

**Marketing
Cheshire**

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

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Board Papers

Thursday 16th May 2024

Agenda

Virtual Board Meeting

Thursday 16th May 2024 8am – via Teams

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TIME		ITEM	LEAD	REFERENCE
08:00am	1	Welcome and Apologies	TB	
08:05am	2	Declarations of Interest	TB	
08:10am	3	Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 14 th March 2024	TB	
08:15am	4	Board Matters - ECW Transition	PC	
08:30am	5	MC Business Plan 2024-2025	CM	(Board Paper 269)
09:30am	6	MD Report	CM	(Board Paper 270)
09:45am	7	Company Finances - Financial Outturn 2023-2024	CM	(Board Paper 271)
09:55am	8	A.O.B		
10:00am	9	Close		

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams
On Thursday 14th March 2024 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”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)
Cristian Marcucci (“CM”)

In Attendance: Liam Hartzenberg (“LH”)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies:
None

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

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 14th December 2023 were correct.

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

LEP Transition

PC confirmed that the transfer of the LEP, and therefore by extension Marketing Cheshire over to local authority ownership has been approved. The first meeting of the local authority joint committee will take place on the 8th April. It will be a procedural meeting which will approve the change of name and ownership of the LEP and formally establish the joint committee and give authorisation for the creation of the Business Advisory Board.

The first meeting of the joint committee is likely to take place in June after the local elections.

There will be consequential changes to the MC board including moving the formal legal responsibilities across to the board of officers. The officers board (subject to final approval) will include Gemma Davies for CW&C, Charles Jarvis for Cheshire East, Eleanor Blackburn for Warrington and PC will be the ECW representative. All operational decisions will be overseen by the Local Authorities, Business Advisory Board and Marketing Cheshire.

The process of recruiting for the Business Advisory Board will take place after the Leaders and Chief Executives meeting on Friday 22nd March.

Comments from Board

SCB raised concerns over the speed of decision making under the new structure and PC confirmed that ECW will have the delegated authority to made decisions within certain terms and conditions.

Both MG and GD assured board members that the local authorities already have Companies that work in this way and decisions are not held up by elected members and advised that the growth directors' group will support the new committee.

TB and PM thanked Philip and the team, including the Growth Directors for all the work on achieving the LEP Transition. It was emphasised that we are stronger all working together in a single structure.

IB advised that there will be some continuity with the MC board as PC and GD will remain, however resignation letters will need to be issued to the other MC Directors at some point in the future.

**Action
IB**

Board Terms of Reference

CM referred to the circulated Terms of Reference and advised that these are a first draft built on the workshop discussions and look at how we will operate under the new structure. These Terms are aligned to the Business Advisory Board Terms of Reference and the intention is once the MC Board agree to these, they are taken to the joint committee meeting for approval on the 8th April.

CM highlighted the key points as follows:

- Legal and financial responsibility is removed to give more time to concentrate on the Visitor Economy role.
- The role will be to represent the voice of the Visitor Economy through the Business Advisory Board
- It is proposed that there will be 12 members with the chair holding the non-voting role on the Business Advisory Board. There will be 5 reserved places, one each for a representative of each of the three Local Authorities and a place each for the Chair of Destination Chester and Destination Cheshire. PC and CM will attend the board but not as official board members.
- The aim is to ensure we have greater visitor economy representation on the board and ensure we have a balance around gender and geography expertise.
- Board members will be required to take a more strategic role in the development of new policies and projects.

Comments from the board

EU requested for the role of the Vice Chair to be defined for example would the Vice Chair be able to cover for the Chair on the Business Advisory Board. With regard to the Board's role to monitor performance EU questioned whether this should be expanded to include performance against the business plan and KPIs and suggested that it should be the Chair's role to review the performance of Board members.

JC referred to the statement in the ToR stating that 'the membership will be representative of the visitor economy business community' and advised this does not correlate to the existing board membership and questioned whether we should take the opportunity now to address this.

SB stated that with regard to accountability the board should have at least two 6-month performance reports which should be presented to ECW. We should also have an annual report to be used by stakeholders to showcase our achievements.

PM emphasised that while the visitor economy is one of our key priorities we do have other functions around marketing Cheshire and Warrington for investment and business and marketing and comms for the new ECW structure. It is therefore important that when looking at the board membership we need review the skills and experience we currently have on the board and the gaps we need to fill. PM also stated that equality, diversity, and inclusion needs to be considered.

GD requested for an organogram to be included within the Terms of Reference.

JC stated that clarity is needed on the 3-year term for board membership.

SCB stated that it is important to look at the topographical structure in relation to board membership.

PC stated that going forward it will be important to have representation from the 3 local authorities on the board for decision making.

CP stated that currently MC is a membership organisation therefore the way in which commercial members views are transmitted into the board needs to be clarified. EU agreed and questioned how the voice of members is heard and stressed the need for this to be more visible.

The board members thanked CM for his work on the Terms of Reference and it was agreed that CM would incorporate the comments from today and circulate a revised ToR.

