



Minutes of the Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry ('the Chamber')

Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 25th March 2021 Via Zoom

Present: Liz Willingham (LW), Ian Girling (IG), Caron Khan (CK), Stephen Mills (SM), Matthew Fretten (MF), Lucy Filler (LF) and Sarah Milton (SM) (Minutes)

And 60 Members, and 4 DCCI Chamber staff

Welcome and Call to Order

At 10:15 am (LW) took the chair and called the Meeting to order. She welcomed Members, Business Partners, Board Members and Ambassadors of the Chamber to the Annual General Meeting and invited the Chief Executive Ian Girling, to read the formal convening notice.

1. Formal Convening Notice and Apologies

(IG) read the convening notice: *"This is the Annual General Meeting of Dorset Chamber of Commerce, and as advised it is being held at via Zoom on the 25th March 2021.*(IG) asked Members of the press to identify themselves. None were in attendance.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting

(LW) then asked Members to confirm that the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 12th December 2019 at The Hermitage Hotel, Bournemouth, were a true record of that Meeting.

The approval of the Minutes was proposed by Ron Wain, seconded by Alice Smee, and approved by everyone present as a true record. There were none against the approval.

(LW) then invited (IG) to announce the results of the on-line ballot for Elected Ambassadors and to confirm the new Office Bearers.

3. Confirmation of Office Bearers and Announcement of the result of the online ballot for Elected Ambassadors

(IG) updated in accordance with the Chamber governance process that the following are nominated for the roles of Office-Bearers:

President: Caron Khan

Senior Vice President: Tony Brown

Honorary Treasurer: Stephen Mills

(IG) then requested a **motion to formally ratify the appointment of the named individuals by way of a single motion** **This was proposed by Liz Willingham, seconded by Paul Kinkaid and agreed by everyone present (60 votes); there being no abstentions.**

(IG) then requested a vote be held for each of the Office Bearers:

- **President:** The Members had confirmed by a clear majority that Caron Khan be elected as President of Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry for the following year until the AGM in 2022. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2021/22 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry.
- **Vice President:** The Members had confirmed by a clear majority that Tony Brown be elected as Senior Vice President of Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry for the following year until the AGM in 2022. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2021/22 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry.
- **Honorary Treasurer:** The Members had confirmed by a clear majority that Stephen Mills be elected as Honorary Treasurer of Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry for the following year until the AGM in 2024. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2021/22 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Caron Khan was elected as President, Tony Brown was elected as Vice President, and Stephen Mills was elected as Honorary Treasurer

(IG) continued that regarding Non-Executive Directors, the Board have resolved that three Members should continue in office as Non-Executive Directors for the year 2021/2022 until the next AGM: Nicky Busst, Simon Boyd and Nicola Newman. All have stated that they are pleased to continue to serve. Additionally they have also resolved the appointment of two new Non-Executive Directors, Lesley Keets and Gary Neild and they have confirmed that they are pleased to serve. The Board have also resolved to appoint Paul Tansey as a Non-executive Director with effect from the end of this meeting. (IG) invited Members to approve a resolution for the non-executives' continuation in office for a further year.

(IG) then requested a **motion to formally ratify the appointment of the named individuals by way of a single motion**

These were proposed by Matthew Fretten, seconded by Paul Kinkaid

Members present approved the resolution for the continuation in office of Nicky Busst, Simon Boyd, Nicola Newman, Lesley Keets, Gary Neild and Paul Tansey for a further year.

(IG) updated that regarding Elected Ambassadors there were thirteen nominees for the role of Elected Ambassadors and in accordance with the articles Ambassadors being no fewer than eight and no more than sixteen, there were six spaces available. Consequently an online ballot for Elected Ambassadors was held. The following candidates received votes in their favour bringing the council of Elected Ambassadors to sixteen in total. The candidates elected were:

Nicki Cluley
Cara Ashford

Heidi Roper
 James Akin-Smith
 Paul Collins
 Kimberley Davies

(IG) then confirmed that these candidates were duly elected as Elected Ambassadors of the Council and thanked them for their willingness to serve the Chamber and congratulated them all. He then went on to say a vibrant and active Council is essential to the Chamber fully representing its Members and business in Dorset.

