



# **Board Papers**

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023**

# Agenda

## Virtual Board Meeting

### Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023– 8am

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Please join via Teams video conference [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 391 179 141 938 Passcode: XTNxwx

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 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	TB	
08:15am	4 Board Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment update</li> <li>- Board thank you</li> </ul>	TB TB EU / AL	
08:25am	5 Chief Executive Report/Draft delivery plan	JM	(Board Paper 256)
08:45am	6 Visit Britain priorities and DMO review	NS	
09:15am	7 Company Finances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2022/2023 Q3 Financial Report</li> <li>- Approach to Budgeting 2023/2024</li> </ul>	IB IB	
09:45am	8 A.O.B		
10:00am	9 Close		

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held via Microsoft Teams  
On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – 8am**

**Present:** Trevor Brocklebank – Chair (“TB”)  
Joe Manning (“JM”)  
**Marketing Cheshire  
Directors** Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)  
Andy Lyon (“AL”)  
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)  
Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)  
Rob Charnley (“RC”)  
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)  
Jamie Christon (“JC”)  
David Walker (“DW”)  
Peter Mearns (“PM”)  
Philip Cox (“PC”)

**In Attendance:** Nicola Said (“NS”)  
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

**Apologies:** Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)  
Rob McKay (“RM”)  
Ian Brooks (“IB”)

- **Opening by the Chairman and Welcome**

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting. It was confirmed that apologies had been received from TO and RM.

- **Declarations of Interest**

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

- **Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting**

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 were correct.

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

- **Risk Register**

TB requested that Board members delegate authority to the audit committee to monitor the risks and report any concerns by exception to the main Board. The Board members present approved the request.

- **Follow up from the Strategy Day**

JM referred to the MC Strategy Day that took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> November and advised that a very positive follow up session took place with the Destination Cheshire Partnership which was well attended and had a very collaborative feel to the session and a good understanding of the wider place positioning. The next steps include using the period Jan to March to hold workshops to research the ‘Cheshire Story’ with various consumer and business groups across Cheshire, in time for Cheshire Day on the 30<sup>th</sup> March.

A session also took place at Chester Zoo around animal and plant sciences across Cheshire, attended by delegates from Chester University and Liverpool University Veterinary School. This fits in with the Cheshire story of a great place to live, work and visit.

It was also confirmed that internal work is taking place within Marketing Cheshire around the key focus of activity in the next financial year being orientated around the One City Plan, Chester Management through Destination Chester as well as the Live, Study, Work and Invest elements. We will start to evaluate this work with our partners to identify where we can add more value. IB, JM and NS are working on a full detailed business plan which will be shared with the Board in the New Year.

PC advised that one of the outcomes of the wider LEP review has been the emphasis from the Local Authority partners have put on Marketing Cheshire to work on the Live, Work, Visit, Study agenda and for the LEP to invest a proportion of the LEP budget on this Place Marketing work.

AL suggested that it would also be beneficial to have an invest group workshop to identify why businesses invest in Cheshire. It was confirmed that this is a key area that the LEP are looking to align across the two organisations.

SCB stated that there is huge potential with the world Science events, it was confirmed that the LEP directors are looking to prioritise these areas. As part of the Science Corridor marketing the aim is to highlight these key events and stories and we are looking at holding a symposium in June promote this.

It was stated that we have quirky businesses in Cheshire with fantastic back stories that should be included in the promotion of why Cheshire is a great place to be doing business in Cheshire.

It was stated that we should as a county use what we are doing in terms of our marketing to collectively promote the county at events such as COP15. It was confirmed that we are looking at creating a toolkit to enable our partners and businesses to act as ambassadors for the county.

CW&C are launching its origin brand for Ellesmere Port which would fit well with the Science Corridor.

- **Board Briefing Note / CEO Report**

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

- Joe advised formally that he will be leaving MC to take up a new role in the New Year and thanked board members for their support over the past couple of years.
- Nicola and Joe attended a tourism alliance conference which highlighted parallels to 2008. Conflicting reporting came out of the conference with concerns voiced around the series of crisis over the past few years. However, it was highlighted that post covid consumers want to get out and enjoy the visitor economy, therefore spending money.
- Good press coverage particularly the Time Out article and the Telegraph article
- The review work on the Visitor Information Centre has commenced, and we are engaged with partners to review a set of strategic questions around what the best way is to provide information to visitors. Secondly, we have a set of operational questions which look at the centre as it currently functions, looking at ways to generate additional revenue, cost savings and location of the centre.

We will aim to provide the board with an update on this work in approx. 6 months' time.