**Action
CM**

Managing Director Report

CM updated board on the MC report advising of the following key items:

- CM thanked the board for sending in their comments on the Destination Management plan and advised that we are now working towards a final version of document for publication early next month.
- MC Awards - 280 attendees booked and thanks to Jamie for putting us in touch with our headline sponsor.
- We have invested in better photography and videography to provide us with stronger content to use throughout the year and better promote next year's event.
- The Online packaging feasibility study is now complete, the proposal was to build a bespoke online booking system however this has created concerns and the recommendation from the study suggest that it would be more feasible to create a visitor pass.
- We have had strong performances from our campaigns with our transport partners, which has resulted in additional funding.
- The new 'visit' website invitation to tender is now live. It is important that we review dwell time going forward and this info will feed into our KPIs next year.
- Our annual conference will take place on the 3rd July at the Queen Hotel.

Comments from Board

JC suggested that CM should have a discussion with Sam Dixon around the work we are undertaking with Avanti.

**Action
CM**

JC also advised that the Zoo are working on a dual language campaign in Welsh and are also extending their market target area to Birmingham and requested that MC liaise with the Zoo's marketing team on this.

**Action
LH**

Delivery Plan 2024/2025

CM updated board members on the 2024/2025 delivery plan and ran through the attached presentation.

Comments from Board

EU questioned how we will deliver this work and whether it will be prioritised against the business plan. EU also asked if we will be looking at duality in having separate plans for Chester and Cheshire.

PM stated making sure the Cheshire Brand and getting it properly defined is fundamental and with regard to the development of a film office suggested having a conversation with the Liverpool Film office.

SCB raised concern over the absence of the inclusion of the wider but smaller membership in the focus statements. SCB also referred to the trend for wellness and green spaces but there appeared to be a focus on the towns and asked for the balance of this to be reviewed.

LH emphasised that the towns provide a base for visitors to explore the rural areas and stressed that we are not excluding the rural areas we are complimenting these areas through the towns.

CM confirmed that the updated delivery plan will include a clearer timeline and proposed additional staffing resource. It will also include duality and the wellness offer will feed into our campaigns.

TB stressed that commercial sponsorship and ensuring our income streams allow us to deliver what we want to do it very important, and the positioning of the Cheshire brand is crucial. It will be important to identify the initial things we can do that will really make a difference.

CM advised that he will be producing an updated delivery plan to circulate ahead of the next meeting.

**Action
CM**

Company Finances

Preliminary Budget 2024/2025

IB updated Board members on the budget paper advising that this was presented to the recent Audit meeting.

The budget was prepared before CMs appointment and was produced as part of the LEP transition process which was presented to the LAs as a high-level indicative plan.

The budget will be revisited in July and the aim is to have the budget at a breakeven level.

There will be opportunities within the LEP for MC via PR and place marketing activity.

The new website would be treated as capital investment spread over the period in which it has value.

IB /CM will update the budget over the coming weeks to incorporate CMs business plans.

**Action
IB/CM**

Comments from Board

EU suggested that it would be helpful to have comparisons in the budget to previous years and voiced concern that we are being over optimistic with the increase in partnership income.

DW advised that this was discussed at the audit meeting and will be quite challenging. DW referred to the reserve levels and suggested that this is something that board members should keep under review going forward.

TB reiterated that the board will not be micromanaging debts but will be ensuring plans are sustainable going forward.

CP advised that when we look at what we are spending income on, the majority would be concentrating on marketing, PR and research as these are areas with direct outputs against commercial income and suggested this raises questions that need to be considered in forward planning.

IB advised that we could look at the presentation side of the teams that spend time on marketing activity to show as marketing spend. The inclusion of the VIC was also questioned; however, it was advised that some of the strategic funding for the VIC comes from the LEP.

TB advised that once the transition is complete, we will look to align the economies of scale with the 3 local authorities to work more efficiently with the funds available.

Overview of the company finances.

IB referred Board members to the current YTD report included within the board pack and updated on the financials within the paper. IB emphasised that the operating reserves remain above the minimum required level and there are no issues with solvency.

IB advised that the employment terms of conditions within the LEP and MC have been aligned and will be effective from April 2024.

Comments from Board

EU suggested that there should be a comparison against last year and voiced concerns around the reducing reserves level and questioned how we will address this going forward.

TB advised that the finances have been well managed internally however it is not good to see a below budget performance and felt that the cause of this is the lack of a leadership MD role over the past 12 months. There is a need to perform commercially going forward.

PC advised that it is Ian's final meeting before leaving his role on the 30th April and thanked Ian for all of his hard work over the years. An interim will be recruited for a one-year period while long term requirements are assessed.

TB also advised that David Walker will be resigning from the board and thanked David for all of his hard work over the years especially in chairing the Audit Committee. It was confirmed that David will resign after the Audit meeting on the 26th March.

Any Other Business

GD advised that CW&C won an award yesterday evening with regard to their work in Northwich this includes a £15k prize fund to spend on a community led project.

SCB referred to the Chancellor's budget and the decision around furnished holiday lets advising that there are a number of petitions being circulated to request the chancellor reconsiders his decision. SCB requested that MC communicate reassurance to our members that we are working with them on this - SCB/CM to discuss.

CP referred to the work undertaken by MC under CMs leadership and stated that it is connecting into the work in Chester regarding the One City Plan and development of a Tourism Plan.

**Action
CM/SCB**

Future Board Meetings

16th May 2024

27th June 2024

5th September 2024

17th October 2024

12th December 2024

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

Marketing Cheshire Board

Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Marketing Cheshire Board plays a pivotal role in the place marketing and promotion of Cheshire and Warrington as a place to visit, live, work, invest and study.

As the expert advisory group for Marketing Cheshire, the Board exerts real influence and provides strategic insight into all work to enhance, grow and promote the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy, and promote the sub-region as one of the best investment propositions in the UK.

