



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

### Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021 at The Marsham Court Hotel, Bournemouth

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

**And 43 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.

#### 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 The Marsham Court Hotel, Bournemouth on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 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

(CK) then asked Members to confirm that the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021 via Zoom, were a true record of that Meeting.

**The approval of the Minutes was proposed by Liz Willingham, seconded by Chris Kane, 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.

#### 3. Confirmation of Office Bearers and 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> year term)

**Vice President:** Tony Brown (2<sup>nd</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 Kimberley Davies, seconded by Simon West and agreed by everyone present (43 votes); there being no abstentions.**

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(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 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 re-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.

***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 2021/2022 until the next AGM: Liz Willingham, Paul Tansey, Gary Neild, Lesley Keets, Nicky Busst, Simon Boyd, Tony Brown and Nicola Newman. All have stated that they are pleased to continue to serve. Additionally they have also resolved the appointment of one new Non-Executive Director, Phil Popham and he has confirmed that he 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 Simon West, seconded by Chris Kane.***

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

(IG) updated that regarding Elected Ambassadors there were two 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 two spaces available, therefore there was no need for an online ballot for Elected Ambassadors.

(IG) confirmed that Helen Stacey and Juliet Beardsley were duly elected as Elected Ambassadors of the Council and thanked them for their willingness to serve the Chamber and congratulated them both. 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. **Financial Report**

(SM) began by introducing himself as a Partner at Mazars and the Honorary Treasurer of Dorset Chamber.

(SM) then went on to explain the trading performance for the year to 31st March 2021 in the statutory financial statements for the year which were being signed today and will be uploaded to the website by the end of the week.

(SM) spoke of when we entered the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 in good financial health, the balance sheet was the strongest in the Chamber's history, with healthy reserves and very healthy cash balances. (SM) said that we entered April 2020, the start of the financial year, with trepidation, not knowing how the pandemic would affect our core business of International Trade and Membership, but in the knowledge that decisions could be properly considered and taken without panic. He said that our initial budget suggested we could make a significant loss of £150k and he said that while we were confident that the Chamber could weather the storm, difficult decisions had to be made and new sources of income found.

(SM) started with income. (SM) said the highlight is that we did indeed see a significant decrease in income, down £236,000 to £667,000, compared to the previous year of £903,000. However, he said the decision was made not to run the Dorset Business Awards 20/21 which generated £130,000 income the previous year and therefore on a like for like basis the drop was just a little over £100k. (SM) stated this is still a significant fall of approaching 14%.

(SM) said we have been extremely gratified by the continued support of our members and our business partners.

(SM) went on to say that Membership income was potentially a serious concern as we went into the pandemic with many businesses going into hibernation or looking at ways of saving money. (SM) said that with that in mind, we quickly developed a digital package to our Membership to show how the Chamber could still be relevant to them, helping them with the provision of networking online and maintaining links with the Chamber and other Chamber members.

(SM) said that although Memberships were down by around 50 members to approx. 650, this drop could have been considerably more in the pandemic. (SM) said that by and large income from membership held-up, with a decrease in income of a relatively modest £26,000 from £235,000 to £209,000 the end of March 2021.

(SM) stated that the support of our Business Partners is, continues to be and always will be vital to the success of the Chamber and not just in cash terms. (SM) said that our Business Partner program contributed £127,000 to the year ending March 2021. (SM) said that on behalf of the Board he would like to thank all our Business Partners and members for their great support for Dorset Chamber.

(SM) moved on to say that due to the pandemic, all face-to-face events were cancelled for the year, however we developed an online networking programme delivered via Zoom, free of charge, to support businesses in lockdown the best way we could. He said these proved extremely popular with attendance often reaching 80 – 100 participants per event. (SM) said that they continue to be popular now. However, (SM) said that as a consequence of the forced change in the business model, income from our events programme reduced by £58k.

(SM) stated that our International trade services have been another 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 to our customers.

However, (SM) said that due to COVID 19 and Brexit, we experienced a major fall in income in this area from £310,000 to £200,000 a fall of £110,000.

(SM) said this remains a significant area of concern and is being monitored. (SM) confirmed that the British Chamber of Commerce are reporting that the situation is nationwide.

(SM) said 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) said that businesses are experiencing both driver and container shortages which is also having an impact on exports.

