

**Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Board
Thursday 11th February 2021 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank (“TB”) (Chair)
Joe Manning (“JM”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Steven Broomhead (“SB”)
Andy Lyon (“AL”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
Rupert Collis (“RC”)
Gemma Davies (“GD”)

In Attendance: Philip Cox (“PC”) (observer)
Nicola Said (“NS”)
Juliette Littleton (“JL”)

Apologies: Clare Hayward (“CH”)

1. Opening by the Chairman and Welcome

TB thanked the board for joining the call and welcomed Juliette Littleton, Finance Manager to her first Board meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

TB asked Board members to advise of any declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 12th November 2020 were correct.

TB confirmed that the actions related to the letter to Debbie Bland and the circulation of Audit meeting minutes had been actioned. The points relating to the budget and cost review will be addressed in the finance section of today’s meeting.

4. Chair Introduction

TB advised that we need to develop a clear strategy for the organisation and for Cheshire as we come out of the pandemic. It is our responsibility to look at the medium and long-term priorities as well as the immediate recovery following the pandemic. The hospitality and retail industries have been particularly hard hit and it is important that we focus on getting these businesses back up and running.

PC advised that the LEP are putting together a recovery and delivery plan which will go out to consultation to a wide range of stakeholders early next month. PC also acknowledged that the retail and hospitality industries have been hit hardest by the pandemic and MC will be critical in getting the

hospitality and Visitor Economy up and running again. With a lot of retail businesses being brought online there is a need to review what the city centres and high streets will look like going forward and where the retail workers are going to find work.

GD referred to the Savills reimagining document and advised that the council are in discussions with the key stakeholders regarding the future of retail and what role the public sector can play in this.

TB stated that with such a broad remit there is a need for the Board to decide what we will deliver on over the next few years. We cannot do everything so should concentrate on one or two things that we can do really well that will make a difference.

It was agreed that the Board should have a strategy day to discuss this further and agree our vision, values and mission once we have recruited our new board members – **action SP to look at potential dates in a month's time.**

Action SP

EU stated that it would be useful in advance of the strategy day to pull together the best practice from other DMOs and Visitor Information Centres to see how they promote themselves. SCB advised VB give a prize for the best VIC in the country therefore could be worthwhile to review what the winners have done - **action JM/NS to review, include international DMOs.**

Action JM/NS

SCB stated that MC will have a very big role to play in the safe reopening of accommodation providers. It was agreed that international holidays may not go ahead this year therefore it will be important to market Cheshire and Warrington as a holiday destination.

To ensure we align our messaging it was questioned whether we have an understanding of what visitors are looking for. NS advised that a trends and sentiments session is taking place on Monday with the DC Network. NS will pull together learnings from this session.

Action NS

EU advised that the NT are almost looking at reverse marketing so that that the NT are not overwhelmed. NS stated that we could make an incremental difference by positioning offers that will not be in as much demand.

SCB stated that as we begin to open up there is an opportunity to dovetail into the LEP's initiative regarding youth employment, as there will be a big requirement for seasonal support.

AL questioned if there is a piece of work, we could do based around promoting C&W as a place to relocate to. There are also concerns that university students will move out of the area to access employment. TB agreed and stated that we need to create opportunities to keep graduates in the area, perhaps look at retraining options to move from retail to hospitality roles.

SCB stated that we have great resource with the Colleges, is there a way we can tie into this to create an online learning short course to get local people trained up to work in the hospitality industry.

AL stated that the FE Colleges will require funding to do this, may cause issues if the course has no qualification at the end of it.

PC and TB agreed to discuss this further outside the meeting.

**Action
PC/TB**

PC sounded a note of caution around advertising Cheshire as a place to relocate to as there is huge sensitivity on building on green field development. Due to housing numbers and locations conversations need to take place with the 3 local authorities prior to developing a marketing campaign on this.

MG advised that there is a big trend to redevelop office space into smaller flats, this will help regenerate our town centres. There is a huge uncertainty on what will happen next, can we learn from the recovery from the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001.

5. Board Briefing Note / CEO Report

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

- JM referred board members to letter to the PM appended to the CEO report which outlined our concerns. We are hearing through our networks that businesses are increasingly concerned about the amount of debt they are incurring and not knowing when the revenue will return. Another concern is Mental Health, particularly of business owners due to uncertainty of the tier restrictions changing at short notice and therefore the need to destroy stock.
- There may be an opportunity for MC to provide more support to our networks and to advise them what support is available to them. There is also a need to focus on the positives to build a better future in 2021 and beyond.
- We had some very strong Comms and marketing activity which gained strong coverage including national coverage, around the Christmas period over the shop local campaign.
- We are producing a monthly article for Cheshire Life magazine
- With regard to Destination Chester, Jamie Christon has agreed to be the Chair of the group.
- Operations and staffing, staff have continued to operate flexibly with staff supporting the Growth Hub and the VIC staff developing an online shop and supporting the Heritage Action Zone project.
- We have been looking to support staff wellbeing particularly where childcare requires flexibility.

