



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

### **Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022 at The Hilton Hotel, Bournemouth**

**Present:** Ian Girling (IG), Caron Khan (CK), Stephen Mills (SM), Tony Brown (TB), Lucy Filler (LF) and Sarah Milton (SM Minutes)

**And 45 Members, and 7 Dorset Chamber staff**

#### **Welcome and Call to Order**

At 10:30am (CK) 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.

#### **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 The Hilton Hotel, Bournemouth on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022.*(IG) asked Members of the press to identify themselves. None were in attendance.

#### **Approval of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**

(CK) then asked the Members to confirm that the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021, were a true record of that Meeting.

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

(CK) then invited (IG) to announce the confirmation of Elected Ambassadors and Office Bearers.

#### **Confirmation of Office Bearers and Elected Ambassadors**

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

**President:** Caron Khan (3<sup>rd</sup> year term)

**Vice President:** Tony Brown (3<sup>rd</sup> year term)

(IG) then requested a motion to formally ratify the appointment of the named individuals by way of a single motion **This was proposed by Simon West, seconded by Paul Tansey and agreed by everyone present (45 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 re-elected as President of Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry for the following year until the AGM in 2023. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2022/23 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry.
- Vice President: The Members had confirmed by a clear majority that Tony Brown be re-elected as Vice President of Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry for the following year until the AGM in 2023. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2022/23 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

**Caron Khan was re-elected as President and Tony Brown was re-elected as Vice President.**

(IG) continued that regarding Non-Executive Directors, the Board have resolved that the following Members should continue in office as Non-Executive Directors for the year 2022/2023 until the next AGM: Liz Willingham, Matthew Fretten, Nicky Busst, Lesley Keets, Gary Neild, Phil Popham, Tony Brown and Simon Boyd. All have stated that they are pleased to continue to serve. Additionally they have also resolved the appointment of one new Non-Executive Director, Lesley Fox and she has confirmed that she is pleased to serve. (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 Paul Tansey and seconded by Helen Stacey.**

**Members present approved the resolution for the continuation in office of Matthew Fretten, Nicky Busst, Lesley Keets, Gary Neild, Liz Willingham, Phil Popham, Tony Brown and Simon Boyd for a further year.**

(IG) advised that Nicola Newman, who had served on the Board since 2019, resigned in August to focus on the new Dorset Chamber LSIP programme. (IG) offered his sincere thanks for her service and support to Dorset Chamber.

(IG) stated that Paul Tansey has also felt that the time was right to step down from the Board, having served on the Board since 2015. (IG) thanked Paul, who is a past President, for his incredible support for the Chamber and his friendship and guidance over the many years.

(IG) announced that Steve Mills has also stepped down from the Board as Honorary Treasurer after an incredible 19 years of service. (IG) said that he believed that Steve is our longest serving director in the history of the Chamber. (IG) said that Steve's contribution to the Chamber has been immeasurable and he has played a key role in the financial management of the Chamber for many years. (IG) thanked Steve for his service to Dorset Chamber

(IG) explained that as Steve Mills is in to year 2 of his 3-year period of office, Lesley Fox, Managing Partner of Mazars in Poole will take over from him for this final year before standing formally at the next AGM. (IG) said that the Board have supported this proposal and that he is delighted to welcome Lesley to the Dorset Chamber Board as our Honorary Treasurer.

(IG) updated that regarding the Ambassadors, the term of office for Oliver Arnold, Heidi Roper and Alice Smee has come to an end and they have informed (IG) that they are not standing for re-election. (IG) thanked Oliver, Heidi and Alice for their great service and support to Dorset Chamber as an Ambassdor.

(IG) went on to say that Simon West is also not standing again as a co-opted Ambassador. (IG) said that Simon had given around 40 years of service to Dorset Chamber as a member, President and Ambassador and (IG) formally recorded his thanks to Simon for his incredible support for the Chamber over the many years.