(SM) summarised that so far, our traditional revenue streams generated approximately £200k less income than in the previous year. (SM) said that having understood early that this was foreseeable, we sought new sources of income through the Peer Networks Programme funded by the Dorset LEP. (SM) said we successfully delivered 8 groups, all online, which generated £89,000 income. (SM) said that with funding also received for a Brexit advisor, to help businesses with complex export queries due to Brexit, we recovered about £100k of the income shortfall.

(SM) emphasised that Dorset Chamber has a key focus on ensuring it is sustainable on our commercial income streams and we are careful to not develop any dependency on public sector funding. He said that Dorset Chamber will seek to deliver public sector contracts but only where they are a strategic fit with the Chamber and meet the needs of our members. (SM) confirmed that the Peer Networks Programme and the Brexit advisory service met this criteria.

(SM) moved on to say that by far the biggest element of our overheads are our amazing Chamber team. He said that like many businesses we are indebted to the government support provided during the pandemic. (SM) said that we took the decision very early on to use the furlough scheme for 8 of our staff members which contributed a saving of £41,000 in the year. (SM) said that with the team working from home, this reduced pressure on some of our overheads and in general terms overheads have been well controlled by the finance department.

(SM) concluded that he is extremely pleased to say that the accounts show a surplus on ordinary activities before tax of £29,412 and after deducting tax payable of £4,135, we added £25,277 to our reserves. (SM) stated that as at 31st March 2021, Dorset Chamber of Commerce reserves stood at £394,000. He said this marks a further strengthening of the Chambers balance sheet over the last few years.

(SM) said looking forward, with the pandemic and Brexit still being problematic, challenges remain, not least in maintaining income from International Trade and from members. (SM) said that while we prepared a prudent forecast to March 2022 that anticipated that International Trade would continue to be slower than previous years, it has been more suppressed than we envisaged. (SM) said we have carried out a reforecast to the end of the financial year and we do now anticipate a loss in the current financial year. (SM) said our balance sheet remains strong and we have plenty of liquidity to absorb the loss. He said that new membership figures are again on the rise and once we have the Marketing Manager in place, we are confident that we will see our Membership figures rising as a whole.

(SM) gave a huge thank you to all our business partners members and customers for their support over the last 12 months in a very challenging year.

5.

### **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 2021, 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 2021.

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.

6.

### **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 Matthew Fretten, Seconded by Simon West and agreed unanimously. There were no abstentions.**

7.

### **President's Address**

(CK) began by congratulating everyone on still being here as amazing business leaders, despite the continual impact of the pandemic. (CK) said the relentless ambition and perseverance is truly inspiring, not to mention the willingness and ability to adapt and evolve in the face of adversity. (CK) stated that this is what defines a true business leader, and is why she is so incredibly proud to have served everyone, as President over the last 7 months. (CK) said that everyone has shown that you can survive even the harshest of climates, and it's this resilience that also underpins the Chamber, which has spent the last year driving itself and its members forward with a renewed focus on wellbeing – a focus that we can all agree is imperative to survival, both as businesses and as individuals.

(CK) then went on to say that the appointment of Xanthe Grace, a dedicated Health and Wellbeing coordinator, demonstrates our commitment to workplace wellbeing, and she said we hope that every employer will nurture their own employees with the same empathy and understanding. (CK) thanked our health and wellbeing sponsor, [Lester Aldridge](#), for their support in enabling this very important growth. (CK) said that despite the worldwide focus on physical and mental health in the workplace, there are many wellbeing issues that have, for so many years, been ignored. For example, the experience of women going through the menopause in the workplace. (CK) said she is incredibly proud that we have stepped out of the corporate comfort zone to lead the conversation on this massively important issue. (CK) went on to say that we're now talking honestly and openly about the real experiences of women at work, and she very much hopes that this conversation continues and that attitudes begin to change so that more women feel empowered to continue with their career.

(CK) said that with the recent launch of [Got Your 6](#), we're also leading the conversation around the mental health of our business leaders, whose own wellbeing can often get overlooked. She said that by building a network of business leader 'champions' who have undergone Mental Health First Aid training, we are able to provide confidential support to business leaders so that they have the inner resources to continue doing what they do best – growing their businesses, nurturing their employees, and contributing so dynamically to Dorset's thriving business

community.

(CK) said that by thinking 'outside the box' and focusing our attention on areas that were previously in the shadows, the Chamber's been able to buck the trend of the pandemic and actually prosper and grow. (CK) said that an example of this unwavering ambition is reaching out to our Chamber colleagues in Singapore to explore a partnership where the two chambers can work together on joint initiatives for the good of our members. She said that we welcome them into our Chamber family with open arms and very much look forward to the opportunities this important connection creates.

