



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

### **Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 5th December 2024 at The Bournemouth Highcliff Marriott Hotel, Bournemouth**

**Present:** Ian Girling (IG), Tony Brown (TB), Gareth Sherwood (GS), Lesley Fox (LF) and Sarah Milton (SM Minutes)

**And 56 Members, and 6 Dorset Chamber staff**

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

At 10:30am (TB) took the chair and called the Meeting to order. He 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 5th December 2024".*(IG) asked Members of the press to identify themselves. None were in attendance.

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

(TB) then asked the Members to confirm that the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 7th December 2023, 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.**

(TB) 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 for a 2<sup>nd</sup> term

**Vice President:** Gareth Sherwood for a 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 Elaine Wilkins and agreed by everyone present (56 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 2025. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2024/25 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 2025. The outcome of the vote was noted and is listed within the 2024/25 AGM file held at Dorset Chamber.

**Tony Brown was elected as President for a 2<sup>nd</sup> term and Gareth Sherwood was elected as Vice President for a 2<sup>nd</sup> term.**

(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 2024/2025 until the next AGM: Simon Boyd, Lesley Keets, Nicky Busst, Gail Polkinghorne and Toni Taylor-Price. All Non-Executive Directors have stated that they are pleased to continue to serve. Caron Khan has confirmed that she would like to remain on the board as Past President and Helen Stacey will continue in year 2 in the role of Chair of the Council of Ambassadors. Matthew Fretten agreed that he will continue in his role as Honorary Solicitor and is in year 2 of his 3-year term of office and Lesley Fox agreed that she will continue in the role of Honorary Treasurer and is in year 2 of her 3-year term of office.

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

**Simon Boyd - This was proposed by James Tourgout and Helen Stacey.**

**Lesley Keets – This was proposed by Chris Kane and Nicky Busst.**

**Nicky Busst – Kimberley Davis and Mark Williams.**

**Gail Polkinghorne – Grant Esterhuizen and Roger Williams.**

**Toni Taylor-Price – Nicki Cluley and Nicky Busst.**

**Members present approved the resolution for the continuation in office of Matthew Fretten, Nicky Busst, Lesley Keets, Lesley Fox, Gail Polkinghorne, Toni Taylor-Price and Simon Boyd for a further year.**

(IG) then moved on to the Ambassadors, and extended his heartfelt thanks to Debbie Frith, Liz Hutchings and Michaela Smith for their dedicated service as Ambassadors, as they stepped down this year.

(IG) said that Lee Taylor of Bagette and Co. and May Palmer of Harry J Palmer Ltd have stated they wish to be elected Ambassadors after being co-opted in the last AGM.

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

**Lee Taylor - This was proposed by Jamie Forster, seconded by Michaela Smith and agreed by everyone present (56 votes); there being no abstentions.**

**May Palmer - This was proposed by Roger Williams, seconded by Nick Busst and agreed by everyone present (56 votes); there being no abstentions.**

(IG) stated that in the convening notice we stated we were seeking two Ambassadors this year and we received applications from 4 members for this position. (IG) said that the board will meet on 12<sup>th</sup> December and will review all the applications. (IG) then thanked the members who had applied for this position.

(IG) congratulated everyone and thanked everyone for their willingness to serve Dorset Chamber.

### **Financial Report**

(LF) began by explaining the overall trading performance for the year to 31st March 2024 and then outlined developments within the Chamber since the year end.

(LF) explained that we entered April 23 knowing that Membership and International Trade Revenues were going to continue to be difficult areas to manage due to the economic and trading climate, and, although Dorset Chamber has not relied on public sector income streams, (LF) said we had hoped there may be opportunities to tender for public sector business support programmes in the year but unfortunately this was not the case. (LF) said it has been a challenging year, and the Chamber has reported a loss after tax of £31,869, but this has been well-managed and the result was in line with the budget. (LF) said the result is improved on the loss of £68,478 to March 2023.

(LF) started with the income. (LF) said we saw an increase in sales year on year of £80,000 to £723,000 compared with the previous year of £642,000.

(LF) said we held the Dorset Business Festival for the first time which produced extra income of £100,000 and a profit of £25,000.

(LF) took this opportunity to thank our Premier Festival Partner, Lester Aldridge and our Festival Partners Blue Sky Financial Planning, YMCA, Dorset Council, Bournemouth & Poole College and The Dolphin for sponsoring the Festival.

(LF) moved on to say 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, however, (LF) said we have seen a major decrease in turnover over the last few years.

