



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

Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 7th December 2023 at The Bournemouth Highcliff Marriott Hotel, Bournemouth

Present: Ian Girling (IG), Caron Khan (CK), Tony Brown (TB), and Sarah Milton (SM Minutes)

And 52 Members, and 5 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, and as advised it is being held at The Bournemouth Highcliff Marriott Hotel, on the 7th December 2023".*(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 1st December 2022, were a true record of that Meeting.

The approval of the Minutes was proposed by Ron Wain, seconded by James Tourgout, 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: Tony Brown

Vice President: Gareth Sherwood

(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 Jamie Forster and agreed by everyone present (52 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 Tony Brown be elected as President of Dorset Chamber for the following year until the AGM in 2024. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2023/24 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber.
- Vice President: The Members had confirmed by a clear majority that Gareth Sherwood be elected as Vice President of Dorset Chamber for the following year until the AGM in 2024. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2023/24 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber.

Tony Brown was elected as President and Gareth Sherwood was 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 2023/2024 until the next AGM: Simon Boyd, Lesley Keets, Nicky Busst. Matthew Fretten agreed that he will continue in his role as Honorary Solicitor and is in year 3 of his 3-year term of office and Lesley Fox formally stood for election for the role of Honorary Treasurer which was unanimously agreed by the Members. All Non-Executive Directors have stated that they are pleased to continue to serve. Additionally they have also resolved the appointment of three new Non-Executive Directors, Gareth Sherwood of YMCA Bournemouth, Toni Taylor of Tru Talent and Gail Ninnim of Ocean Automotive. (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 Helen Stacey and seconded by Mandy Fitzmaurice.

Members present approved the resolution for the continuation in office of Matthew Fretten, Nicky Busst, Lesley Keets, Lesley Fox and Simon Boyd for a further year.

Helen Stacey was appointed as the Chair of the Council of Ambassadors, which was proposed by Debbie Frith and seconded by Matthew Fretten and unanimously agreed by the Members.

(IG) advised that Liz Willingham, who had served on the Board since 2015 as Non-Executive Director and past President, had taken the decision to finish her time on the Board. (IG) offered his sincere thanks for her energy and support to Dorset Chamber, and particularly working closely with him as President during the pandemic.

(IG) stated that Gary Nield has also felt that the time was right to step down from the Board. (IG) thanked Gary for his incredible support for the Chamber and his friendship and guidance over the many years.

(IG) announced that Phil Popham has also stepped down from the Board, having served two

periods and (IG) thanked him for his great support as a Director in both his terms of office.

(IG) updated that regarding the Ambassadors, the term of office for James Akin Smith has come to an end and James informed (IG) that he is not standing for re-election. (IG) thanked James Akin Smith for his great service and support to Dorset Chamber as an Ambassador.

(IG) went on to say that Chris Kane had informed him earlier in the year that he is also stepping back from his role of Ambassador and (IG) thanked him for his great support for Dorset Chamber in this role.

(IG) also stated that Paul Clarke has also stepped back as an Ambassador following his appointment to manage a hotel in Salisbury and (IG) thanked him for his long term support.

(IG) said that regarding Elected Ambassadors, there were 9 nominees for the position of Elected Ambassador and in accordance with the articles Ambassadors being no fewer than 8 and no more than 16, there were 6 elected spaces available as well as 6 co-opted places. (IG) said that Clare Trevarton, Karen Parkinson, Michael Matthews, Nick Bryant, Jamie Forster, who was previously co-opted and Nicki Cluley who was standing for a second term were all ratified by the Board and unanimously voted on by the Members of Dorset Chamber.

(IG) went on to say that The Council of Ambassadors had also approved Lee Taylor, May Palmer and Michaela Smith to be co-opted Ambassadors, with such appointments to take effect immediately after the end of the AGM. (IG) thanked them all for their willingness to serve the Chamber and congratulated them all.

Financial Report

(TH) began by stating that Lesley Fox, Managing Partner at Mazars and the Honorary Treasurer of Dorset Chamber could not be here today and therefore she has been asked to read out the financial report in her absence.