4. **Adoption of New Articles**

(IG) stated that the articles had been reviewed in accordance with good governance standards and a new set of articles have been approved by the Board in October 2019 and have been made available to view on the Dorset Chamber website.

(MF) then went on to say that in order to reflect the changing nature of the Chamber it is important to ensure that our constitutional documentation (in this case the Articles of Association) are kept relevant and up to date. (MF) then confirmed that the Board have proposed that these new Articles are adopted by members at the AGM and the main changes can be summarised as follows:-

- References to the 'Council' and 'Councillors' are replaced with references to 'Council of Ambassadors' and 'Ambassadors'
- References to committees that are not currently formed or sitting have been removed
- The quorum required for a general meeting has been reduced to 25 members from 50
- The maximum number of directors who *may* sit on the Board has been increased to 14
- The structure of the Board has been changed to reflect:-
 - Removal of the Senior Vice President and Junior Vice President roles; and
 - Creation of a Vice-President role
- The functions of the Council of Ambassadors has been updated and expanded upon (reflecting the Guide given to Ambassadors)"

The approval of the articles was proposed by Tony Brown , seconded by Paul Kinkaid and agreed by everyone present (60 votes); there being 0 abstentions.

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5. **Financial Report**

(SM) began by thanking everyone for their confidence in voting him in as Honorary Treasurer. (SM) stated that this will be his second time as Honorary Treasurer. He said he was fortunate enough to have held the position from 2004 through to 2018 and was pleased and proud to resume the role. He stated that he continued to serve on the Board in the period since he was last Honorary Treasurer and therefore hoped that it will be a seamless transition back from James Robinson. (SM) thanked James for his contribution over the last three years, which he said has been a period of significant financial success for the Chamber, as well as also thanking Theresa Higgins, Head of Finance and Administration for all her hard work.

(SM) stated that the purpose of this Financial Report was to lay the accounts for the previous financial year, however, he said he felt that as this is a delayed AGM and in only a few short days, we come to the end of the current financial year on the 31 March. This current financial year is one that has been spent entirely in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. (SM) went on to say that the world and the economic environment has changed dramatically and those

results are confined to history and bear no relevance as a benchmark of future performance. He confirmed that the accounts have been on public record at Companies House for all to see now for the last five months. (SM) therefore stated that he did not intend to delve into the detail of the 2020 accounts. But instead he wanted to paint a picture of the robust financial health the Chamber entered the pandemic in.

(SM) went on to say that If you enter a challenging economic environment in rude financial health, with healthy reserves and cash balances, you have time and options. And this was the case for the Chamber, but he said it wasn't always the case.

(SM) stated that he had looked back in history for the low point in the Chamber's recent history, and found that this was only in 2012. (SM) said that in that year, the Chamber made a financial loss of £27k; and ended that year with reserves of only £74k, less than 2 months expenditure, and a cash balance of £19,485.

(SM) said he wanted to contrast that with the position when we entered the pandemic. Revenue had hit an all-time high of £922k and profit before tax was £41k. Our reserves had been rebuilt to an amount of £335k and importantly this had flowed into cash generation and DC ended the last financial year with cash of £378k. (SM) said that we should characterise the period from 2012 through to the start of the pandemic as a fabulous success story and he said our thanks must go out to Ian and his team who have delivered this performance during a period when membership organisations have struggled to stay relevant and have seen membership and financial performance dwindle. (SM) said that what he felt was more important than revisiting the 2020 numbers was to give everyone an understanding of what has happened over the last year and to bring everyone up to date.

(SM) said, like many businesses, DC entered April 2020 with real trepidation wondering what would happen to membership and to the ability of DC business partners to support us.

(SM) was pleased to say that the export documentation service has been a resilient source of income, during the national lockdown, and the government support to the economy and to businesses cushioned the shock.

(SM) was pleased to announce that DC's business partners, almost in their entirety, stood by us, as did a significant proportion of membership. He said DC sought new sources of income and the Peer Network programme delivered almost £100K of income. He stated, costs were contained, difficult decisions were taken and advantage taken, to a limited degree, of the coronavirus job retention scheme. (SM) was delighted to say that the outcome was that the 10 months management accounts to the end of January shows a scarcely credible profit of £40k, much better than the original pre-Covid budget of £10k, and cash today stands at a very healthy £335k.