Board Members bring knowledge of their sector and champion the sub-region to national and international audiences. They collaborate with the Local Authorities Joint Committee of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and the Business Advisory Board, taking a strategic approach rather than acting in the interests of their individual sectors and organisations.

Purpose of Marketing Cheshire

Marketing Cheshire (MC) is the Visit England designated Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Cheshire and Warrington and responsible for the sub-region's Destination Management Plan.

In addition, as a subsidiary organisation, it is responsible for Enterprise Cheshire + Warrington communications and marketing.

MC is responsible for building an effective tourism and place marketing strategy, amplifying the Cheshire and Warrington brand, and promoting the sub-region nationally and internationally to business, leisure visitors, and investors.

Marketing Cheshire Board Purpose

- Work with MC and Local Authorities to shape and influence the interconnected tourism and place marketing strategies for Cheshire and Warrington, including the Destination Management Plan (DMP)

- Be consulted by the Joint Committee on any visitor economy or place marketing decisions that will impact upon the Cheshire and Warrington Business community.
- To represent the voice of businesses in the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy in partnership and stakeholder groups
- To work with the Managing Director to oversee and guide delivery of the **Marketing Cheshire Delivery Plan** and DMP, providing sector insight to support place and visitor economy marketing and communications activity
- To champion and advocate for the work of MC within and beyond the sub-region, supporting work to: grow our membership base and commercial income; secure grant funding; and pitch for appropriate commissions, in-keeping with our organisational purpose

The Board is advisory in nature and will provide MC with:

- Sector intelligence and the direction of the visitor economy
- Links to with the wider visitor economy stakeholder community (including Destination Chester and Destination Cheshire), bringing representatives together from across the political, business and skills sectors across our sub-region and beyond, to promote Cheshire and Warrington
- Horizon scanning for funding initiatives and opportunities for collaboration
- Ideas to promote the Cheshire and Warrington economy/visitor economy more widely

Board Membership

The Board will consist of approximately 12 full members. Any new members will be selected by an open process and appointed by the Local Authorities Joint Committee.

Membership will be representative of the visitor economy business community of Cheshire and Warrington and reflect policies on equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Board Chair will be invited to take a non-voting position on the Business Advisory Board. **The Chair will also attend the Local Authorities Joint Committee if key MC priorities or activity is being discussed. In their absence, the Vice-Chair will deputise for the Chair on the Business Advisory Board and Joint Committee.**

Reserved places on the MC Board will be held for:

- 1 member from each Local Authority
- The Chairs of Destination Cheshire and Destination Chester

Board membership will consider factors including (but not limited to):

- Gender balance
- Size of business
- Sectors across the visitor economy – attractions, hospitality, leisure
- Range of expertise **and experience**
- Geographical location

Board members will generally be appointed for a 3-year term. Board members may serve a second term through the appointment process.

Other parties may be co-opted to the Board for up to 12 months, to bring specific subject matter expertise.

The current board consists of:

NAME	COMPANY /ORGANISATION	POSITION
Trevor Brocklebank Chair	Entrepreneur Vice Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership	Owner
Peter Mearns Vice-Chair	Cheshire Dance, Bluecoat	Chair
Steven Broomhead	Warrington Borough Council	CEO
Mark Goldsmith	Cheshire East Borough Council	Councillor
Gemma Davies	Cheshire West and Chester Council	Director of Economy and Housing
Eleanor Underhill	Destination Cheshire	Chair
Colin Potts	Destination Chester	Chair
Sarah Callander-Beckett	Combermere Abbey	Owner
Jamie Christon	Chester Zoo	CEO
VACANCY		
VACANCY		

Working approach

The Board is intended to bring visitor economy and place marketing insights to the work of Marketing Cheshire, and to support work stream prioritisation.

The Board will seek to influence public and private sector bodies to participate in and delivery priority projects and campaigns.

Board members will be requested to take a strategic and leading role in the development and delivery of priority projects and initiatives. MC officers will engage and involve the Board Member through every stage of delivery.

The Board may form sub-groups from its own membership and others, where it deems necessary. Wherever possible, sub-groups should be constituted according to the principles of these Terms of Reference and, in all cases, sub-groups should abide by terms relating to accountability and reflect policies on equality, diversity and inclusion.

A paragraph of text will be included in papers for submission to the Local Authorities Joint Committee setting out the views of the Board on the issue(s) under consideration

Board Meetings and Representation

The Board will meet 6 times a year with the aspiration to hold at least three board meetings or additional ad hoc meetings/workshops in person (hosted by Board Members). No meetings will be held in July and August.

Board members are expected to attend not less than 75% of meetings over a 12-month period. Deputising for a member is permitted. There should be a quorum of eight members, with the Managing Director always present.

Meeting agendas and minutes will be developed and issued on behalf of the Managing Director within five working days of the meeting.

The Managing Director will provide board members with a quarterly report on key performance indicators and produce both a mid-year and annual performance report to demonstrate progress against the Marketing Cheshire Delivery Plan.

Accountability

The Board will report on its work to the Local Authorities Joint Committee

The Board and its Members will operate and conduct themselves in accordance with the following principles:

- Code of Conduct – underpinned by the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan principles)

- Attendance – commitment to attending 75% of meetings of the Board
- Support of a fully inclusive culture, promoting and adhering to policies on equality, diversity and inclusion
- Declarations of interest
- Confidential reporting
- Whistleblowing
- Gifts and hospitality

On issues of conduct, the Board and its Members are accountable to the Local Authorities Joint Committee.