(TH) started by explaining the overall trading performance for the year to 31st March 2023 before moving on to specific areas within Dorset Chamber.

(TH) said that although COVID restrictions had been lifted, Dorset Chamber still entered April 23 with some trepidation, not knowing what the long-term effect of the pandemic would have on both International Trade and Membership. (TH) said that International Trade was also still being seriously affected by BREXIT. (TH) stated that there were also concerns over the amount of public sector funding that would be available for the year.

(TH) said that we saw a decrease in sales year on year of £83,500 to £642,000 compared to the previous year of £725,500.

(TH) explained that this was due to the loss/increase of income in the following areas:

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. However (TH) went on to say that we have seen a major decrease in turnover over the last few years.

(TH) stated that 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 brought in the same income of £188,000.

(TH) continued by saying that we had hoped that International Trade would have bounced back to the numbers we were receiving pre COVID of £310,000, however Brexit was still an issue and the financial climate was very unsettling for businesses.

(Th) said that this still remains an area of concern and is being monitored closely. The British Chamber of Commerce are reporting that this situation is nationwide and reporting drops in export documentation.

(TH) explained that this is due to new rules and regulations since leaving the EU which have now become more expensive for our customers to export to the EU, in some cases making goods uncompetitive. (TH) said we had hoped that this situation would have resolved itself by this time. BREXIT, Covid, the Ukraine war and now a financial crisis is proving to be the perfect storm for export activity.

(TH) went on to say that Membership stayed steady in 2022/2023 compared to the previous year with a slight increase from £206,000 to £209,000, an increase of £3,000. Membership remains around 650.

(Th) said that we have seen an increase in new members, but retention has been challenging and therefore a continued emphasis is on membership retention and strong account management is vital. (Th) stated that Marketing continues to focus on membership benefits and we are looking to strengthen our resources around account management.

(TH) continued by saying that the support of our Business Partners continues to be vital to the success of the Chamber. Our Business Partner program contributed £127,000 to the year ending March 2023 and on behalf of the Board (TH) thanked all the Business Partners for their great support for Dorset Chamber.

(TH) was pleased to announce that a full calendar of face-to-face events was back in 2022/2023 which contributed an income of £62,000. (TH) said we also continued the online networking programme via Zoom free of charge to support businesses.

(TH) said that Dorset Chamber has ensured it is sustainable on commercial income streams, without developing any dependency on public sector funding. (TH) went on to say that with a drop in income within the International Trade and Membership areas, we did explore funding opportunities and we bid successfully for Peer Networks Programmes funded by the Dorset LEP and BCP & Dorset Council online ESG Programme which generated a total income of £56,000.

(TH) stated that we also became the employer representative body (ERB) for the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Dorset on behalf of the Department of Education in August, and this produced extra income and will do up to March 2025 in staff recharges.

(TH) said that overheads have been well controlled by the finance department as always, however she said that this is becoming increasingly difficult with the financial crisis and costs

rising in all areas of our business. (TH) said by far the biggest element of our overheads are staff costs.

(TH) concluded by saying that overall, the accounts show a deficit on ordinary activities before tax of £68,100 and after deducting tax payable of £357, saying we lost £68,400 to our reserves. (TH) said that as of 31st March 2023, Dorset Chamber reserves stood at £380,100. (TH) stated that this highlights the importance of developing commercial streams as well as concentrating on our core business.

(TH) ended by saying that looking forward, it is still an extremely challenging time for businesses including Dorset Chamber not least in maintaining income from International Trade, membership and reductions of public sector funded business support contracts. (TH) said that with that in mind, we prepared a prudent forecast to March 2024. (TH) said to this end, we are exploring new commercial income streams to ensure growth for the Chamber now and in the future which in turn will offer businesses support in a very difficult time.

(TH) thanked all the members and customers for their support over the last 12 months in a very challenging year.

(TH) thanked everyone for their attention before handing over to Dean Pullen from TC Group, Dorset Chambers appointed auditors.

Auditors' Report

Dean Pullen introduced himself and said he was delighted to be working with the Chamber. He said having audited the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2023, systems were good and that in his opinion these gave a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Chamber as of 31st March 2023.