(LF) stated that 2023/2024 brought in a slight increase in income of £4,000 than the previous year, and income this year was £189,000.

(LF) said we had hoped that International Trade would have bounced back to the numbers we

were receiving pre COVID of £310,000. (LF) said Brexit was still an issue due to new rules and regulations since leaving the EU which have now become more expensive for our customers to export to the EU.

(LF) said we had hoped that this situation would have resolved itself by this time. Brexit, Covid, the Russia / Ukraine war, political instability across the globe and a resulting challenging financial climate is proving to be the perfect storm for export activity.

(LF) went on to say that The British Chamber of Commerce are reporting that this situation is nationwide and reporting drops in export documentation. (LF) said we believe that this income level will now be 'the norm' going forward.

(LF) said Membership stayed steady in 2023/2024 with an increase from £209,000 to £221,000, an increase of £12,000. Membership remains around 640 members

(LF) stated the support of our Business Partners continues to be vital to the success of the Chamber. (LF) said our Business Partner and new Associate program contributed £128,500 to the year ending March 2024.

(LF) thanked all our Business Partners and Associates for their great support for Dorset Chamber.

(LF) then moved on to events. (LF) said the business community have participated and enjoyed a full calendar of face-to-face events in 2023/2024 which produced an income of £67,000.

(LF) said our free events are still an important part of our membership offering. (LF) said it should also be noted we have faced increasing event costs in terms of venues, food and beverages.

(LF) stated that we remain the employer representative body (ERB) for the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Dorset on behalf of the Department of Education. (LF) said this produced extra income in staff recharges and will continue to March 2025.

(LF) noted that at this time we have not been informed as to whether the programme or funding will be continue after March 2025.

(LF) then moved on to our costs. (LF) said overheads have been well controlled by the finance department as always. (LF) said this is becoming increasing difficult with costs rising in all areas of our business. (LF) observed that by far the biggest element of our overheads are staff costs.

(LF) said overall, the accounts show a deficit on ordinary activities before tax of £31,494 and after deducting tax payable of £375, (LF) said we lost £31,869 to our reserves. (LF) said as of 31st March 2024, Dorset Chamber reserves stood at £348,249.

(LF) declared this highlights the importance of developing our commercial revenue streams as well as concentrating on our core business.

(LF) said 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.

(LF) said with that in mind, we have prepared a prudent forecast to March 2025.

(LF) concluded by saying that 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 to our

members in challenging times.

(LF) said a big thank you to all our members and customers for their support over the last 12 months. (LF) also said she would like to recognise the huge effort made by Ian and Theresa to drive the Chamber forward on behalf of the membership.

### **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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

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

(IG) handed over to the President of Dorset Chamber, Tony Brown (TB).

### **President's Address**

(TB) begin by thanking everyone for attending the AGM.

(TB) said he could not describe how quickly the last 12 months had gone and that he had had a fantastic year representing Dorset Chamber as President. (TB) added that he was honoured to have held that role, and thanked Ian, Theresa, and the team for their support.

(TB) state that the year has been eventful, with new challenges and opportunities faced throughout. (TB) said there were instances where it seemed difficult to get through a meeting without hearing the phrase "after the election."

(TB) said that during the year he attended most of the Chambers Networking events and accompanied Ian on two very successful meetings with both Dorset and BCP Council Leaders. (TB) said he was heartened by the strong relationships that we are now building with local councillors, their leaders and MP's. (TB) said his charity and Chamber work also brings him into close contact with various county decision makers and leaders, giving him a great opportunity to enhance and build on the Chambers position within the Dorset community.

(TB) then went through his personal highlights of the year:

- Attending a function in Bristol where we met Southwest Chamber members as well as spending three enjoyable hours in a car with Ian listening to and discussing Elvis.
- Attending the Bournemouth Airshow as a guest of BCP Council
- Supporting various charities as an auctioneer and guest at fundraising

functions.

- Obviously, the Dorset Business Festival and 75th Anniversary celebration were incredible, it was an honour to be President for these memorable events
- Welcoming as many new members as possible by attending the New Members coffee mornings
- Having lunch with Lord Elliot and hearing about the work of the Jobs Foundation
- Signing the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of Dorset Chamber
- Attending the VIP launch of Jet 2 at Bournemouth Airport
- Presenting talks on the benefits of businesses engaging with and supporting charities

(TB) said he is proud to be a part of a fantastic board who all share a passion for the success of business in Dorset but also the importance of the role of Dorset Chamber within our business community.