Review

The Chair will arrange an annual one-to-one conversation with Board Members to discuss the performance of the board and consider any ongoing changes, improvements or additions to the Board, for collective consideration and agreement by the Board.

Similarly, this Terms of Reference is a live document and kept under review. It may therefore be amended, varied or modified in writing following consultation with, and agreement by, Board Members.

March 2024

Business Plan – 16th May 2024 - Board Paper 269

INTRODUCTION

The Cheshire and Warrington sub-region is a special destination. A place of aspiration and personality, where natural beauty and vibrant towns meld with leading edge enterprise and spectacular opportunity. An active place with appeal, elegance and attitude. And an incredible place to visit, explore and stay, to enjoy globally renowned visitor attractions, sport and heritage venues offering the perfect and often premium backdrop, for wedding venues, music festivals, filming locations and more.

Our role at Marketing Cheshire is to promote this incredible destination as one of the best places to visit, invest, work and live. Working with our attractions, leisure and hospitality businesses, we create and execute campaigns and multimedia activity to inspire visitors and residents about Cheshire and Warrington. We collaborate with public and private partners to celebrate and advocate for the visitor economy across the sub-region, to develop new products and give visitors the best possible experience. And our role is to capture, analyse and share data and intelligence to inform and inspire our own work and the work of our members.

As one of a growing number of accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) across the country, we collaborate with Visit England, neighbouring DMOs and others to promote our tourism offer and destinations to both a national and international audience.

As a subsidiary of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (formerly the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership) we also work with and through our local authorities to promote both the area's exceptional economic performance alongside future ambitions and opportunities, to attract business investment and talent to the area.

This annual Marketing Cheshire Business Plan, in tandem with the recently completed Destination Management Plan for Cheshire and Warrington details our objectives, audiences and activity for the 2024-25 and beyond. Following a period of transition in terms of personnel, ownership, board and organisational structure, this plan will be reviewed and updated annually.

CONTEXT AND BACKDROP

In early 2024, Marketing Cheshire produced a Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Cheshire and Warrington, following engagement with partners and members. This important strategic document for the sub-region highlights our incredible offer while describing the continuing challenges we face post pandemic and because of wider, national economic challenges.

Almost 50 million tourists visited Chester in 2022, generating £3.41bn of economic impact and supporting 35,000 jobs (STEAM). These figures are all considerably lower than in 2019. While the

situation is mirrored across much of the national visitor economy, and many of our attractions are performing well, there are significant issues to address, including:

- Sluggish or static hotel occupancy, falling behind the national average.
- Significantly lower rates of international visits compared to competitor historic cities.
- Footfall figures (in terms of growth and trend) lower than competitor destinations.

The Marketing Cheshire Business Plan is aligned with the DMP to address these challenges. It is also shaped by a range of tourism trends, including:

- The staycation phenomenon is likely to remain.
- Financial pressures and cost of living crisis are creating uncertainty.
- Inbound travel appears to be recovering more quickly, driven by North America.
- Visiting Friends and Relatives / multi-generational travel / celebration are increasing.
- Sustainability is becoming more of a factor in decision making.
- Outdoors, Wellness and Relaxation.
- Workforce issues.
- Inflationary Pressures on the sector.

In addition, longer term trends that we need to be alive to include:

- Increasing choice of destinations across the globe and competition for visitors.
- Connectivity – Ease of travel is a significant factor in consumer decisions.
- Travellers are becoming older, people are living and staying active for longer.
- Accessibility - an expectation that destinations and business are fully accessible to all.
- 'Box Office' – high end experiences shareable on social media.

The **DMP's Vision** is that by 2029 Cheshire will be nationally recognised as an aspirational destination, where visitors can be assured of premium but accessible experiences built on unique heritage, a modern and sustainable approach, cultural facilities, quality businesses, a warm welcome, and its outdoor offer. Tourism will be a thriving part of the most sustainable, inclusive, healthy and growing economy in the UK. There is a lot of work to be done across the entire visitor economy. Collaboration will be key, and Marketing Cheshire must find new and different ways of working with partners, at the same time as doing different things.

THE ROLE OF MARKETING CHESHIRE

Following the transition of the Cheshire & Warrington LEP into Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, under local authority ownership, the Terms of Reference of the Marketing Cheshire Board are changing (subject to approval by the Local Authority Joint Committee). However, as the DMO for Cheshire, and one of a growing number of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) accredited by Visit England, the core purpose of the organisation remains:

- To market Cheshire and Warrington as a great place to visit, invest, work and live.
- To **inspire** visitors and residents about our destination brands.
- To attract **business investment**.

- To provide **insights and intelligence**.
- To **advocate** for the visitor economy in Cheshire and Warrington.
- To focus on where we **create impact and add value**, where we have **knowledge and expertise** and celebrate the **Best of Cheshire** in all we do.

AUDIENCE

Our work to promote the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy will continue to target three core leisure audiences identified as the key demographics for our attractions and hospitality operators. These target audiences will be reevaluated and likely expand in the event of a successful vote on the Chester Accommodation BID (see later in plan).