He 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 Group had indicated their willingness to continue in office as Auditors to the Chamber and requested that TC Group be elected Auditors for the ensuing twelve months.

This was Proposed by Ron Wain, Seconded by Gareth Sherwood and agreed unanimously. There were no abstentions.

President's Handover

(IG) formally welcomed Tony Brown as our new President.

(IG) then begin by saying a huge thank you to Caron who he said has been an amazing President to work with and a great friend, mentor and guide to him over the last 2 years as well as President of our Board.

(IG) then presented (CK) with flowers before removing her gong to handover to (TB). (IG) then invited (CK) to say a few words.

(CK) began by saying that as she stands before everyone today, she cannot help but think back to the unprecedented circumstances under which she assumed this role. (CK) said that she was appointed during the pandemic lockdown and conducting our AGM online, said it was a moment that symbolised both challenge and opportunity. (CK) said that little did we know the incredible strides we would make together despite the uncertain future we faced.

(CK) said that during her time as President, we've carved a path of innovation and progress, taking bold and brave steps that have redefined the very fabric of our chamber's impact.

(CK) then went on to say that one of her proudest moments was pioneering the groundbreaking menopause campaign – an initiative that not only put us on the map but also shed much-needed light on a crucial topic. (CK) said that becoming the first Chamber in the UK to champion this cause brought us widespread media attention, including coverage on the BBC, and she said it's a true testament to our commitment to addressing vital issues impacting our business community and beyond.

(CK) went on to say that in 2021, the launch of the Dorset Apprenticeship Awards marked a significant milestone, celebrating the success stories and contributions of apprentices to our vibrant business landscape. (CK) said this event not only recognised talent but also highlighted the importance of supporting our future workforce here in Dorset.

(CK) went on to say that it has been a passion of hers to support young people in accessing every opportunity and the education they need to thrive.

(CK) said she is incredibly proud that during her tenure, our chamber was appointed to deliver the LSIP programme. (CK) explained that this appointment signifies an opportunity for us to actively contribute to enhancing local skills and fostering workforce development in Dorset.

(CK) then moved on to talk about the launch of the Future Leaders Forum in 2022 which she said demonstrated our dedication to nurturing the potential in young professionals. She said that supporting the personal and professional development of individuals under 30 within our business community has been a priority, ensuring a robust and resilient pipeline of business leaders for the future. Additionally, (CK) said that during her term, she hosted for the first time an International Women's Day lunch, and she said that she is planning to host again in March. (CK) said that continuing with her focus on people, she initiated the creation of an EDI working group to ensure we, as a chamber are doing all that we can to create an inclusive and diverse community.

(CK) stated that in 2023, our combined efforts culminated in the return of the Dorset Business Awards as part of a remarkable four-day Dorset Business Festival – the largest series of events the Chamber has ever delivered. (CK) said that this very successful event, not only celebrated excellence but also created collaboration and networking opportunities, further strengthening our business community here in Dorset.

(CK) then spoke of how proud she was of being named as one of the top five Chambers in the UK this year, and that this is a testament to the dedication, hard work, and collective effort of the Dorset Chamber team, our CEO, and the board.

(CK) went on to say that in a landscape where competition for membership communities is fierce, our chamber's ability to not only endure but evolve and excel is a testament to the collective spirit of our members.

(CK) said that as she bid farewell to her tenure as President, she is filled with immense gratitude for the opportunity to lead such an exceptional Chamber. (CK) said she has every confidence that under the capable hands of our incoming President, Tony Brown, that Dorset Chamber will continue to flourish and exceed expectations. (CK) then concluded by thanking

Ian and the team for entrusting her with this role, and for being the backbone of our achievements. (CK) said that the journey we've shared has been a memorable one, and she is excited to witness the successful heights Dorset Chamber will reach in the years to come.

(CK) then handed over to the new President of Dorset Chamber, Tony Brown (TB).

President's Address

(TB) began by saying that he was here today with a heart full of gratitude and a deep sense of honour. (TB) said it is with immense pleasure and pride that he expresses his sincere thanks for entrusting him with the responsibility of serving as this year's President of Dorset Chamber.