(IG) said that regarding Elected Ambassadors, there were 8 nominees for the position of Elected Ambassdor and in accordance with the articles Ambassadors being no fewer than 8 and no more than 16, there were 9 spaces available. (IG) said that Paul Clarke, Mandy Fitzmaurice, Liz Hutchings, Ian Jones, Grant Esterhuizen, Emily Turgoose, Debbie Frith and Elaine Wilkins were all ratified by the Board and unanimously voted on by the Members of Dorset Chamber. (IG) thanked them all for their willingness to serve the Chamber and congratulated them all.

## **Financial Report**

(SM) began by introducing himself as Managing Partner at Mazars and Honorary Treasurer of Dorset Chamber. (SM) said that he was first appointed to the Board of the Chamber in 2004 and how it has been a very great pleasure to have been involved for these past 18 years.

(SM) said he has been fortunate enough to work with some able operators and great minds around the Board room table, with Ian of course who has brought great energy, enthusiasm and drive to the Chamber, with Theresa and of course with the dedicated and committed team at the Chamber who so clearly believe in the mission and purpose of the Chamber.

(SM) confirmed that all good things come to an end and that it is time for him to step down. (SM) said he is delighted to be able to pass over the role to someone he feels is far more able than him and he said he was excited to announce that Lesley Fox, his business partner at Mazars and the Managing Partner of the Poole office, has agreed to step in as Honorary Treasurer for the final year of his three year period. (SM) stated that Lesley is no stranger to the Chamber, having long been an active member and having worked with Lesley for a number of years now he said there is no doubt that she will be fantastic in this role. (SM) stated that the chamber is in excellent hands.

(SM) then moved on to explain the overall trading performance for the year to 31st March 2022 and discussed specific areas within Dorset Chamber.

(SM) spoke of how we entered April 2021 with some trepidation, with Covid still very much among us and that nervousness was most evident in relation to the uncertainty of not knowing what the long-term effect of the pandemic would have on our core business of International Trade, Membership and our Events programme.

(SM) said that International trade services are a vital offering that has been an excellent contributor over the years, not just the documentation and Custom declarations offering, but also the export documentation training programs which has enhanced our international

services and sales to our customers.

(SM) stated that Pre-Covid, this was an area of our business already grappling with the implications of BREXIT. (SM) confirmed that in the year to 31 March 2020, pre-Brexit and pre-Covid, income from International Trade had reached £310,000. (SM) said it was very much the jewel in the Chamber's crown. And in the year to 31 March 2021 ie the previous financial year, this had fallen to £200,000. (SM) said we saw a further drop this year ie the year to March 2022, where income from International Trade had reduced still further to £188k.

(SM) declared that he was sorry to say that the prospects for International Trade are still not improving and remains very much a concern and one we are monitoring closely. (SM) said we are not alone, our friends at The British Chamber of Commerce report that the situation is a national phenomenon, with all Chambers reporting significant drops in export activity.

(SM) explained that this is due to new rules and regulations since leaving the EU which has now become more expensive for our customers to export to the EU, making their goods uncompetitive. (SM) exclaimed that he had hoped that this situation would have resolved itself by this time but Covid, the Ukraine war and now a financial crisis is proving to be the perfect storm for export activity.

(SM) moved on to say that Events were still very much affected by the pandemic, particularly the face-to-face events programme with many events cancelled; however, he said we were able to run events 5 months of the year which generated income of £18,500. (SM) also said that we also continued the online networking programme via Zoom free of charge to support businesses, and these continued to be extremely popular in 2021/2022 with approximately 80 to 100 participants per event.

(SM) said that Dorset Chamber has a key focus on ensuring it is sustainable on commercial income streams and will not develop any dependency on public sector funding. (SM) stated that Dorset Chamber will only seek to deliver public sector contracts where they are a strategic fit with the Chamber. (SM) said that with this in mind and the probable drop in income within the International Trade and Membership areas, Dorset Chamber successfully developed programmes and bid for funding through the Peer Networks Programme funded by the Dorset LEP, BCP ARG Covid-recovery fund for our Business Transformation Programme and supported the Silicon South Innovation Driving Growth programme which generated a total income of £103,000.

