with Wilmslow BID through their PR agency to gain national coverage by positioning the town within the wider Cheshire visitor offer. An approach titled “Putting the Slow in Wilm-slow” will promote the area as a serene, rejuvenating escape through the lens of slow travel.
- Upcoming national press features include pieces in Sainsbury’s, Waitrose, and Red magazines, following a hosted press trip to Tarporley and the Pheasant Inn/Beeston.

Visit Cheshire Tourism Awards

- Following a successful event at Chester Cathedral earlier this year, the awards will be rebranded as the Visit Cheshire Tourism Awards. The 2025 cycle will launch on 10 June, with applications open until 22 August. All 17 award categories will return.
- The event will take place at Walton Hall and Gardens on Thursday 5 March 2026. We are now contacting potential sponsors and would welcome any recommendations or contacts from the board.
- The national VisitEngland Awards for Excellence are held in Brighton on 4th June – Jodrell Bank is shortlisted for Business Events Venue of the Year

MC Connect

- We will shortly confirm the date and venue for the annual MC Connect conference for partners and work is underway on the agenda and content. We are also in discussions with Visit England to invite VE Advisory Board Chair, Lady Victoria Borwick to the Connect event and to visit one or two partners. We are also looking at the possibility of holding a dinner for MC Board Members and Lady Borwick.

Strategic Projects

Film Office

- A report on the Film Office feasibility study will be presented to council Growth Directors on 19th June to set out the economic and tourism opportunity, and funding requirements. The Culture and Visitor Economy Devolution Workstream will also be including a financial ask to the new C&W Combined Authority as part of the developing growth plan.
- MC is hosting a Film Office-themed networking event in the Chester Racecourse Directors Box at the Ibiza Classics race meeting on the evening of Friday 11th July. The guest list includes key partners including Chester Zoo, Tatton Studios and Bolesworth, along with council representatives, TV producers and location managers, and the managers of the Manchester and Staffordshire Film Offices.
- MC will be attending the FOCUS 2026 film conference in London in December on a Cheshire and Warrington stand with Chester Zoo, Tatton Studios and Bolesworth, and sponsoring a reception for location managers, to raise the profile of the Cheshire Film Office work and the sub-region as a filming destination.

Travel Trade

- A new travel trade proposition is being developed for launch in September 2025, allowing partners to subscribe as part of their marketing package. This will include a profile on a new travel trade website, due for completion this summer. The initial buy-in will last 18 months, with a view to expanding into a three-year campaign aimed at positioning Cheshire and Warrington as a leading group travel destination—starting with the domestic market and progressing internationally.
- We are also developing joint travel trade products with nearby destinations such as Liverpool and North Wales. These will appear alongside inspirational itineraries on the new website. Partners involved in the campaign will be invited to join a dedicated travel trade group for shared intelligence and strategic collaboration.

What's On – July to September

- The upcoming edition includes new advertisers - Living Heritage, Truck Fest, and Deva Fest. Editorial content will spotlight summer festivals, outdoor experiences, and free attractions. Publication is scheduled for week commencing 23 June.

Visit Cheshire Website

- The new visitcheshire.com site launched at the end of March 2025 and has received positive feedback. We're now developing seasonal and themed content as part of a refreshed annual content calendar. SEO performance is being closely monitored to maintain Google rankings and ensure relevant traffic. All partners now have logins to update business pages, post offers, and add events.
- The following pages are now in development and will be hosted on subdomains via Destination Core's CMS:
 - Trade: Launching June with award info, marketing opportunities, and partnership details.
 - Business Tourism: To showcase conference and event venues
 - Travel Trade/Groups: Launching September; tailored to group travel organisers and coach companies.

Hospitality Connect

- Held on 29 April at Chester Townhouse, this event brought together educators, industry leaders, and students to explore careers in hospitality. The programme included hands-on workshops and expert discussions aimed at supporting educators and raising awareness of career pathways. Nine schools participated: 6 from CWAC; 2 from Cheshire East; 1 from Warrington

Media Gateway – 7–9 July 2025

- 83 journalists, travel writers and bloggers are confirmed to attend. Fam trips will include boat tours, walking food tours, Chester Zoo, and Port Sunlight. 75 delegates are booked on fam trips for Monday 7 July, with 54 booked for Wednesday 9 July
- Marketing Cheshire will host the official welcome at Chester Town Hall with Gyles Brandreth as keynote speaker. Plans include contributions from Forest Gin, Restaurant 209, and Storyhouse (which will preview Alice in Wonderland). Key stakeholders will also be invited.
- To boost exhibitor numbers, a special Connection Zone rate of £599 is being offered to Marketing Cheshire Partners—making participation more accessible to smaller businesses.

Booking.com Traveller Review Awards

- A celebration event recognising Chester as one of the world's top 10 most welcoming destinations will be held on Wednesday 4 June at Chester Zoo. Around 60 guests are expected, including MPs, the Lord Mayor, and senior visitor economy representatives. Marketing Cheshire is supporting with invitations, event coordination and PR — all funded by Booking.com.

Data and Insight: A dashboard is included in the accompanying documents.

Commercial Income 2025-26

- 66 partners: £49k
- 6 seasonal campaign partners: £15k (Canal & River Trust; BeWILDerwood; National Trust; Chester Zoo; Gulliver's; and Jodrell Bank)
- Digital advertising: £3k
- What's On advertising: £10k
- Total to date since start April - £77k

Devolution Communications & Engagement

- Ongoing support continues for the Communications Group through web updates, stakeholder engagement, and strategic advice. Local engagement activity is scheduled for May-June, supported by Social PR.

UKREiiF – 20–22 May 2025

- MC coordinated the ECW presence and delegation at UKREiiF in Leeds alongside all three local authorities. We lead marketing and event management, with a focus on regional devolution opportunities. Post-event evaluation and planning for 2026 are both underway.

Cheshire and Warrington Place Brand

- Development of a new regional place brand remains a key priority. However, this work is paused until after the 2026 Mayoral Election, so the newly elected Mayor can play a central role in shaping it.

Partner Meetings

Destination Chester

- Held on 15 May at Cheshire Oaks. RJS Associates presented findings from the recent perception study. Marketing Cheshire shared campaign updates. Colin Potts has expressed willingness to remain as Chair for another year – to be discussed further at the July meeting.

Destination Cheshire

- Took place on 29 April at Park Royal, Warrington. Key topics included group membership and ambassador roles. Plans for Cheshire Day were reviewed, and members agreed to form a steering group to develop a five-year strategy.

Look Ahead – June to September 2025 Priorities

4th June – Booking.com Traveller Review Awards event, Chester Zoo

- 10th June – launch of the Visit Cheshire Tourism Awards
- June – August: Destination Campaign
- 7-9th July – Media Getaway
- 11th July – Film Office Directors Box
- Development of the Travel Trade proposition
- Partner Connect Conference development
- Halloween and Christmas campaign development