Priority Segments	Type of Break	Motivations	Geography
Free and easy mini breakers, 24-45 pre-nester couples / friends, including city dwellers seeking green space	Boutique accommodation Unique events and experiences Active pursuits Food and beverage Shopping	Feeling connected Feeling excited	Connected by rail: London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Milton Keynes, North & South Wales, Ireland, Germany, Spain,
Country-loving traditionalists 55+ empty nesters	Heritage and culture Food and beverage High quality accommodation Green Spaces Shopping	Feeling connected	Up to 2-hour drive time for overnights USA
Aspirational family fun - day visits and short breaks	Events and experiences Unique attractions	Feeling connected	Cheshire, North West and Yorkshire, Midlands, North Wales, up to 2-hour drive

We will target a core business market, through our work on the Science Corridor, to promote conference venues and business tourism across Cheshire and Warrington.

In addition, place marketing activity on behalf of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and the three local authorities, promoting the sub-region as one of the best places to invest, work, live and study, will target key internal and external audiences including:

- Cheshire and Warrington business leaders
 - Focus on (but not limited to) life science, energy, net zero industries
- C&W Business networks and organisations: Chambers, BIDs, Federation of Small Business
- Government: Secretaries of State (Treasury, DBT, DESNZ, DfE), Ministers and Civil Servants
- C&W MPs (to support public affairs activity)
- Developers and investors
- Trade and local government media

KEY PROGRAMMES OF WORK

Visitor economy activity throughout the year is grouped into five distinct but interconnected workstreams which align closely to key themes in the Cheshire and Warrington DMP, alongside the support we provide to Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington. Our key priorities for 2024-25 are:

- Supporting the delivery of a Chester Accommodation BID.
- Destination campaigns that inspire visitors and residents (City with a Break, seasonal, Cheshire Day) and targeted activity across key Cheshire towns including Macclesfield.
- Development and launch of a Chester/Cheshire visitor pass.
- Support the creation of a Film Office to promote C&W as a filming location.
- Development of the Cheshire and Warrington place brand and marketing programme, activated e.g. through our presence at UKREiiF and Cheshire Science Corridor promotion.
- Build and launch a new Visit Cheshire website supported by enhanced social media and influencer marketing.

The following sections provide more details on our priorities and other key activity that will be delivered or commence in 2024-25.

1. Increase awareness and appeal of Cheshire and Warrington as a destination.

We work with transport (largely rail) operators to fund and expand multimedia destination campaigns. In addition, we partner with members to increase the budget and reach of those campaigns. We will build on that approach for key destination promotion in 2024-25 including:

- A campaign to promote overnight stays in Chester, titled **A City with a Break**, featuring advertising in the London Underground, programmatic advertising and PR, with support from rail operators and Chester partners.
- A focus on towns across Cheshire (initially piloting in Macclesfield), seeking collaboration with members, BIDs and town councils as we target key journalists and media, alongside our own social and web content.

- Seasonal activity and collaboration: Christmas, Easter, Cheshire Day.
- All campaign plans to include SMART objectives.

In addition, it is essential that Marketing Cheshire reconnects with the Travel Trade, re-establishing product Cheshire and Chester, through attendance at key events, and seeking collaboration with neighbours including Liverpool, Manchester and Wrexham. Priorities include:

- Attending at least 2 leading travel trade events per year starting in March 2025.
- Contributing to international destination marketing through English Historic Cities, who will be featuring at a North American travel trade show in 2024 – a prime opportunity to promote our links to Wrexham.

In 2023 we agreed a new contract with JSPP to deliver our public relations support and initial results are hugely encouraging. We will turbocharge our approach to PR in the year ahead by increasingly targeting social media influencers alongside mainstream media. To promote Cheshire and Warrington as a premium destination, we will also feature the array of award-winning attractions and venues in our activity.

2. Infrastructure

To effectively market Cheshire and Warrington, it is essential that we employ the best – primarily digital - tools to showcase our destination and target audiences, including:

New website and destination management system: the contract with our current web provider expires in 2024. Following a tender process, we have selected Destination Core as our new provider. In Spring/Summer we will launch an engagement programme with members to design and build our new site, to create a digital shop window featuring inspirational user-led experience, personalization and monetization.

- new www.visitcheshire.com site will launch in November 2024.
- Targets: minimum 400k visits per month, with average dwell time of +60 seconds, and 5 average page views.

Social Media: implement a new social media strategy to increase followers, engagement and profile of Cheshire and Warrington as a visitor destination. Targets include:

- Annual 5% increase in social media followers across all platforms, currently 101k across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X.
- Launch TikTok channel and production/commissioning of video content.
- Targeted approach to social media travel influencers.
- Target engagement rates: Instagram 4%, Facebook 2%, LinkedIn 2%.

Quarterly Cheshire and Chester What's On: while digital channels are the predominant tools in our arsenal, there remains a place for printed collateral, and what's on information.

- First edition published and distributed in June 2024, 36 pages, 25k print run.
- Income target for 24/25 of £15k.
- Profit in Year 1 of £5k.
- The guide will sync with the online What's On Guide on www.visitcheshire.com.

Upskilling the MC Team: as well as investing in a new website and expanding our use of social media, it is essential we continually invest in and upskill the team. This will include training and development opportunities from VisitEngland's LVEP programme, alongside bespoke learning on destination marketing, digital skills and the use of AI.

- 2 x team training sessions per annum.
- All staff have training needs identified and CPD plan in place by March 2025.