(SM) explained that we also became a Kickstart Gateway for the DWP. (SM) stated that Dorset Chamber supported 92 companies which had one or more roles filled, 247 placements were made and 87 long term unemployed young people placed were employed on a permanent basis after the initial 6 months scheme. (SM) said this was a great effort by the team and certainly had its challenges. (SM) confirmed that this generated £70,000 income and was a great success for Dorset Chamber both financially and in helping young people gain opportunities and employment.

(SM) then moved on to say that income from Membership stayed steady in 2021. (SM) said that Membership has remained at about 650, a significant success in the circumstances. (SM) confirmed that the Dorset Chamber membership team is now back up to capacity and the team are working hard to demonstrate to our members the benefits this brings them, in terms of services we provide and how this can result in cost savings for their businesses.

(SM) noted that perhaps above all else, the support of our Business Partners continues to be vital to the success of the Chamber. (SM) said that the Business Partner program contributed £123,500 to the year ending March 2022 and on behalf of the Board (SM) thanked all the Business Partners for their invaluable and much needed support for Dorset Chamber.

(SM) said that overall, the Chamber saw an increase in income of £58,500 to £725,500, compared to the previous year of £667,000 and in the circumstances (SM) said it was a very pleasing result.

(SM) confirmed that overheads have been well controlled by the finance department. (SM) stated that by far the biggest element of Dorset Chamber overheads are staff costs. (SM) said that when furlough ended in April 2021, some difficult decisions were made and two staff members were made redundant, one in membership and one in international trade to keep overheads down as much as possible in the tough climate predicted. (SM) said that however on a positive note, Dorset Chamber welcomed new tenants at Chamber House in a three-year lease, Saline, following the end of the current lease to the Fire Service.

(SM) confirmed that the accounts show a surplus on ordinary activities before tax of £62,491 and after deducting tax payable of £7,705, Dorset Chamber adding £54,786 to reserves. (SM) said that as at 31st March 2022, Dorset Chamber reserves stood at £448,500, stating that this marks a continuance of the significant strengthening of the Chambers finances over the last few years.

(SM) remarked that looking forward, with Brexit and the Ukraine war still being problematic, together with a deteriorating economic outlook, this obviously presents its challenges within the business community including the Chamber, not least in maintaining income from International Trade and membership. (SM) said that further, the public sector funding and contacts that Dorset Chamber had during the year to March 2022, have all concluded. (SM) stated that these have yet to be replaced and represents a significant adverse risk to income. (SM) said that despite the strong year on which we are reporting, the budget for the year to March 2023 shows a very significant expected deficit. (SM) said that if you simply change the sign on the surplus we made last year, you will not be far off. (SM) reported that this quite clearly has the full attention of the Board and Ian as Chief Executive. (SM) said that given the healthy reserves and cash position, there is no panic nor need to panic, but there is a pressing need to identify and explore new commercial income streams to ensure the Chamber can return to surplus in the near future which in turn will offer businesses support in a very difficult time.

(SM) concluded by congratulating the team at Dorset Chamber for their achievements over the last few years. (SM) said that everyone has seen the Chamber modernise on every level and it's finances improve substantially. (SM) said he has been proud to serve Dorset Chamber over the years and he wished everyone the very best for the future. (SM) said he would like to give a huge thank you to all the members and customers for their support over the last 12 months in a very challenging year.

(SM) thanked everyone for their attention before handing over to Lucy Filer from TC Group, Dorset Chambers appointed auditors.

### **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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

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.

### **Re-Appointment of Auditors**

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

This was Proposed by Paul Tansey, Seconded by Simon West and agreed unanimously. There were no abstentions.