(SM) concluded his report by saying thank you to Ian and to congratulate his team for an outstanding year, he then thanked everyone for listening before introducing Lucy Filler, Filler Knapper, the Chambers appointed auditors.

6. Auditors' Report

Lucy Filer introduced herself and said she was delighted to be working with the Chamber. She said having audited the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2020, systems were good and that in her opinion these gave a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Chamber as of 31st March 2019.

She concluded that they have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, and the information given in the Directors report is consistent with the financial statements.

7. Re-Appointment of Auditors

(IG) then stated that Filer Knapper had indicated their willingness to continue in office as Auditors to the Chamber and requested that Filer Knapper be elected Auditors for the ensuing twelve months.

This was Proposed by Matthew Fretten, Seconded by Paul Kinkaid and agreed unanimously. There were no abstentions.

8. Handover and incoming President's Address

(LW) virtually handed the Presidentail medal to (CK) before stating that it had been a huge privilege and honour being President for the past two years and she wished (CK) every success stating that DC was in safe hands.

(LW) then went on to say how much she had enjoyed the challenges and the fun working in partnership with Ian and the amazing chamber team who have done such an incredible job to navigate us through this insane year. (LW) said she felt fortunate to have been President in two critical years, one she said we saw coming - the fabulous celebration of our 70th anniversary, and the second we totally didn't - the biggest crisis in our Chamber's history.

(LW) stated that she was proud to have seen it through this rocky year and leaving the role knowing DC is in really good shape, highly valued by the members and the business community as a whole, as well as the strategic stakeholder partners. (LW) went on to say that she was pleased to continue to contribute as Board member, and spearheading the business leader resilience initiative GU6, as part of our pioneering Fit For the Future focus on wellbeing and mental health in the workplace.

(LW) confirmed that she will also remain on the Board of the British Chambers of Commerce and therefore will be championing the Chamber concept nationally and globally. (LW) concluded by thanking everyone for being such a supportive membership and for all the good wishes she has received from so many, saying it has been truly touching.

(LW) then handed over to (CK) for her welcome speech.

(CK) began by wishing everyone a good morning before introducing herself, explaining that she ran her own consultancy and has been lucky enough to have spent the last 20 years working with some amazing people, from a real mix of businesses and organisations. (CK) also stated that she had been involved in some major public events such as Pride of Lions in Bournemouth where she installed over 50 life-size lion sculptures in an arts trail around the town; Bournemouth University's BFX Festival, a visual effects and animation festival celebrating the amazing talent coming out of the universities; and the ever so popular and award-winning Christchurch Food Festival, which she hopes will be returning this September.

(CK) then went on to say that the common theme throughout her career has always been passion: passion for where she lives here in beautiful Dorset; passion for using art and culture as a transformative affect that helps attract talent and create a strong sense of place, identity and wellbeing; and passion for bolstering Dorset's business community that sits at the very centre of the county's culture.

(CK) said that this is why she is so honoured to have been a Board Member of the Chamber since 2018, and a loyal member going back to 2002. (CK) stated that during her time as a Board Member she saw the inner workings of the Chamber, which showed just how vital the

organisation is to Dorset's business community. (CK) then went on to say that during the challenges of 2020, she witnessed the team's relentless hard work to support its members, and was proud to have played a very small part in guiding the organisation through some difficult times of its own. But she said there have also been positive experiences with many successes too.

(CK) then went on to give examples such as carving out a place digitally as an organisation and found a new way to come together with the hugely successful online 'Simply Networking' event, which saw up to 100 business people coming together on a fortnightly basis. (CK) also said that by joining forces with LEP and Dorset's local authorities the chamber was able to support the business community with Ian's weekly and sometimes daily video updates that not only helped businesses make sense of the rapid changes coming down from Government, but also informed the community of vital financial support available.

(CK) added that by winning the bid to deliver the Dorset Peer Network programme, the chamber and its team of facilitators and experts created a unique and safe space for business people to come together to share their stories and learn from one another. And she said she knew just from working with these groups how powerful and some say life-changing they have been.