3. Develop our product and places

To enhance our visitor offer and also reignite our approach to working with the travel trade, we need to review and reimagine the products we offer across the county and city of Chester, and how we work with our members. Key activity this year includes:

Chester / Cheshire visitor pass: to encourage more people to stay longer in Cheshire and explore more of our attractions, we are conducting a feasibility study into the creation of a visitor pass, which for a fixed price offers access to a range of different venues. York has offered a pass for around a decade, while Manchester launched their own version earlier this year.

- Subject to feasibility study, launch a Chester/Cheshire visitor pass by March 2025.
- At least 15 attractions signed up to the pass.

Cheshire Film Office: Given our proximity to Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, international airports and our plethora of stately homes, landscapes and picturesque towns and villages, there is enormous potential to promote the sub-region for filming. We are already in discussions with Tatton Estates and Chester Zoo on the proposals, have had expressions of interest from other venues, and will be seeking UKSPF funding to support this activity.

- Play a supporting role in the formation of a Cheshire Film Office with a target November 2024 launch.
- Secure SPF funding for forward looking feasibility study.
- Develop proposals for a fully independent, funded Cheshire Film Office from 2025/26.

Enhancing the membership offer: as a LVEP, it is essential that we provide our members with far more than a presence on our website and access to our social media and campaigns promotion. Our role includes sharing insights and trends, learning opportunities and networking, to help our tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses navigate an increasingly complex and challenging marketplace.

- Launch our new Marketing Cheshire B2B website.
- Bring our annual programme of online and in-person learning and networking opportunities, including our annual conference, under the new brand of the **Marketing Cheshire Academy**.

4. Manage our visitor economy effectively

Marketing Cheshire Awards: following the success of the 2024 awards at Chester Cathedral our ambition is for an even bigger and better celebration of the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy in 2025. Key targets include:

- Increasing entries, in particular from Cheshire East and Warrington businesses
- Increased sponsorship – target of £8k, excluding ECW contribution
- More than 300 attendees on the night (compared to 280 in 2024)

Destination Chester: improving our insight and data, supporting the emerging Chester Tourism Plan, and continuing to deliver Destination Showcase events through the year (at least 2 more in 2024-25).

Destination Cheshire: improving member engagement and working with local authorities to develop an annual workplan and objectives for the group.

Visitor Information Centre: delivery of visitor information services in Chester as part of our SLA with Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Enhanced data and insight: we need to improve the way we capture, analyse and utilise data and insight to inform the work of Marketing Cheshire, and inform our members. We have recommissioned STEAM for 2023, but will also explore opportunities to collaborate with neighbours, and through the LVEP network, to improve data collection and reporting.

5. Chester Accommodation BID (Chester ABID)

In June and July, 27 hotels in Chester will vote on whether to form an ABID in Chester, to commence in January 2025. It would introduce a visitor charge of £2 per room per night and potentially generate more than £1m per annum over five years to invest in the city's visitor offer and promotion, on par with the existing annual budget for Marketing Cheshire as a whole.

Marketing Cheshire is working with the current Chester BID, Destination Chester and Chester Hospitality Association on the business plan and engagement with hoteliers to support the ABID and demonstrate the game-changing benefits it would bring to the city. If approved, a newly formed ABID board would decide how and through which delivery partners the money would be spent. If the ABID vote is successful, key objectives for Marketing Cheshire this year include:

- To secure a place on the ABID Board to influence and shape decisions and ensure collaboration with the wider Chester and Cheshire visitor economy
- To secure a multi-year commission to deliver key elements of the ABID business plan:
 - Promoting business conferences and events – establishing a conference bureau
 - Destination marketing and campaigns, including a new Chester city brand
 - Improving the visitor experience
 - Engagement with the travel trade

We would play a significant role in other elements within the business plan, such as investment in cultural and consumer events in Chester, but it is vital that we concentrate on our strengths,

and collaborate in other areas, to avoid spreading resources too thinly. This activity would require the recruitment of at least three additional members of staff, alongside the commissioning of external support, so will require a significant amount of managerial input.

6. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington

Following the transition of the LEP into Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington in April 2024, the organisation is re-evaluating its communications requirements. In the year ahead we will:

- **Develop a new communications protocol** for ECW and the three local authority partners and plan for opportunities following the 2024 General Election.
- **Brand Cheshire and Warrington:** our identity as a sub-region and the story we tell audiences including Government, potential investors, businesses and visitors, is currently inconsistent and uncoordinated. Work to develop a Cheshire and Warrington place brand was included on last year's delivery plan but has not progressed. It is essential that we develop a new story and identity for the sub-region, engaging our stakeholders, to support future ambitions.
- **UKREiif:** coordinate and deliver the Cheshire and Warrington presence at the UK's leading development and investment conference, including the stand build and programme, PR and contribution to the wider event programme.
- **Cheshire Science Corridor:** refresh the strategy and create a forward plan of networking and information sharing events for businesses across the sub-region

BUDGET

The following budget sets out Marketing Cheshire's position at the start of the financial year but does not include potential income and expenditure from a successful Chester ABID proposal.