### **President's Address**

(CK) began by congratulating Ian and his team on a very successful year at Dorset Chamber. (CK) said that the relentless hard work and perseverance are truly inspiring, not to mention Dorset Chamber's ability to adapt and evolve in such challenging times for membership organisations. (CK) said that Dorset Chamber has shown that it can continue to thrive even in the toughest climate, and in an incredibly competitive marketplace.

(CK) stated that this is what defines a dynamic business Chamber and is why she is so incredibly proud to have served Dorset Chamber as President over the last year.

(CK) also said how very proud she is that Dorset Chamber has been selected to lead the delivery of Dorset's Local Skills Improvement Plan – a three-year countywide review of skills provisions against the current and future needs of businesses. (CK) said we will see Dorset Chamber working closely with public and private sector partners including Dorset employers, the LEP, Local Authorities, local colleges and private training providers, stating that this was proof that the Chamber is still very much a valuable part of the Dorset business community.

(CK) emphasised that she would also like to recognise the Dorset Chamber Board. (CK) said how fortunate we are to have an impressive selection of business leaders who give up their precious time to bestow their expert advice and perspective, without which the Chamber would not be where it is today. (CK) went on to say that their combined knowledge, and experience has been pivotal to the Chamber's growth over the last 12 months – all this while navigating their own businesses. (CK) said that suffice to say as a fellow Board member, she feels extremely privileged to work alongside these inspiring individuals. (CK) said a big thank you to:

Matthew Fretten  
Nicky Busst  
Lesley Keets  
Gary Neild  
Paul Tansey  
Liz Willingham  
Phil Popham  
Tony Brown  
Simon Boyd  
Steve Mills

(CK) exclaimed that is because of all of them that we've been able to survive, thrive and even start to think bigger – much bigger – than ever before. (CK) said that the world of business is forever changing, but with the support of the Board she said she was confident that Dorset Chamber can evolve with it, and even lead the way where others follow.

(CK) stated that as we look ahead, we can be sure that the resilience of Ian, his team, the Board and all our members will continue to drive the Chamber and Dorset's business community forward. (CK) said that this is what sets Dorset apart as a truly entrepreneurial and

thriving business community, and is why, as President, she has been so proud to have supported and celebrated all the successes.

(CK) announced that in her third year as President, she will be honoured to continue to support the initiatives Dorset Chamber has started, to further strengthen and evolve the Chamber for the benefit of all.

(CK) then moved on to pay tribute to Her Majesty the Queen. (CK) stated that her exemplary public service, including her support for businesses as patron of the British Chambers of Commerce, was nothing short of inspiring. (CK) said Her Majesty the Queen performed her duties with incredible dignity and calm assurance during a remarkable reign, and her legacy will live on through her family and the country she has helped to shape. (CK) said she was sure that everyone would join her in wishing King Charles as prosperous a reign as his 'darling mama' – stating, he has big shoes to fill!

(CK) declared that looking ahead to 2023, she is excited that the Chamber's popular events are back in full swing post pandemic. (CK) confirmed that Dorset Chamber has hosted over 70 events over the past 12 months, with over two and a half thousand businesspeople attending, making Dorset Chamber the most attended and active business community in the region. (CK) announced that we also have the return of the Dorset Business Awards for 2023 – with a brand-new look! (CK) stated Ian, herself and the Board have gone back to the drawing board to create an even better event experience and she is looking forward to seeing everyone there.

(CK) concluded by thanking everyone again for their membership over the last 12 months. (CK) said she truly believes that for the Chamber, its members and Dorset's business community at large, the future still holds wondrous possibilities – and (CK) said that we should continue to work together, support one another, and lead the way as dynamic, forward-thinking business leaders.

(CK) then handed over to Ian to go through his Chief Executive's report.

### **Chief Executive's Report**

(IG) began by saying that as businesses in Dorset and across the UK continue to face a challenging economic climate it is his aim that our Chamber does all it can to support our business community.

(IG) stated that starting with membership, this currently stands at 638, being 656 at this time last year. (IG) said that retention remains at 79% and in our last benchmarking report was at 84% from a volume's perspective.