- The Sustainability conference went well with just under fifty delegates in attendance. There is a growing audience for us to step into the business advice work.
- It was advised that sadly Debbie Bland, our former Finance Manager passed away in September and the work Debbie put in to get us through the covid period was highlighted and it was advised that we have made a small donation to the East Cheshire Hospice where Debbie received end of life care.

#### **Comments from Board**

- The board thanked Joe for his work over the past few years commenting that we are in a much more inclusive position representative of the whole Cheshire and Warrington area.
- It was asked what the plans are for Joe's succession. TB also advised that his Chairmanship is also up in March so we will need to be looking at a succession plan for both roles.

PC advised that the LEP are looking at succession planning and the immediate priority will be to recruit an interim replacement for Joe to enable the LEP to take the time to find the right permanent replacement for Joe's role. PC emphasised that MC has a very important future role so it will be key that the person has the skills to carry out the MC role.

The Board also thanked Trevor for his commitment over the past 3 years.

- **DMO review**

NS referred to the slides in the Board pack from the Visit England (VE) / DCMS roundtable that TB attended in October.

Two main updates from the roundtable were: -

- The criteria to become a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) has been streamlined and the expression of interest process has started for DMOs who would like to consider themselves as LVEPs with the formal application process taking place in the spring. NS will be reviewing the forms and will start the process to apply formally in the New Year.
- Newcastle and Gateshead have been chosen as the destination pilot, the goal being to demonstrate the impact of the additional funding.

JM advised that the distinction between LVEPs and Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs) is confusing and is creating some challenges. NS stated that this is part of the reason for the pilot scheme.

It was suggested that we need clarity from DCMS on the approach to this process. TB advised that the initial plan is to look at creating the LVEPs and to get consistency and uniformity over the next couple of years. It was agreed that we need to pull together our intelligence to report to VE on how our businesses have performed and we will continue to have these conversations with VE.

PC stated that the issue is around lack of funding, the pilot scheme in Newcastle and Gateshead will help to justify the impact of the funding. We have a lot of expertise at the LEP, especially within the Growth Hub to support businesses and provide resource, therefore we are in a good position to provide this ongoing support.

NS advised that we will review the opportunities that exist in applying for the LVEP status such as data and intelligence therefore identifying the opportunities that come through this process. NS to review these opportunities in advance of the next board meeting.

It was suggested that as part of the data collection process we should encourage collaboration with the Destination partners to collect this data to all work together. NS advised that we are looking to transform our partnership to a means to obtain greater data and the MC team are keen to develop this process.

It was questioned whether there is an opportunity to look at collaborative ways of working across boundaries. JM advised we have been collaborating more with the NW DMOs around sharing information what we have not done is got together around specific target areas or looked at international gateway work, the DDP would allow us to do this by creating the resource. With the NW DMOs we collaborate at CEO level but tends to be closed doors when it comes to funding discussions.

It was emphasised that there is a huge amount of work taking place at a regional level to look at making Cheshire and Warrington an integral place to visit in the Northwest. Another opportunity is the Open at Hoylake and Eurovision in Liverpool.

- **Company Finances**

TB introduced DW to give an overview of the company finances.

DW referred Board members to the current YTD report included within the board pack advising that the operating result is better than budgeted returning a small deficit. DW ran through the key elements of the report noting that the Audit Committee are comfortable with the cash position and use of reserves.

PC confirmed that the employee pay award has been processed in line with previous discussions.

JM advised that the account management approach is enthusing the MC team and thanked the team for their hard work.

Additional funding from Local Authority partners has allowed us to work on more activity. There is a need to look at other funding opportunities such as a corporate or sponsorship approach.

- **Any Other Business**

It was suggested that we should bring the next board forward a week to allow Joe to attend before he leaves – **action SP to look at alternative date.**

It was suggested that the new Chair and CEO should meet the board prior to the May board meeting – **PC to review**

**Future Board Meetings**

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023 (date to be reviewed)

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023

Thursday 14 December 2023

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

**1<sup>st</sup> February 2023**

## **Chief Executive update**

### **Paper 256**

#### **1. Introduction**

This is my final report as Chief Executive of Marketing Cheshire. Thank you again for all your support and I look forward to seeing Marketing Cheshire go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

#### **2. Visitor economy summary**

The period leading up to Christmas was mixed in terms of destination performance. Occupancy in December saw growth compared with December 2021. Overall occupancy increased to 69% across Cheshire and Warrington from 57% the previous year with Chester seeing occupancy at 75% compared with 63% last year. In addition, rate has grown slightly in line with inflation.