(CK) said she is also very proud of the 100% retention of Business Partner membership, which proves that the Chamber is still very much valued as a vital part of the Dorset business community. (CK) went on to say that to demonstrate our real belief in, and commitment to, our members, we've put forward several businesses to be recognised nationally for their excellence at the British Chambers Awards – and she said that she is personally very proud that Field International got through to the Winner of Winners awards, and very much hope they come out on top!

(CK) said she would also like to recognise our hard working CEO, Ian Girling, not to mention his brilliant team and board. She said we are fortunate to have an impressive selection of business leaders on our board, who give up their precious time to bestow their entrepreneurial advice and perspective, without which the Chamber would not be where it is today. (CK) said that their combined knowledge, experience and energy has been pivotal to the Chamber's growth over the last 12 months - all this whilst navigating their own businesses through the pandemic! Suffice to say that as a fellow board member, she feels extremely privileged to work alongside these inspiring individuals.

(CK) stated that this is why we have been able to survive, thrive and even start to think bigger than we ever have done before. (CK) said that the world of business is forever changing, and with the support of our board we are confident we can evolve with it, and even lead the way where others follow.

(CK) concluded by saying 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. She 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 our successes.

(CK) said that in her second year as President she will be honoured to continue the projects and initiatives we've started, harnessing the dynamic input of our board members to help drive the Chamber forward for the benefit of all. (CK) went on to say that now that we've initiated the conversation around women's experiences in the workplace, and how best to support them during the menopause, she is excited to take this to the next level, honouring the many women who - until now - have suffered in silence by turning a taboo into something that is widely understood and accepted.

(CK) thanked everyone again for your incredible determination over the last 18 months, and she said that she truly believes that for the Chamber, its members, and Dorset's business community at large, the future still holds wondrous possibilities - as long as we continue to work together, support one another, and lead the way as forward-thinking, taboo-smashing, business leaders.

## 8. **Chief Executive's Report**

(IG) began by saying that he would like to take a few minutes to present his annual report and today marks the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of him joining Dorset Chamber. (IG) said that this year we have been able to bring our AGM back to being a face to face event after our online AGM this March. (IG) stated that we need to do an AGM within 15 months of the last one so March was the latest we could stretch this. He said that this means that only 9 months have gone by since the last AGM but we are now back on our regular timeframe.

(IG) said he would like to begin by talking about membership. (IG) stated that currently membership stands at 656 and has been steadily increasing, being at 627 at the March AGM. (IG) said retention has gone from 74% of a financial basis to 79% and 97.79% from a volumes perspective. He said that the new membership models have bedded in well and we feel gives our members far more choice on the services they would like to receive.

(IG) said we know we need to do a better job on both marketing the services we offer as well as improving access to these for our members and this is something we are working on. He said we are also in the process of recruiting for a new marketing manager at this time.

(IG) said our Business Partner programme continues to perform extremely well and he thanked all of our Business Partners for their great support. (IG) said a specific thank you to all our Business Partners giving us 100% retention in this area including our Premier Partner OnBuy. (IG) also said a big welcome to The Dolphin Centre who returns as Business Partners, representing the retail sector.

(IG) also said a particular thank you to our website partners Digital Storm and Deep South Media, our website and newsroom Partners who continue to do such a fantastic job for us.

(IG) went on to say that our business magazine, Dorset Business Focus, continues to go from strength to strength as the leading business publication in Dorset and the only monthly in print. (IG) said a big thank you to those who support the magazine with advertorial and gave special thanks to our magazine partners Pulford Publicity and our own in-house editor Hayley Moore.

(IG) said he was also very proud of our Google rating, with 86 ratings showing a 5 star score. (IG) said this is the highest of any Chamber in the UK by some way, with most showing less than 5 reviews.

(IG) moved on to events, stating that this continues to be a very important part of the Chamber offering and whilst our online events have been very successful, we are now building a strong forward plan of face to face as well as virtual events. (IG) said we recognise the benefits of virtual events but there is no doubt people have missed the personal contact of being face to face. (IG) said we are improving our capacity in this area and he said he would like to say a very warm welcome to our new Events Coordinator Frankie Murphy who has started this week.

(IG) went on to say that a very significant part of our activities as a Chamber is our international trade support, helping Dorset businesses export goods across the globe. He said that exports include food, cosmetics, machinery and clothes. (IG) said we've also worked closely with businesses helping them overcome complex export challenges as a result of Brexit. Brexit and Covid have had a huge impact on export levels and these are some way down on previous years. (IG) said we are monitoring this closely and doing all we can to maximise this area of activity but much of this is beyond our direct control.

