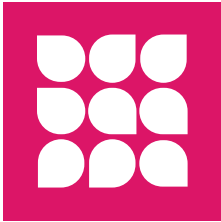


**Dorset
Chamber**

DORSET CHAMBER

ANNUAL REVIEW **2020-21**



Welcome to Dorset Chamber's annual review for the year ending 31st March 2021

The Chamber has faced arguably the most challenging 12 months in its 72-year history yet it has also embraced change and undergone more rapid transformation than at any time in living memory.

This annual review reflects upon these achievements and challenges, while looking forward with confidence to the future for businesses in Dorset and the local economy.

Clearly, it has been a extremely challenging time for the vast majority of businesses – especially those who were mandated to close during the lockdowns – and particularly in such hard-pressed sectors as events, retail, leisure, tourism and hospitality.

Dorset Chamber – the county's leading business support organisation – has done its utmost to help not just its members but the wider business community during this rollercoaster year.

We've launched our first ever programme of virtual networking on Zoom, which has proved tremendously popular. Other innovations have included a new membership model and my regular video updates on LinkedIn to signpost support available.

As the 'voice of business', we've championed Dorset and thrown our weight behind the outstanding work of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) in lobbying for greater business support at the highest level at Westminster.

Partnership working with Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), BCP Council and Dorset Council has also worked incredibly well.

The LEP-funded Dorset Gateway support service – delivered by the Chamber for all businesses in the county – has been an absolute lifeline for many firms.

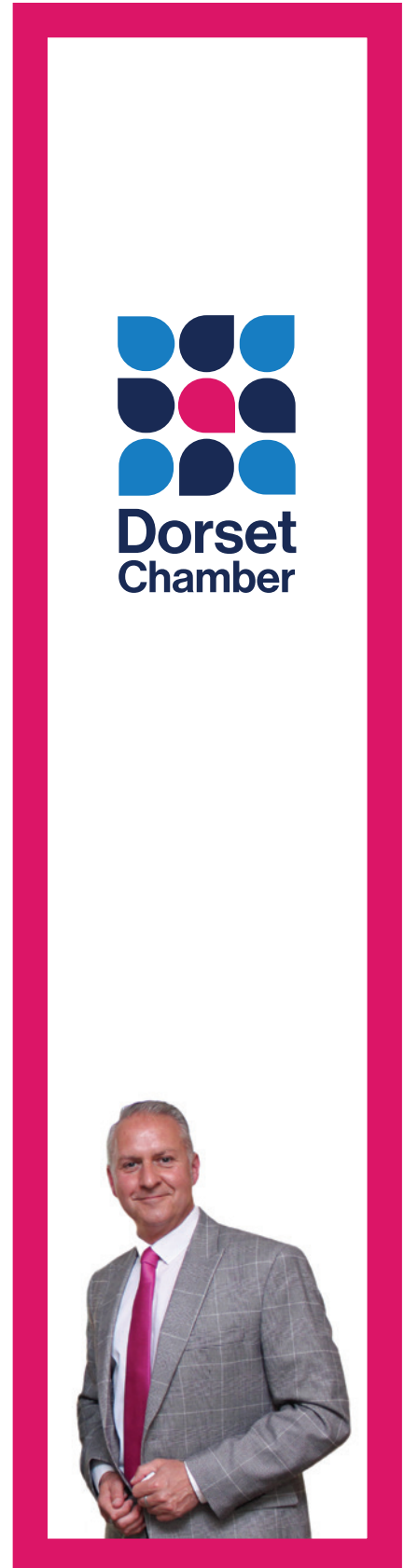
Our gratitude goes to our members, board directors, business partners, ambassadors and partners for helping Dorset Chamber to weather the storm of the past year so successfully. I'd also like to pay tribute to my team who have shown nothing but absolute commitment and professionalism in what has been a challenging year for us all.

A recent Net Promoter Score survey has ranked Dorset Chamber as 'great', a superb score which makes us one of the highest rated chambers nationwide – and well above some very well-known brands.

We finished 2021 in very good shape; our membership retention has been excellent and we've been very well supported by our members and business partners, our strategic relationships and positioning is very strong and our financial position remains robust.