Over the Christmas period there was an extensive and creative events programme across Cheshire and Warrington which we maximised in our marketing activity. Generally, events performed well, though with consumers being affected by the cost of living, they tended to choose 'tried and tested' experiences with guaranteed value for money or those at low cost, rather than some of the newer and more premium experiences. Chester Christmas Market, in its 10<sup>th</sup> year was the 'best ever' according to traders and consumers, evidence that our new model of delivery for this has been a positive step forward.

#### **3. Recruitment and interim cover**

As outlined by Philip Cox, we have taken the opportunity of the Christmas break to review job descriptions and have decided to bring together parts of mine and Nicola's role to create a Managing Director, Marketing Cheshire. This will be a key post within the LEP's senior leadership team and will have responsibility for overseeing Marketing Cheshire's work on visitor economy marketing and expanding it to cover all aspects of marketing Cheshire and Warrington as a great place to live, work, study and invest as well as to visit. The post will also be responsible for the LEP's PR and corporate communications and for gathering business intelligence and providing ongoing support to businesses in the retail, hospitality and visitor economies. To work alongside the Managing Director, we are proposing to recruit a Marketing Manager for Marketing Cheshire who will be responsible for much of the day-to-day delivery of Marketing Cheshire's work. We recognise that getting this recruitment right is critical and may take some time. We have appointed search agents and ask that board members use their networks to recommend candidates.

In the interim the LEP will provide additional senior management time to Marketing Cheshire through Philip Cox and Ian Brooks. We are also recruiting for an interim management role that will keep up progress on Destination Chester, Destination Cheshire and the Local Visitor Economy Partnership accreditation process. This role will provide management oversight for the existing team in line with our 2023/23 delivery plan. Finally, we are in discussions with Cheshire West and Chester on the best approach for our visitor information review in Chester. We have developed a full brief and work scope with colleagues in the Council and are waiting to agree next steps on the approach.

#### **4. 2023/2024 Marketing Cheshire draft delivery plan**

As part of our new strategic direction and to ensure a smooth transition into the new management arrangements we have developed a delivery plan for 2023/2024, including the first three months of the year. The team have been fully engaged in its development and are enthusiastic and motivated about our new direction. We will provide a more detailed verbal update on the delivery plan during the board meeting. The next step is to develop alongside LEP colleagues at the Away Day on 8<sup>th</sup> February. It will be integrated into the full LEP delivery plan and brought to the Board for sign off.

Priorities within the delivery plan over the next few months are

- Shaping the relaunch of the Cheshire Science Corridor.
- Working with our three Council partners to promote Cheshire and Warrington at UKREiif.
- Using 'Cheshire Day' as part of brand development for the Cheshire story.
- Scoping the VIC review and agree approach with CW&C.
- Launching consumer campaigns for both Chester and Cheshire.
- Delivering Marketing Cheshire Awards at The Halliwell Jones Stadium on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
- Developing the partnership proposition including strengthened account management.

#### **5. Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Status and engagement with Visit Britain**

The LVEP accreditation process has commenced, and we have submitted an expression of interest. Once reviewed we will be invited to submit a full application, the process for which will open in about March / April. We are positive Marketing Cheshire will be successful in obtaining LVEP status, as part of Nicola's new role she will be supporting DMO's to gain the accreditation but also on an ongoing basis – through an agreed MOU which will identify priority areas for Marketing Cheshire to grow and achieve greater impact.

We also hosted a positive visit from Visit England / Visit Britain's Chief Executive, Patricia Yates. This included visits to Chester Zoo and Jodrell Bank as well as time with the Chester Hospitality Association at the Chester Grosvenor.

#### **6. Spotlight on PR and Media coverage**

Through our work with Travel Tappers we are continuing to generate some fantastic PR pieces, which showcase the destination in a positive light.

Overall, in 2022 we had:

- 131 articles, print and online.
- Print: 72 articles, audience 8.6m, impact 7.5m



- Online: 59 articles, audience 3.9m, impact 81.4m
- Overall audience: 12.3m
- Overall impact: 88.9m

A Deck showing the highlights from the last quarter will be circulated to Board members early next week.

A variety of media visited Chester and Cheshire in 2022 at the invitation of Marketing Cheshire and Destination Chester, including The Guardian, Time Out, Reclaim, Cheshire Life, Birmingham Mail, This Is Leeds, Express & Star, National World, Luxuria Lifestyle, Northern Soul, and the bloggers Love Travelling, Claire's Itchy Feet, Worldwidewriter, and Beau Monde Traveler. We also assisted with inviting media to the opening of Chester Market, securing a visit from Sarah Barrell, Senior Editor at National Geographic Traveller UK and contributing editor to BBC Good Food. We arranged a visit for 2023 by national travel writer Lottie Gross, who will be researching her new dog-friendly book for Bloomsbury.