Corporate Activity	Income	(2023-24)	Expenditure	(2023-24)
Local Authority SLA	£156,400	(£167,650)		(£12,000)
Partnership & Commercial	£210,000	(£185,000)		(£80,500)
LEP Core	£155,000	(£135,000)	£75,500	(£65,000)
LEP Place	£200,000	(£200,000)	£100,000	(£120,000)
Operational Staff			£332,609	(£290,891)
Operating Costs			£80,900	(£53,700)
Admin staff			£92,897	(£90,809)
Governance and overheads			£18,500	(£13,300)
Delivery Programmes	£110,000	(£160,000)	£135,800	(£140,000)
Visitor Information Centre	£245,000	(£246,250)	£240,157	(£227,123)
Total	£1,076,400	(£1,093,900)	£1,075,863	(£1,093,323)
Surplus	£537	(£577)		

COMMERCIAL STRATEGY

As outlined earlier in the report, the Chester ABID project could have a seismic impact on our resources for marketing and promoting the city and will require re-evaluation of our staffing and financial operations in future years.

We enter the new financial year in a healthy financial position, with reserves of £261k, the same level as at start of 2023-24. Our organisational target reserves level, as agreed at the MC Finance and Audit Committee is £130k, so we have sufficient headroom in the budget to manage unforeseen events and consider prudent investments.

We are maintaining our commercial approach from 2023-24, aware of the financial challenges that many of our members and wider tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses are facing. Targets for the year include:

- Retaining 90% of partners – we have held rates at the same level as last year following a 10% increase in 23/24.
- Maintaining a partnership account manager approach to provide us with business insight and provide businesses with consumer and destination insight.
- Identifying and recruiting larger tourism businesses who are not currently partners.
- Grow Destination Support Packages (DSPs) by 10% on 2023/24 (marketing packages with largest 20 tourism businesses).
- Ongoing annual partnerships with main train operating companies.
- Develop marketing packages with town councils and BIDs.

In addition, we will develop or support new opportunities and commercial models including:

- Chester ABID and business plan.
- Launch the quarterly What's On guide.
- Increase sponsorship income for the Marketing Cheshire Awards.

The Managing Director and Head of Commercial will also engage with board members to develop a new commercial strategy from April 2025, including a review of best practice across the LVEP network and consideration of new funding models to provide financial growth and sustainability.

MARKETING CHESHIRE BOARD

A report and new terms of reference for the Marketing Cheshire Board will be presented to the Local Authority Joint Committee for approval in summer 2025. They will remove legal and financial accountabilities from board members so that they can instead focus on influencing, advising and shaping the activity and performance of the organisation.

The Board will meet every two months, with at least one in two meetings taking place in person at an attraction or member venue across the sub-region. Additional informal meetings and workshops may take place throughout the year. Minutes and papers will be issued one week prior to the meetings, including insight reports and a forward calendar of activity.

Under the new terms of reference, individual board members will take on additional advisory responsibilities for key programmes of work set out in the delivery plan.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

As detailed in our work programme, under **Managing our visitor economy effectively**, we will improve the way we capture, analyse and report data and insight to the Marketing Cheshire Board, Local Authority Joint Committee and to our members. This will include data on the performance of Marketing Cheshire alongside the wider performance of the Cheshire and Warrington visitor economy.

This will in turn enhance the performance culture within the organisation. This will include a more granular analysis of, for example, our digital activity, beyond website visitor numbers and social media reach, to understand our impact and continually challenge the way we work.

We have recommissioned a STEAM economic impact report for 2023 and anticipate receiving it by the summer. In addition, from July we will create a quarterly Marketing Cheshire report and dashboard, to include:

- STR data on occupancy and ADR
- Short-term lets data from Visit England
- Footfall data
- Commercial income and partnerships
- Visitcheshire.com website: visitor numbers, dwell time, source
- Social media / e-newsletters: engagement, Click Through Rates, open rates
- PR reach
- Visa spend data

We are also exploring the potential of sentiment tracking data for our destinations, cost permitting. However, this may be something that we can fund for Chester with an ABID in place.

STAFF AND PRIORITIES

The Marketing Cheshire team has 11 FTE members of staff, of whom 4.5 FTE work in the VIC.

Cristian Marcucci, Managing Director

Business planning and performance, LA SLAs, ABID development, place branding, PR strategy, travel trade strategy.

Liam Hartzenberg, Head of Marketing

Strategic marketing, coordination of destination campaigns, stakeholder management, place marketing and branding projects (eg Science Corridor).

Ashley Shacklady, Head of Sales

Partnership account management, DSPs, commercial management, town councils, What's On Guide, Hospitality Connect, Visitor Pass, Transport Operator Partnerships, sponsorship.

Fiona Bebbington, Head of Corporate Events

UKREiIF, Marketing Cheshire Awards, Cheshire Science Corridor events and business liaison, business visits and events, support for ECW events, ECW social media, MC corporate events.

Leanne Eaton, Sales Manager

Account Management, new partnerships, MC Academy, digital sales, website support, What's On.

Jon Robinson, Creative and Content Lead

Content development, brand support, creative delivery, data and insight reporting, Snapsea, support on destination campaigns.

Pip Meachin, Digital Manager

Destination and corporate websites (including visit rebuild in 2024), ecomms, MC corporate social, STEAM, ticketing.

Wami Cracknell, Marketing Intern

Cheshire Day, research, content creation, website support.

Anna Williams, Marketing and PR Consultant

Visit social content, social media strategy, campaigns support, influencer management.