I'd like to pay tribute to the brilliant Dorset business community which has demonstrated admirable resilience, optimism and courage over the past year – we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with you as we look forward to better days ahead.

Ian Girling
Chief Executive
Dorset Chamber



Membership

Dorset Chamber's members are its heartbeat – they have become crucial to its continuing success and the strength of the county's thriving business community.

Great thanks and praise is due to the Dorset Chamber 'family' for standing by the organisation over the past year, with membership retention reaching an exceptional 91 per cent overall.

The Business Partner programme has become a powerhouse with a near 100 per cent retention rate and magnificent commitment from some of the county's top businesses.

This loyalty and engagement has been reflected in the Chamber's 'great' rating in a recent Net Promoter Score (NPS) survey of members which measured customer satisfaction and willingness to recommend products or services.

Dorset Chamber's support for its members – more than 650 representing 35,000 employees – has never been as important as in the past year.

After listening closely to feedback, we took the bold decision to launch a new membership model in the most challenging circumstances possible at the height of the pandemic.

This revamp – fired by our culture of innovation and continual improvement – represented a complete step change, with packages based on choice not on size of business.

Including a trailblazing Digital membership level, the new model ensures we can continue to deliver a first-class service and ensure its 'protect, promote, connect' benefits and opportunities are accessible to all.

Events

Before the first lockdown in March 2020, Dorset Chamber organised more than 100 events annually – from networking meetings and training workshops to business forums.

Today, our events programme is near-unrecognisable after being reinvented to adapt to the realities of the pandemic while continuing to deliver high-quality opportunities for training, networking and relationship building which businesses have come to expect.

We have wholeheartedly embraced the digital potential of video conferencing and have launched hugely popular yet professional networking events online. We may have gone digital but the Chamber has remained the 'go to' place for business.

Our fortnightly Simply Networking @9 networking meetings draw nearly 100 members while our heavyweight Business

Leader Events have continued to provide a forum for debate among owners, directors and senior managers with many high-profile speakers over the last discussing a range of topical business issues.

A first-class range of webinars, online workshops and courses has been created with a comprehensive portfolio of subjects from first aid training to international trade support.

Although face-to-face networking is due to make a very welcome return to the Chamber in July 2021, it will not mean the end of digital events.

We are intent on seizing this exciting opportunity to rebuild its calendar with an ambitious programme blending the best of both physical and digital to help businesses prosper and grow.

STATS

No. of Dorset Chamber digital events in last 12 months

31

Total number of attendees to digital events

1289

Average no. delegates per Simply Networking event

80

No. Videos providing information on Covid support for businesses

50

International trade

Over last 12 months Dorset Chamber has helped 174 businesses export over £100m worth of goods across the globe – despite the pandemic and Brexit.

The county's stamp has gone on shipments travelling to countries worldwide, from Africa and Asia to Europe and America – putting Dorset on the map and boosting the local and national economy.

They range from clothing, confectionery and baths bombs to racing pigeons, advanced electronics engineering and cosmetics.

International trade has become a major growth area at the Chamber in recent years. As UK plc bounces back from lockdown and gets to grips with Brexit, demand is only set to increase for our services – especially in the field of documentation.

Dorset Chamber's knowledgeable, experienced and fully-qualified international trade team are all trained in customs declarations – which are a new and complex requirement for any businesses involved in imports or exports with the EU.

Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has joined forces with the Chamber to boost the support on offer to help firms adapt to the EU transition. This includes access to specialist trade advisors and funding for training to help build the capacity of businesses to trade internationally.

Dorset Chamber continues to deliver a full training programme covering all areas of export and import and encourage more firms to take the plunge overseas to break into new and potentially high-growth markets.

Top 5 export destinations

 Turkey

 Qatar

 UAE

 Kuwait

 Saudi Arabia

Dorset Gateway

When disaster struck during the Covid pandemic the first port of call for many owners, directors and managers was the Dorset Gateway.

This vital – and free – business support service provided lifeline advice and guidance about government funding, grants and other help available when it was needed the most.

In fact, it fielded a staggering 1,400 enquiries – mostly via phone and email – over the past year, equivalent to 116 a month.

Delivered by the Dorset Chamber in partnership with the Dorset LEP, the Gateway acts as a single access point and signposting service for business support available. It remains open for all businesses.