(IG) said that within membership, whilst he believes we offer a great range of benefits, (IG) said we need to improve the marketing of these benefits to both potential and existing members and stated that this is a focus for the Chamber as we look forward. (IG) confirmed that this will be part of the remit of Dorset Chamber's new Marketing Manager Caroline Sharp and Digital Marketing Executive Greg Lear.

(IG) reported that we have continued with our quarterly membership surveys, giving Dorset Chamber a Net Promoter Score of 44 which is officially 'great'. (IG) said he is keen we increase the return rate on these surveys which has been between 10 and 14%. (IG) then thanked Richard Knight of Insight 6 for all his support on this.

(IG) then moved on to our Business Partner programme, stating that it continues to perform extremely well and thanked all of the Business Partners for their great support. (IG) said these are longstanding relationships that Dorset Chamber highly value.

(IG) then gave a warm welcome to the two new Platinum Business Partners this year, Insightful UX and Mazars. (IG) said a huge thank you to Lester Aldridge who became a Premier Business Partner earlier this year.

(IG) also said a particular thank you to Dorset Chamber's website partners Digital Storm and Deep South Media, Dorset Chamber newsroom partners who (IG) said continue to do such a fantastic job, facilitating a powerful voice for the Chamber in the media.

(IG) announced that the Dorset Chamber business magazine, Dorset Business Focus, is now in its 48<sup>th</sup> edition and continues to be a leading business publication in Dorset and the only monthly in print. (IG) said a big thank you to everyone who supports the magazine with advertorial and (IG) gave special thanks to our magazine partners Pulford Publicity as well as the Dorset Chamber team that he said work so hard on the magazine.

(IG) then moved on to say how proud he is of our Google rating, with 99 ratings showing a 5-star score. (IG) said that this is the highest of any Chamber in the UK by some way, with most showing less than 5 reviews. (IG) then requested that if people enjoy the day that they could leave a nice review, but if not, to just let him know.

(IG) then spoke of the events saying that this continues to be a very important part of the Chamber offering. (IG) confirmed that Dorset Chamber have a strong forward plan of face-to-face events but stated that we will still do some events virtually, particularly workshops, making our events more accessible, lowers cost and reduces the carbon footprint of our events. (IG) said Dorset Chamber will work hard to make the events enjoyable, of value and (IG) said he is very keen to engage a wide audience.

(IG) went on to say that a very significant part of our commercial activities as a Chamber is our international trade support, helping businesses trade across the globe through our training and documentation services. (IG) said that disappointingly, nationally we continue to see reduced export levels due to a variety of reasons including Brexit, increased costs and challenges with exporting, the impact of Covid and now Ukraine. (IG) stated that this is having an impact on the volumes of documents we are issuing as a Chamber which is in turn impacting on us financially and we continue to monitor this area closely.

(IG) announced that funding from Dorset LEP for the Gateway service finished in March and the funded Peer Networks programme also came to end this year although the Chamber was successful in bidding to deliver a smaller programme, Business Growth Groups. (IG) said that delivery of public sector funded business support programmes continues to be a key area of activity although it remains competitive in terms of bidding and we will be seeking to work with other organisations where the fit is right. (IG) stated that at this time, there are very little publicly funded business support opportunities.

(IG) moved on to say that this year has seen Dorset Chamber continue to embrace the health and wellbeing agenda to support the resilience of businesses and our teams. (IG) said that Liz Willingham continues to champion our ground-breaking Got Your Six project, a ground-breaking project that supports the wellbeing of our business leaders. (IG) said that this year has seen the delivery of some great wellbeing events including our walks in nature and we have also grown our bank of Mental Health First Aiders, our GU6 Champions who offer their support to those who may be struggling. (IG) thanked Lester Aldridge and Dorset Mind for their great support for our wellbeing activity.