(IG) moved on to say that we continue to do a good job in the delivery of the Dorset Gateway service, funded by Dorset LEP, and this support has been invaluable to many businesses.



(IG) said we were also successful in bidding for a second Peer Networks programme, funded by Dorset LEP. He said that whilst delivery was initially strong, it's evident that many business people have been very time short and this has impacted on recruitment for new programmes. (IG) said that this situation has been reflected on a national level and Dorset remains one of the most high-performing areas in the UK. (IG) stated that January will see us launch a new programme which will focus on personal resilience for business leaders.

(IG) said we've provided an excellent service to the business community as a Kickstart Intermediary, helping many businesses access the Kickstart scheme. (IG) said this hasn't been without its challenges from an administration side but we are proud of the work that has been achieved and this has made a valuable contribution over the last year. (IG) said we also provided 2 Kickstart placements at Dorset Chamber and Luke and Angel have been excellent.

(IG) said that this year has also seen Dorset Chamber embrace the health and wellbeing agenda to support the resilience of businesses and our teams. (IG) said that Liz Willingham has been the driver of our ground-breaking Got Your Six project, a highly innovative project that supports the wellbeing of our business leaders, who are often isolated and face huge personal pressure.

(IG) said another area we are very proud of is our work on menopause awareness and education and we have been the first Chamber in the UK to champion and campaign on this very important area. (IG) said we've invested in our resources in this area with the appointment of Xanthe Grace, our dedicated health and wellbeing coordinator and he said he would also like to say a huge thank you to our health and wellbeing sponsors Lester Aldridge who are hugely passionate and extremely supportive of our work in this area. (IG) also said a big thank you to our health and wellbeing partners Ouch Training and Dorset Mind for their support as well as all of our GU6 Champions.

(IG) moved on to say that strategic relationships remain very strong and our key partners include both BCP and Dorset Councils, Dorset LEP, the Universities, particularly Bournemouth University and all three FE colleges in Dorset. (IG) said he had also recently become a board member of Weymouth College to help strengthen these links.

(IG) said he continues to receive fantastic support from our Board and Ambassadors and said a personal thank you to everyone for all the support. (IG) welcomed Phil Popham, former CEO of Sunseeker and Lotus Cars who has recently returned to our board.

(IG) also thanked Paul Collins, former board member, President and Ambassador who steps down as an Ambassador today.

(IG) then welcomed Juliet Beardsley who became an Ambassador today.

(IG) then moved on to say that he has worked very closely with our President Caron Khan since our last AGM and said a personal thank you to Caron for her support, mentorship and great listening skills.

(IG) also paid tribute to his fantastic team, saying all of whom have worked tirelessly in their respective roles. (IG) said It's the staff that makes any business and I feel extremely privileged to be a part of such a fantastic team. (IG) stated that as a move to improve our own resilience, he thanked and congratulated Theresa Higgins on her appointment as Chief Operating Officer in Dorset Chamber, recognising her role in supporting him in the running of the business.

(IG) concluded by saying that we will continue with our work on the health and wellbeing agenda and the coming year will see Dorset Chamber really embrace the ESG agenda,



helping business become more sustainable and environmentally aware, improving governance and embracing social value. (IG) said he is also very pleased to announce that next year will see us bringing back our Apprenticeship Awards, in partnership with the Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network and sponsored by Superior Seals. (IG) said we will also be looking to engage more closely with our younger workers who will form the businesses of the future.

(IG) then unveiled our new vision. (IG) said that we want to recognise the incredibly important role business plays in society. (IG) said that business is not all about directors seeking wealth through dividends and profit. Business helps finance our health service, our welfare system and education. Business provides education, supports the charitable sector and provides opportunities for fulfilled and happy lives. (IG) said he was delighted to announce our new vision, approved by our board as “Enabling Better Lives Through Business”. He said our forward activities will underpin this vision and bring this to life.

Finally (IG) thanked our members in helping us build a modern and vibrant Chamber. (IG) said the word ‘community’ has never been stronger in Dorset Chamber and he feels very proud of what we all have achieved.

(IG) ended by thanking everyone for their continued support and hopes for a better New Year for all of us.

#### **9. 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.

#### **10. Conclusion of Meeting**

The President thanked everyone for attending the December 2021 Annual General Meeting closed at 11.25 a.m.