(TB) said he would also like to particularly thank Helen Stacey for her support to him as the Chair of the Ambassadors, who form an integral and important part of Team Chamber.

(TB) also remarked that last year has also given him a behind-the-scenes insight as to the energy, hard work, and dedication of the Dorset Chamber team and he took a moment to thank the team by way of a round of applause.

(TB) said looking forward, he is both honoured and delighted to be continuing as President for another year (TB) said it is a privilege to work alongside such an amazing group of professionals who care deeply about supporting each other and making Dorset a better place to live and work.

(TB) concluded by saying that there is no doubt that the next 12 months will be challenging for businesses including Dorset Chamber and everyone's support is greatly appreciated.

(TB) said the role of President is one that he cherishes, and (TB) wished everyone a very Merry Christmas and gave his best wishes for 2025.

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

(IG) thanked Tony and said it's a pleasure to be with everyone today. (IG) said he became Chief Executive of Dorset Chamber 11 years ago today and this year Dorset Chamber has also celebrated its 75th anniversary. (IG) began by giving an overview of the last 12 months outlining our priorities as we look to the future.

(IG) began speaking of membership, (IG) stated this currently stands at 646 with retention at 78% in terms of income and in our last benchmarking report this was 85% from a volume's perspective. (IG) said that Membership remains at the heart of what we do and remains stable although renewals and new memberships are challenging in the current climate and we expect this to continue. (IG) then thanked Sarah, Donna and Paul for their continuous hard work in membership. (IG) said we've been focusing on amplifying some of the excellent benefits within membership and will continue to do this in the year ahead. (IG) stated that the new member coffee mornings have also worked well, and that we will continue to look at how we can improve the benefits of Dorset Chamber membership.

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

(IG) stated that in the last twelve months we have welcomed ITCS, Ocean Automotive and now CrowdComms as Platinum Business Partners. (IG) said we also have three new Business Partners that should be coming on board in the new year.

(IG) noted that the Associate Programme was established in November of last year. (IG) said that this programme was designed as a midway membership between the standard and Business Partner memberships. (IG) stated that the programme is gaining traction and has successfully enrolled 11 Associates to date.

(IG) said that we want to strengthen the support we offer our Business Partners and Associates and are in the process of recruiting a dedicated account executive for these programmes. (IG) thanked all the Business Partners and Associates for their support.

(IG) also thanked our Website Partner Digital Storm for their great support and Deep South Media, our PR and Newsroom Partner who continue to do such a fantastic job for us on our business voice. (IG) also thanked Pulford Publicity for their support as the publishers of our magazine Dorset Business Focus.

(IG) said events continue to be well attended although he said we are experiencing increasing cost pressure through rising venue costs. (IG) stated that events continue to be a very important part of the Chamber offering and he thanked all the team and Kat for doing such a great job. (IG) said the team are busy working on a strong and varied events plan from 1st April and he said a huge thank you to all our event sponsors. (IG) reported that he is also delighted that we will be working with CrowdComms as our Event App Business Partner. (IG) said this will enhance the event experience from a digital perspective as well as provide enhanced sponsor opportunities.

(IG) reported that our event highlights of the year were the 75th Anniversary Ball and the Dorset Business Festival, that included a networking breakfast launch, a major conference and expo and the Dorset Business Awards, and with a footfall of over 1,000 delegates, the Festival was a huge success. (IG) said that 500 people attended the Expo, one of the largest business events to be held in Dorset for many years. (IG) thanked the Premier Festival Partner Lester Aldridge and Festival Partners Blue Sky Financial Planning, Bournemouth and Poole College, Dorset Council, Electrix and the YMCA Bournemouth. (IG) also said a special thank you to Paul Hackett of Image Republic, our Video Partner for his fantastic AV support with the Festival and 75th anniversary event.

(IG) then went on to talk about international trade support, helping businesses trade across the globe. (IG) said that nationally we continue to see reduced documentation levels due to global events as well as reducing border requirements. (IG) said this has had an impact on us financially and we do not anticipate numbers increasing. (IG) stated that with a smaller team in place, we are working with Business West to ensure we always offer a great service, and he thanked Tom and Kellie for their great work. (IG) also thanked our delivery partner International Trade Matters.

(IG) then moved on to say that this year saw our third Dorset Apprenticeship Awards, working with the Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network and sponsored by Superior Seals, celebrating the achievements of people on all levels of Apprenticeships. (IG) confirmed that the Apprenticeship Awards will return in 2025.