(TB) said to say he was honoured and delighted would be an understatement. He said the confidence placed in him is truly humbling and he is acutely aware of the significance of this role within our vibrant and dynamic business community.

(TB) stated that Dorset Chamber has long been a beacon of collaboration, innovation, and growth, and (TB) said that as we navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, he is eager to build upon the strong foundation laid by his predecessors and work collectively with everyone, to help move our chamber to even greater heights.

(TB) said he is fortunate to be surrounded by a community of dedicated professionals whose passion for the prosperity of Dorset is evident in the work that they do every day. He said he is committed to fostering an environment where ideas flourish, businesses thrive and where the collective strength of our chamber becomes a catalyst for positive change.

(TB) said he would like to acknowledge all the hard work and dedication of the chambers staff, members, the board as well as the ambassadors who together have made our chamber a driving force within the region. (TB) said that the commitment they have all shown is the backbone of our success and he looks forward to collaborating with each of them in the coming months. (TB) also congratulated (IG) on his 10th anniversary as CEO of Dorset Chamber.

(TB) concluded by saying that he is truly grateful for the opportunity to serve as President in its 75th year, and he said let us all make a lasting impact on our community and create a legacy of prosperity that will benefit generations to come.

(TB) then thanked everyone for their trust and said he was excited to embark on this journey with everyone.

(TB) then handed over to (IG) to go through his Chief Executive's report.

Chief Executive's Report

(IG) began by saying that this is his 10th AGM and he became Chief Executive of Dorset Chamber 10 years ago to the day and he said it's an absolute privilege to continue to hold this role. (IG) said he is extremely proud of our achievements over the last 10 years and thanked everyone who has supported him over this time.

(IG) went on to say that It's been an extremely challenging time for businesses over the last 4 years with unforeseen global challenges and we will continue to do our absolute best for our business community.

(IG) then said starting with membership, this currently stands at 657 with retention at 75%

in terms of income and in our last benchmarking report was at 85% from a volume's perspective.

(IG) stated that we continue to look at how we can improve the benefits of Dorset Chamber membership as well as retention and the year ahead will continue to see improvements.

(IG) then went on to say that this year has seen a step forward in our general marketing with the appointment of Caroline and Greg and this includes a more structured approach to marketing the benefits of membership.

(IG) said our Business Partner programme continues to perform extremely well and thanked all of our Business Partners for their great support, and said that these are longstanding relationships we highly value.

(IG) then gave a warm welcome to Enhanced who he said have recently joined as a Platinum Business Partner. (IG) said that everyone can expect to see our support for our Business Partners strengthened in the year ahead.

(IG) also said a particular thank you to our website partners Digital Storm and Deep South Media, our newsroom Partners. (IG) said that this year saw the launch of a new Dorset Chamber website and gave many thanks to Caroline and Greg and the Digital Storm team for their excellent work on this.

(IG) then went on to say that our business magazine, Dorset Business Focus, which is exactly 5 years old, continues to be the leading business publication in Dorset both online 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 team Caroline and Greg that work so hard on the magazine. (IG) said we will continue to develop the content in the magazine.

(IG) said he is very proud of our Google rating, with 119 5 star ratings. (IG) said that this is the highest of any Chamber in the UK by some way.

(IG) stated that our events continue to be well attended although he said we are seeing increasing cost pressure due to the economic environment. (IG) said that Events continues to be a very important part of the Chamber offering, and he said we have a strong forward plan of face-to-face events and people can expect to see a refresh of our events early next year.

(IG) was delighted to say that our highlight of the year was the Dorset Business Festival, a 4 day celebration that included a networking launch, a major conference and expo and the return of the Dorset Business Awards. (IG) said that with a footfall of over 800 businesses, this is the largest and most ambitious project ever undertaken by Dorset Chamber and he gave a huge thank you to his amazing team. (IG) also gave a big thank you to all our festival partners and said that you can expect to see the festival return in October 2024 over a two week period.