RC questioned whether the success of the Christmas gift guide could be rolled out to other key events in the year such as Easter. JM advised that we are currently working on Valentine's Day. NS advised that the pandemic has given the opportunity to develop really interesting content and we will continue to build upon this work.

SB referred to the letter to the PM and stated that the timetable for a response will be approx. 3 months. MC needs to be influencer here.

SCB stated that it is essential that we build upon digital expertise, there is a key opportunity here to offer a reduced fee to partners for ongoing recovery marketing and digital messaging will be key to this.

JM advised that part of the work we are doing is to continue to support our partners and we do want to start conversations with partners in the coming months regarding charging membership fees.

EU questioned timing how are we forward planning and preparing content. Have we also looked at active partnerships with other publishers to gain a reciprocal advantage? NS advised that we have guest blogs from local influencers to help promotion. We are working on a 12-month marketing strategy, including promoting Cheshire Day at the end of March. We are also actively promoting pre-booking.

6. 2020/21 Q3 Financial Report

TB introduced DW give an overview of the company finances.

DW thanked SB for joining the Audit Group and for attending the meeting on the 27th January and referred Board member to the minutes from that meeting included within the board pack.

The Audit Group continue to update and monitor the cashflow and reserves situation to ensure we do not put ourselves in a position where we do not have adequate reserves required for wind up costs.

JL referred Board members to the Q3 report included within the board pack and ran through the key elements of the report advising that the Audit Group are comfortable with the reported loss in the current circumstances and that our reserves, which are above our required wind-up costs were sufficient to cover the loss.

EU questioned given that we have the sustainability from the LEP how do the scenarios play through to what our commitments are. JM advised that the LEP and MC invoice against different budget lines. We have a series of complimentary lines against different activities. It is a work in progress, and we hope to create greater transparency going forward.

PC stated that the LEP and MC employees work together as a team and the work of MC within the Growth Hub has been extremely valuable, especially with the need to move quickly to access funding from BEIS.

DW advised that that the Audit Group work very closely with Ian Brooks, Finance and Commercial Director at the LEP and stated that an exercise has taken place to look at the performance of both the LEP and MC individually and the entities together on a joint basis.

TB stated that it is important to have distinction between the financial performance of MC and the LEP. As a Board it is important that we are focussed on the success of MC.

7. Budget 2021/22 Scenarios

AL questioned how realistic it is that MC will achieve commercial income.

JM advised that the 2020 budget has been included within the scenarios to show what income we would have expected if it had been a normal year and the other important comparison is to show the level of increase in LEP funding. The breakeven scenario assumes that the Growth Hub income continues.

JM's advice to the Board is that we should pursue commercial income, difficulty is knowing the level of commercial income. We believe this is the right strategic direction to take. In the event that commercial income is not forthcoming we will have to undertake a cost saving exercise at the end of Q1.

NS reiterated the need to pursue commercial income this year, but we need to be prudent on what commercial income we are expecting and to plan commercial activity accordingly. This would include looking at allowing businesses to pay later, reducing the number of guides that are produced. Christmas Market discussions will need to take place with the council before planning in any income from this project.

RC questioned whether we should retain our membership fee levels to ensure the partners value the service provided. NS stated that going forward we will look at our offer to ensure it is relevant and will aim to get back to normal levels in the next financial year.

JM advised that informal conversations have taken place with partners we will continue these conversations once we have agreement from the Board on the budget. In a couple of months we hope to have a clearer picture of the level of demand and ability to pay. Need to be seen to be supporting the sector. We will start to have more structured conversations if the board are supportive.

GD stated that for the partners it is a cashflow problem, we need to be coordinated and agree a timescale with the BID to ensure businesses are not getting asked for funds from several organisations at the same time.

JM/NS advised that we work closely with the BID and are having upfront conversations to ensure that what we are doing is achievable and sensitive at the same time.

TB and JM thanked David and Jules for their hard work particularly to Jules for getting to grip with the finances so quickly.

8. Any Other Business.

NS stated that we are actively promoted National Women's Day on the 8th March and are looking for short videos and would encourage Eleanor, Sarah and Gemma to enter a video.

SCB stated that the management of the Grant Scheme out to businesses has been really efficient and has been a lifesaver to businesses, therefore commended the Councils for their hard work on this.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on the Thursday 6th May 2021 – via Microsoft Teams

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

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DRAFT