(CK) also stated that Dorset Chamber has also recognised the importance of the next generation and is working alongside the British Chambers of Commerce as an intermediary in helping businesses access the Kickstart scheme which is a £2 billion pound fund to create hundreds of thousands of high-quality 6-month work placements for young people aged 16-24, and she said that so far the response has been a huge success.

(CK) concluded by saying that the Chamber's place in the Dorset business community is more important than ever, and its reputation has never been stronger. (CK) went on to say that this has only been made possible by its dynamic and forward-thinking leader, Ian Girling, and his incredibly strong and supportive team and added the also impressive board and great Ambassadors.

(CK) stated that of course there would be further challenges for businesses, but there is now a slight glimmer of light at the end of a very dark tunnel, and she is looking forward to working alongside Ian as his President to ensure we don't just survive as a business community, but once again thrive, ending by saying that when we're finally all back together, we can celebrate the amazing tenacity of Dorset's brave businesses. (CK) then handed over to Ian to share his Chief Executive Report.

9. Chief Executive's Report

(IG) welcomed everyone to the 2021 Dorset Chamber AGM.

(IG) began his report by saying that the last 12 months have possibly been the most challenging time Dorset Chamber has ever faced and he was pleased to say we have come out of this very strongly and he wanted to begin by thanking all our members, Business Partners and customers for standing by us.

(IG) then reported that the current membership stands at 627 compared to 677 at this time last April, a net drop of only 50 members during the greatest recession of modern times. He then went on to say that our retention from a financial perspective is 74% and 91% from a volumes perspective. (IG) then went on to say that during this period we launched our new membership packages, moving from a membership fee based on the number of staff in a business to a membership model based on features. (IG) stated that the membership team have worked

extremely hard during this period and he thanked all the team for their great work over this this period. He also said that we are looking forward to welcoming Julie Cullen as our new Membership Executive in April.

(IG) then went on to say that our Business Partners represent our highest level of membership and with one Business Partner per sector, he was delighted to say this programme has remained very strong over the last 12 months he thanked the Business Partners for their continued support, stating the renewal rate for this April is 93% which is incredible. (IG) also advised that we recently welcomed Poole-based OnBuy, an international on-line retail platform which is growing at an incredible rate, as Premier Business Partners as well as welcoming leading dairy manufacturer BV Dairy, based in Shaftesbury, as our new Platinum Business Partner.

(IG) then spoke of the fact that we were one of the first Chambers in the UK to ask people to refrain from any physical contact at events, and shortly after we postponed our events programme for March and April to return in May. (IG) went on to say that our Events programme was re-instated online and has been a tremendous success, stating that Simply Networking regularly has 90 people on line every 2 weeks and has become a very strong online community offering camaraderie and support to attendees.

(IG) also stated that we have also successfully delivered Business Leaders events and speakers have included the Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE , President of the British Chambers of Commerce, Adam Marshall of the British Chambers of Commerce and Lord Mark Price.

Looking to the future (IG) said we will deliver a balanced range of events that will include Networking and Business Lewder events as well as training and other bespoke seminars. He said we plan to return to face to face events in July and our forward events plan will be a mix of digital and face to face.

(IG) then spoke of our international trade support, helping Dorset businesses export goods across the UK to destinations including Turkey, Kuwait, Iran and Iraq. Exports include food, cosmetics, machinery and clothes. He advised that the team has expanded from 3 to 5 members of staff to meet increasing demand to ensure we are geared up for future growth. (IG) stated that all of the staff are qualified or training to be qualified in issuing Customs Declarations, a new requirement when exporting and importing to the EU and a new business opportunity. (IG) announced that we have onboarded 40 businesses for Customs Declarations, as well as also continuing to develop our international trade training programme which has been well attended over the year.

(IG) spoke of the fact that helping businesses around EU transition has been an important part of our work and supported by Dorset LEP, he said we are offering a free EU transition advice and support service, open to all businesses.

(IG) went on to say that we continue to do a good job in the delivery of the Dorset Gateway service, funded by Dorset LEP, which provided invaluable support as Covid took hold and we were inundated with calls from businesses looking for support. (IG) said Tom and Suzannah have done a great job during this period, often fielding a month's worth of calls in one day, and he was pleased to say the LEP have agreed funding for the new financial year.