**The press trip by the UK editor of Time Out resulted in Cheshire being named as one of this prestigious title's Top 15 destinations to visit in 2023.** This was promoted by Time Out in a special marketing campaign as well as a feature on its high-ranking website. Other major coverage achieved with our help included Fiona Whitty's feature on family friendly Chester for The Sunday Mirror, Daily Star and multiple regional Reach newspapers, Mary Novakovich's city guide to Chester for The Lady, Richard Webber's vegan guide to Chester for Vegan Food & Living; David Anderson's profile of Nantwich for The Telegraph; and the inclusion of Carden Park and Oddfellows on the Park in a feature in the Sunday Times. Cheshire also gained various mentions in the national, regional and local press on subjects including new events and attractions opening in the county in 2022, city breaks, family-friendly days out in school holidays, the pending arrival of Wildes Chester, the launch of the Ice Cream Farm's drive-in, seasonal news, dog-friendly hotels and more. Travel Tappers also continued to circulate free media and co-hosting opportunities to Marketing Cheshire's partners, a time-efficient approach and an effective way of consistently highlighting the PR benefit of membership of Marketing Cheshire.

## **7. Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Chester**

The VIC team were pleased to sell the 5000th copy of the range of 'Our Guides'. Further titles are in preparation. Jess and Martin both delivered well received local history presentations at Chester's Stanley Palace history event in early December. Sales at the VIC were up, both compared to the last two years and the very successful performance of 2019. A broader range of Christmas merchandise is now offered and is available all year round to catch the summer visitor looking plan. Christmas baubles continue to be popular even in the height of summer. The VIC team will be attending the 2023 Chester Heritage Festival 'drop in' session in January and plan to be even more involved in this year's festival, which will be held in June.

## **8. Marketing and Digital**

The Christmas marketing activity performed well, and it was positive to see our adverts at key strategic outdoor locations across the North West and Midlands. The partnership with Transport for Wales achieved additional value, with Chester creative being included in their main campaign and joint social media activity achieving high numbers of visits. During November and December, the website had 365,118 visits with 640,424 page views (this is 5.84% up on pre covid 2019).

During this period the Christmas Market in Chester was the most viewed page with 56,510 views. Other Christmas content was also popular. Popular pages included: Where to see Santa, New Year's Eve, Shopping in Chester, What's on and Christmas Light Trails. Overall Christmas content had 240,285 views during this period.

The paid Christmas social campaign performed well, with a total reach of 738,560 and 8,631 clicks through to the Christmas hub on the website. In addition to this, we also commissioned a 'social media friendly' shorter edit of the viral Matt Baker Christmas in Chester film, which we then used in a targeted advert, again across the Meta network, but this time to a slightly more local audience. The video ad performed well with a total reach of 346,431. Organic social continues to drive engagement and clicks to the website with a total organic reach across all platforms over the Christmas period (Oct-Dec 2022) of 495,371. Our total audience across all platforms is now 95,500. We are also seeing good numbers for our website content. Referrals to the site from social media were up 11% comparing the same period in 2021 with significant uplift in referrals from our Instagram channel and stories. Our blog had 19,917 views. Most viewed stories include *Best Places for Afternoon Tea in Chester* and *Places to Visit with Under 5s*.

Through Destination Chester and Destination Cheshire we are developing our marketing campaigns for 2023, starting the year with New Year, New adventures and pulling out the deals and offers that many businesses have during this season. We are continuing our partnerships with train operating companies, looking at a joint campaign with Transport for Wales in the Spring and similar joint promotion with Northern Rail who have joined as partners.

## **9. People and operations**

As part of the LEP review we are working to update staff terms and conditions and ensure that everything is aligned between Marketing Cheshire and the LEP. We are also speaking to the Riverside Innovation Centre about our office accommodation and are looking at taking a new room. This will be a better room for the team and allow us to make some small cost savings.

Finally, I would like to put in writing my thanks to Andy Lyon and Eleanor Underhill, who are both standing down from the Marketing Cheshire board. Andy as he has served his six-year term and Eleanor due to her retirement from the National Trust. They have been great champions of the organisation and region. We are giving consideration to next steps on Board recruitment.

**Joe Manning, Marketing Cheshire**