(IG) then moved on to say that a very significant part of our business is our international trade support, helping businesses trade across the globe. (IG) said that nationally we continue to see reduced documentation levels due to a variety of global events over the past 4 years. (IG) continued by saying that this is having an impact on us financially and we continue to monitor this area closely. (IG) said that we are also working closely with other chambers and pooling resources. (IG) thanked Tom and Kellie for their great work in

delivering our international trade services.

(IG) then said that this year saw our second Dorset Apprenticeship Awards, working with the Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network and sponsored by Superior Seals and was again a huge success, celebrating the achievements of people on all levels of Apprenticeships. (IG) confirmed that the awards will return in 2024.

(IG) also stated that we've also delivered the first stage of the LSIP programme, funded by the Department for Education and this has been a huge success, identify several areas for positive development. (IG) thanked our LSIP lead Nicola Newman as well as all the providers and employers that have contributed to this excellent piece of partnership working, and he said that we are now in phase 2 of this 3 year programme.

(IG) said this year saw a continuation of both our ESG and health and wellbeing work and said people can expect to see a continuation of this and this underlines our vision "Enabling Better Lives Through Business". (IG) thanked Lester Aldridge as our health and wellbeing sponsor.

(IG) then moved on to say that a couple of months ago he had the honour of meeting both Prince William and entrepreneur Steven Bartlett at the BCP launch of the Homewards project, with the aim of eradicating homelessness. (IG) explained that our role in this project will be engaging businesses in supporting 3rd sector organisations that play a key role in this area. (IG) said he is very proud of our involvement in this project.

(IG) said he is also delighted to say this year, working closely with Mazars, we successfully launched the Future Leaders Forum, supporting the personal and professional development of people in work under 30 and he thanked Mazars, our chair Toni Taylor of Tru Talent, David Massieu-King of Bournemouth and Poole College, Jack Ormesher of Trethowans and Aden Harrison of Mazars.

(IG) then moved on to say that Dorset Chamber has been very successful in bidding for and delivering public sector business support programmes over the last 10 years. He said that the majority of this funding is now being allocated to businesses in the form of small business grants and this, combined with the international trade situation, is placing the Chamber under some financial pressure. (IG) explained that we are not unique in this situation and many Chambers in the UK are experiencing this pressure.

(IG) said that like all businesses we need to continue to evolve and develop, and he is working with our board on innovative new services that will bring in commercial income streams. (IG) said that unlike many chambers, we are not heavily subsidised through publicly funded support and developing a commercial approach is vital as we look to the future.

(IG) stated that strategic relationships remain strong and our key partners include both BCP and Dorset Councils, Dorset LEP, the Universities, and all three FE colleges in Dorset. (IG) said the landscape is also changing as we look towards devolution and combined authorities and the future of Local Enterprise Partnerships. (IG) said his role will be to ensure the voice of business is truly recognised and heard within new partnerships that will develop.

(IG) said we continue to receive fantastic support from our Board and Ambassadors and he gave personal thanks to everyone. (IG) also said a warm welcome to our new Board

members and Ambassadors and he said he looked forward to working with them.

(IG) said he wanted to take this opportunity to say a very big thank you to our outgoing President Caron Khan who he said has worked with him very closely over the last 2 years. (IG) said Caron's support has been professionally and personally fantastic and he is very grateful.

(IG) then said that (TB) had done a great job in chairing the Council of Ambassadors over the last couple of years and he said he is really looking forward to working with him in his new role as President.

(IG) concluded by saying a huge thank you to the brilliant team in Dorset Chamber. (IG) said that after some staff changes last year, he believed that we've really bedded in as a team and he has never been prouder of our team and what we have achieved this year. (IG) said he had never worked with a better team.

(IG) said he was thrilled that this year we were recognised as one of the top 5 chambers in the UK in Chamber of the Year and said how proud he is of our achievements over the years. (IG) said that 2024 is our 75th anniversary and he said we will go into the year with energy and commitment in continuing to support our business community.

(IG) then handed over to (TB) for A.O.B.

Any other Business

(TB) enquired if there was any other business and as there was none. (TB) 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 2023 Annual General Meeting which closed at 11.30 a.m.