(IG) advised that this year we were also successful in bidding to deliver 6 groups as part of the LEP's new Peer Networks programme. He said feedback on the programme has been superb, and he was very pleased to say that we worked closely with Warren and Evolve who was also a contractor to the LEP in Peer Networks. (IG) then went on to say that Dorset LEP have issued a call for proposals for a new programme which we have bid for and we await the outcome of the appraisal of the tenders.

(IG) spoke of the very strong focus on building links between education and business to help develop our future workforce through Young Chamber. He said we were ahead of our time and this work has now very much been mainstreamed by Government through the Careers and Enterprise Company, funded through LEPs. (IG) said that although we will very much maintain our focus on this area, we will now effectively put a marker down and formally end the Young Chamber programme.

(IG) was delighted to announce a new project, working with the students in the Business Society at Bournemouth University, called Student Connect. (IG) explained that Student Connect will provide these students with valuable links with businesses to help develop their business skills and opportunities for the future. (IG) said this will include guest talks from business people on key issues, panel discussions, projects on key areas, problem solving opportunities and work experience and work shadowing. (IG) went on to say that this will also benefit the businesses participating with a fresh perspective on their business. (IG) said that whilst being established with BU, this project is portable and over time we would like to extend this to the other HE and FE institutions in Dorset.

(IG) moved on to say that we are the main Kickstart intermediary/Gateway in Dorset and are in the process of placing over 400 young people in paid work-placements to help improve the employability opportunities of unemployed young people. (IG) said that we worked closely with both Councils in this respect and as such our Gateway has been the recommended route for employers in Dorset. (IG) stated that it has been a challenging programme extremely well managed by his PA Sarah Milton and that we will soon see these young people in place. (IG) also said that he is delighted to say that we have a Kickstart young person starting with us very shortly.

(IG) announced that our new website was launched last year which we believe is very fresh with improved functionality and a much stronger platform for our members and he thanked Business Partners Digital Storm for their help in designing and building the new website. (IG) also stated that we have also been steadily building our social media positioning and we have the largest social media following of any Dorset-based business organisation. (IG) added that we also have 77 Google reviews with a 5-star rating, the highest of all Chambers in the UK, with most having 5 or under.

(IG) informed the room that our media voice has remained strong this year with Dorset Chamber commenting on key issues in the media and this year has seen the Chamber regularly in the press, on the radio and also on television. (IG) thanked Deep South Media for the fantastic job they continue to do as the Dorset Chamber newsroom. (IG) added that we have recently undertaken Net Promoter Score survey and our NPS is 53 which is very good and well-above the average of 32.

(IG) then said a really big thank you to our outgoing President Liz Willingham. (IG) went on to say that Liz has held this position for 2 years, the first time this has happened in 72 year history. He said that Liz has worked tremendously hard in the role and given great service to Dorset Chamber. (IG) went on to say that Liz has undertaken this role with passion, commitment and huge enthusiasm and on ends her term as President as the driving force behind GU6, our new project supporting the resilience and mental health of business leaders. (IG) said that Liz will also continue to represent Dorset Chamber at a national level as a board member of the British Chambers of Commerce.

(IG) also congratulated our new President, Caron Khan, who he said he knows will take on this role with equal commitment and focus and no doubt bring a very creative and perhaps even disruptive edge to the role! (IG) went on to say that we are also very fortunate to have a fantastic Board and team of Ambassadors and (IG) thanked them all for their great support for Dorset Chamber.

(IG) concluded by saying that his team has worked incredibly hard over the last 12 months and he said a massive thank you to all for their great efforts.

(IG) went on to say that we have come through this in extremely good shape financially, with the standing in the business community high and he felt that Dorset Chamber has never been in better shape, (IG) then thanked everyone for their continued support.

10. Any other Business

The President enquired if there was any other business and as there was none. She said she would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Chief Executive saying that it was appropriate here to recognise the Chief Executives achievements and invited all to record their thanks for a job well done.

11. Conclusion of Meeting

The President thanked everyone for attending The 2021 Annual General Meeting closed at 11.20 a.m.