The Chamber also worked closely with both Dorset and BCP Councils during the Covid crisis to provide support and help businesses access grants.

Peer Networks

Our Peer Networks programme, delivered in partnership with Dorset LEP, has also proved invaluable over the past year. More than 80 participants took part in eight separate groups, making it one of the most successful courses of its kind nationwide.

Delivered by the Chamber in partnership with the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, this high-quality programme featured facilitated sessions focusing on a topical range of subjects relevant to businesses as they looked beyond Covid.

Feedback revealed that 99 per cent of participants were 'satisfied' and 91 per cent were 'very satisfied' with the programme – a tremendous reflection of its value.

Following a successful tendering exercise with Dorset LEP, we look forward to launching nine new groups in the coming year, open to all businesses in Dorset that meet the nationally set eligibility criteria.

Dorset | Business | Excellence

The future

Dorset Chamber has become a creative, innovative and modern organisation which continues to adapt and evolve in a changing world.

Our aim remains to deliver the highest quality services and greatest support for our members to help drive the future growth of the local economy and business in Dorset.

Innovation has become the hallmark of Dorset Chamber on its journey of modernisation over recent years whether in adopting emerging technology or launching new initiatives and programmes.

This ethos will shape the Chamber of tomorrow – as the county's leading business support organisation – to assist firms as they too seek to adapt to the challenges, threats and opportunities of this changing world.

The Chamber has four pillars, forming the basis of our future business plan:

Membership

International trade

Voice of business

Partnership Working

Membership

Membership remains the cornerstone of Dorset Chamber. We are committed to delivering high-quality membership based on the triple maxim of 'protect, promote, connect'. We will continue to develop our membership offer to ensure it is relevant and accessible to businesses of all sizes, types and budgets.

International Trade

Dorset already punches above its weight in international trade. We want to help even more businesses broaden their horizons and realise their ambitions on the world stage. We aim to help firms to bolster their capacity and access new markets through exports, but also encourage more first-time exporters to take advantage of the support on offer.

Voice of business

Dorset Chamber has a powerful voice championing and representing business in Dorset. We actively engage stakeholders locally and, as the only chamber in Dorset accredited to the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), we have national influence. As Covid support phases out, it will be critical for the Chamber to continue to fight the corner of business and ensure local concerns remain high on the agenda. We will also work closely to work with town Chambers across Dorset through our Associate programme.

Partnership Working

We will continue to work closely with partners such as Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, BCP Council and Dorset Council to support the growth of all businesses in the county. These include the delivery of public-funded programmes such as the Peer Networks programme and the Dorset Gateway business support service to help businesses grow and drive the local economy.



BCP Council has been working really closely with Dorset Chamber over the last year, supporting businesses and working to ensure that our economy is protected where we need to, and continues to grow where it can. We are really proud of the relationship that we have with Dorset Chamber and look forward to working even more closely in the future.

Graham Farrant,
Chief Executive, BCP Council



Dorset Council has been proud to work with Dorset Chamber to support its members and Dorset based businesses throughout the health and economic challenges of the last year. The ability to be able to exchange information in real time for the Chamber then to put this out to their members and the wider community via daily videos, video conferences and e-newsletters has been a really effective partnership. As we hopefully see the direct impacts of the pandemic diminishing, I and my team look forward to continuing our excellent partnership working to support business growth across Dorset.

Matt Prosser,
Chief Executive, Dorset Council



Dorset Chamber has worked very closely with Dorset LEP in the delivery of business support services that have been vital for our businesses during the pandemic. We are proud to work with Dorset Chamber, a professional, modern and innovative organisation committed to supporting businesses in Dorset.

Lorna Carver,
Director, Dorset LEP



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Our values

EXCELLENCE	Leading customer service, professionalism and responsiveness
INNOVATION	Supporting continuous growth and improvement in all we do
INTEGRITY	Uncompromising standards of integrity and ethical conduct
RESPECT	For our colleagues, our customers, our organisation and the business community
TEAMWORK	Universal teamwork and collaboration with a can-do attitude to support the organisation and serve Dorset
WELLBEING	Providing a family-friendly and supportive work and professional environment



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