DRAFT

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Visitor Economy

- 1. Marketing Cheshire Awards:** More than 280 people attended a hugely successful evening at Chester Cathedral in March. Anecdotal feedback was very strong, although we have struggled for responses to our post-event survey. Planning is underway for March 2025 including sourcing of a venue. We are reviewing award categories for next year and looking to include a new events and festivals award. We will launch the 2025 awards in June and include publicity at our annual conference and a webinar – with a particular drive for more Cheshire East and Warrington submissions, and 300+ attendees on the night.
- 2. What's On Guide:** New quarterly guide for Cheshire and Chester to replace Ultimate Map. First edition will be distributed in June for July – September. We have increased planned pagination from 32 to 36 pages for the first edition to meet demand from advertisers, and project a £4k profit from this edition alone, more than we generated from the Ultimate Map in 23/24. The guide will include Chester and Cheshire maps, have a 25k print run and be distributed to Liverpool, Manchester, Midlands, Wirral, North Wales across strategic sites including VIC's, train stations and service stations. There will also be a link available for those smaller outlet and accommodation providers to order. Advertisers include Chester Zoo, Beeston Castle, Chester Cathedral, Jodrell Bank, Tatton Park, Gullivers and Bewilderwood.
- 3. Data and Insight:** We have commissioned STEAM for 2023 and are chasing final contributions from partners. We estimate receipt of the report in summer. Conversations are ongoing with potential partners and providers on improvements to data capture and reporting.

Strategic Projects

- 4. ABID:** at the time of writing, the business plan for the ABID is nearing completion, and will be sent with personalised letters to all hotels in the ABID area. The plan includes fully costed proposals for how the visitor charge income will be spent to increase overnight stays by attracting more business events and conferences, staging more consumer events and festivals, working with the travel trade and developing our products (e.g. visitor pass). Hoteliers will vote on the proposed ABID in June and July, with an announcement mid-July.
- 5. Visitor Pass:** Exploring the creation of a single pass for attractions in Chester and Cheshire to encourage more visitors to stay for longer and enjoy more of our attractions in a single visit. Work builds on and supersedes the online packing tool feasibility study, and we are in talks with potential providers to understand the requirements and opportunities of a pass for Cheshire, as well as learning from the experience of York and Manchester.

6. **Marketing Cheshire website:** Following an open tender process, we have selected Destination Core as our new website partner when our current contract with Simple View ends (Dec 2024). We are now working on a build and launch plan with the provider, to include extensive partner engagement over summer, with a target launch date in November.
7. **Film Office:** Met with Tatton Estates and Chester Zoo and agreed support for the creation of a Cheshire Film Office by November 2024 to promote the sub-region as a filming location and draw both economic and tourist promotion benefits. A bid to the three local authorities for UKSPF funding will be submitted in the coming weeks, with the money used to fund a feasibility study into the formation of an independent and sustainable Film Office and approach.

Marketing Campaigns and Content

8. **A City with a Break:** This summer we will be launching an OOH and digital campaign for Chester, promoting the destination as a boutique city with a wealth of opportunities and attractions on its doorstep. We have secured space at a significant discount on the London Underground, and support from train operators and partners. Activity will include OOH, social media and digital programmatic promotion between June and November.
9. **Transport Campaigns:** All campaigns concluded, results below.

TfW

- Reach: 2,977,932
- Impressions: 6,446,638
- Clicks: 48,418
- CPC: £0.52p (average across all ad sets)

Avanti

- Total Reach: 2,081,011
- Total Impressions: 3,443,150
- Total Clicks: 14,188
- Cost per click £0.45p (average across all ad sets)

10. Website performance:

Jan – March 2024:

- 1.2m visits (102% up from Jan – March 2023)
- 285k users (6% up)
- 4.24 pages viewed per visit (50% up)
- 1m 07s dwell time
- Blog viewed 77,871 times (up 156%)

April 2024

- 413k visits
- 98k users
- 4.21 average pages viewed per user
- Dwell time 1m 6s

11. **Ecomms:** Four eshots sent over the period to 14k contacts with open rate between 28% - 32.5% and click through rate between 1.7% - 2.2%.

Enterprise Cheshire + Warrington

12. **LEP > ECW Transition:** New ECW brand and organisation launched in April with low-key stakeholder and partner publicity due to the pre-election period. Formal ECW launch to take place following LA Joint Committee on 21st July.

Enterprise
Cheshire +
Warrington

13. **UKREiif:** Cheshire and Warrington will once again have a strong presence at the UK's leading investment and infrastructure conference. £10k of sponsorship secured to support activity including a drinks reception featuring Cheshire products.

Partnerships

Income & Renewals

14. A new commercial rate card has been produced this year to support renewals and new partnerships:

- 40 renewals to date this year, £22k income received.
- New partners include Hawarden Estate; Milbys; Moxy; Hole in the Wand; 744 Experience flight simulator; Dead Good Ghost Tour; Crewe Town Council; and additional Farm Stay partners.
- £20k confirmed from partners for seasonal campaigns and digital activity so far in this financial year.

Partner Meetings

- **Destination Cheshire:** meeting at the National Waterways Museum, 23 April. Shared MC priorities for 24/25 including visitor pass and film office. Subsequent meeting with DC and MC chairs, agreed to start work on a forward plan for the group, to include member engagement.
- **Destination Chester:** Meeting at the RIC on 9th May, included items on the Chester events market and a roadmap for redevelopment of the Chester Castle area.
- **MC Conference preparation:** the agenda is currently being finalised for the annual conference at The Queen Hotel, Chester on 3rd July and will be circulated to board members in May.
- **Local Authority SLAs:** held in April to update local authority partners on detailed progress against agreed objectives.