(IG) said another particular area of focus this year has been our ESG programme, helping businesses embrace environmental, social and governance best practice. (IG) thanked both Dorset and BCP Councils for their support in this area. (IG) stated that Dorset Chamber have developed a comprehensive programme for businesses including many aspects of carbon reduction. (IG) said that take-up on the programme has been slow and that Dorset Chamber will be pushing this again next year given the real future needs of business to act in this area.

(IG) stated that strategic relationships remain very strong and our key partners include both BCP and Dorset Councils, Dorset LEP, the Universities, and all three FE colleges in Dorset.

(IG) announced that this year Dorset Chamber has also been successful in bidding to deliver the Dorset LSIP - Local Skills Improvement Plan. (IG) said this is part of a national review training provision in Dorset against the current and future skills needs of business. (IG) said this is a significant programme for Dorset Chamber, both strategically and operationally and we will be working with a wide range of providers and partners on this 3-year programme. (IG) gave his thanks to the lead Nicola Newman and the team for their great work on the project to date.

(IG) moved on to say how Dorset Chamber continues to receive fantastic support from the Board and Ambassadors and (IG) said he would like to say a personal thank you to them all. (IG) also reiterated his huge thanks to Simon West, Steve Mills, Paul Tansey and Nicola Newman as well as those Ambassadors who stepped down today, Alice Smee, Oliver Arnold and Heidi Roper. (IG) said he again would like to give a warm welcome to our new Ambassadors.

(IG) stated that he continues to work very closely with Dorset Chamber President, Caron Khan and (IG) said he would like to say a personal thank you to Caron for all her support and mentorship. (IG) said Caron continues to be a huge support to him on a personal and professional level.

(IG) then moved on to say that like many businesses over the last twelve months, Dorset Chamber have experienced some staff turnover but (IG) said he is pleased to say we are now up to full-capacity which has included investing in our marketing. (IG) then paid tribute to and (IG) said he is very proud to lead our great team.

(IG) concluded by talking about Dorset Chamber's future plans. (IG) said Dorset Chamber will continue with its work on both health and wellbeing as well as ESG and helping build the resilience of businesses in what will continue to be a challenging climate. (IG) said he is pleased to say that we will again be holding the Dorset Apprenticeship Awards, working with the Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network and sponsored by Superior Seals.

(IG) was also pleased to announce that next year will see the introduction of the new Dorset Business Awards as well as a major business conference, all planned within a busy business week in October next year. (IG) stated that our deliberate intention is the awards will not be to the huge scale of previous awards but our focus will remain on a very special and prestigious evening celebrating the achievements of Dorset businesses. (IG) said Dorset Chamber will introduce a new, independent judging process with an expert panel and our aim will be to recognise genuine excellence in business. (IG) said there will be more details to follow.

(IG) confirmed that Dorset Chamber are also developing a Future Leaders Forum, working with our next generation of business leaders, driving Chamber events and services for the under 30 generation. (IG) said we are also forming an inclusivity and diversity forum,

helping us embed inclusivity in all we do and share best practice with the business community.

(IG) said that, like Caron, he would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to and remember Her Majesty the Queen, Patron of the British Chambers of Commerce and who reigned with such leadership and dignity for so many years.

(IG) ended his speech by saying that there is no doubt we face challenging times ahead. (IG) said that as the accredited Chamber of Commerce for Dorset, Dorset Chamber will continue to do our best and as we look to the future, (IG) said he is determined we demonstrate positivity and leadership and we talk business up, not down. (IG) then thanked everyone for their continued support.

### **Any other Business**

(CK) said she was pleased to announce that following a vote at the last Ambassador meeting, Helen Stacey is now Deputy Chair of the Council of Ambassadors.

(CK) then enquired if there was any other business and as there was none. (CK) thanked everyone for attending before requesting that all Board and Ambassadors stay behind for photographs.

### **Conclusion of Meeting**

The President thanked everyone for attending the December 2022 Annual General Meeting closed at 11.30 a.m.