(IG) stated that we continue to deliver the Dorset LSIP programme (Local Skills Improvement Plan) for the Department for Education, helping to ensure that skills provision meets the current and future needs of Dorset employers. (IG) thanked Nicola, Vicky and

Rosie in the LSIP team as well as all the providers and employers that have contributed to this excellent piece of partnership working. (IG) said the future of LSIP's is currently uncertain past March 2025.

(IG) said we have also developed the Dorset Skills communication channel, working with all stakeholders, to keep employers informed regarding the full range of provision available. (IG) said that this year we have also worked in partnership with the Dorset Careers Hub in helping build the Dorset Work Experience Directory, a comprehensive directory of work placement opportunities for schools to use. (IG) said that within this we have also been advising employers on how to offer high quality and meaningful work experience opportunities. (IG) thanked Laura Bush for her great work on this project.

(IG) moved on to say that we continue to develop the Future Leaders programme, supporting the personal and professional development of the under 30's kindly sponsored by Forvis Mazars and Frettons. (IG) said that 2025 will see some new programme developments and he thanked Toni Taylor and the Future Leaders' committee for their support for the programme.

(IG) reported that Dorset Chamber has been successful in bidding for and delivering public sector business support programmes over the last 10 years. (IG) said 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 and general economic environment, continues to place the Chamber under some financial pressure. (IG) said we are not unique in this situation and many Chambers in the UK are experiencing this. (IG) stated that unlike many chambers, we are not heavily subsidised through publicly funded support.

(IG) said that looking forward, we should be open and transparent, and he stated we continue to face a challenging climate, particularly given the NI changes all employers will face next year. (IG) said we are working on new commercial offerings that include:

- The Campfire programme in partnership with Intergage, helping businesses understand and embrace AI – look out for AI Ian.
- A leadership programme with Lumine Developments.
- A sales leadership programme with Roger Williams of Sandler.

(IG) confirmed that strategic relationships remain strong, and that our key partners include both BCP and Dorset Councils, Dorset LEP, the Universities, and our FE colleges in Dorset. (IG) stated that the external landscape is also changing, and he has been working hard to continue to build our relationship with both Councils and ensure that Dorset Chamber and the business voice is embedded within the new Council growth boards that will be developed.

(IG) announced the new 2025-2027 Vision and Mission. (IG) said that our Vision still strongly relates to the wider contribution of business to society and is:

**A vibrant and prosperous Dorset business community that enhances the quality of life for all.**

**Within this, our mission is to drive the growth and prosperity of businesses as the county's leading business support organisation.**

(IG) said that the new document is a return to our roots and states exactly how we achieve this as a membership organisation. (IG) explained that the plan is a very clear statement of the core areas we will focus on to drive business growth. (IG) said that the plan will be a

clear statement on our priorities when we are often pulled in many directions. (IG) confirmed that our website will be updated to follow the clear and simple structure of this plan. (IG) said that copies of the new Vision and Mission could be found at the back of the room.

(IG) said a very big thank you to Tony Brown as our President this year. (IG) said that Tony is totally dedicated to Dorset Chamber and is also a great advocate for us within the wider community. (IG) said he was delighted Tony will continue in the position of President next year. (IG) also thanked our Vice President Gareth Sherwood of the YMCA for his great support.

(IG) also thanked Helen Stacey for her great support as Chair of the Ambassadors. (IG) said that Helen's dedication to the Chamber is fantastic. (IG) said that we also continue to receive excellent support from our Board and Ambassadors, and he said a personal thank you to them all.

(IG) concluded by saying that all the activities of the Chamber are underpinned by a brilliant and dedicated team. (IG) said a huge thank you to our marketing manager Caroline and her new colleague Dom. (IG) said that Caroline and Dom do a fantastic job on all areas of our marketing. (IG) also thanked our COO and Head of Finance Theresa Higgins and Sue Herbert for their hard work in managing our finances. (IG) thanked his colleague and PA Sarah Milton who he said looks after him as well as all our governance and meetings with our Board and Ambassadors.

(IG) stated that in what is a small business, the work and dedication of all the team is incredible and he said he is extremely proud to lead and be part of such a fantastic team.

(IG) ended by saying that after 75 years and as we look to the future, we will continue to stand by the side of business, always doing our very best to support our business community and support a vibrant and prosperous business community that enhances the quality of life for all.

### **Conclusion of Meeting**

The President thanked everyone for attending the December 2024 Annual General Meeting which closed at 11.30 a.m.