

**SEVENOAKS DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LIMITED  
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

held on 20th October 2021 at 10.30am on Zoom

In the Chair – Katrina Walker

**PRESENT:**

Dawn Blee	SDCOC CEO
Elizabeth Dolding	Warners Law LLP
Paul Baker	Wealden Properties Sevenoaks Limited
Mark Tuvey	Connectaphone Limited
Sandhya Iyer	The HR Dept
John Levett	The Listening Room Music Agency
Merilyn Canet	Sevenoaks District Council
Suzanne Rice	Computer Troubleshooters
Julian Weekes	ActionCoach
KathrynMcKerlie	Sevenoaks Chamber
Angela Dadson	Lakeview Accountants
Sharon Field	F M Conway

**1. CONVENE MEETING**

Katrina welcomed everyone, and the meeting was convened online. The agenda item AOB will be moved up the running order to enable the presentation to be made at a convenient time for the recipient of the Tuvey Trophy. The chat function is available to ask questions and the hand raising facility within Zoom can be used for any objections to what is being proposed.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Andrew Eyre – The Stag Theatre  
Simon Pickard – Collier Pickard  
David Hawes Gatt – Chevening Financial  
Andrew Raby – Thackray Williams  
Jay Finch – Hospices of Hope

**3. APPROVE MINUTES OF MEETING AGM 2020 AND MATTERS ARISING**

3.1 The minutes were taken as read. The minutes were approved by Mark Tuvey and seconded by Angela Dadson. All in agreement (voted for at end of meeting).

3.2 There were no matters arising.

**4 CEO REPORT – Dawn Blee**

Thank you Chair.

Looking back through my predecessor Julie’s notes for the 2020 AGM I see that her opening remarks were “It has been an extraordinary year”. At that time, I’m sure she never thought those words would be used to open a CEO report again, but one year on I find I am doing the same. “It has been an extraordinary year” AGAIN. Who would ever have thought that the world would be continuing to experience a pandemic throughout 2021 and for anyone of my generation or younger who did not experience trading through war time Britain, who would have thought that local businesses would

have been so resilient? In the past year there have been personal tragedies and businesses losses in the district but overall, to date, the area has done well in comparison to many others, and I take my hat off to those who have and still are, moving heaven and earth to stay afloat. I would like to think that the Chamber has played its part in providing support and the work that Julie and Kathryn continued to do through the beginning of 2021 to turn the Chamber world virtual was nothing short of pure magic. Through their hard work Chamber members were able to stay in virtual contact just when that was needed most, there was guidance through the available loans and grants available and the Chamber stayed afloat.

We may well be out of the woods now, but personally along with many of you I am still apprehensive of what this winter will bring and wish we could get to Spring 2022 in double quick time.

Partly because of the continues lock down restrictions and partly because there was an interregnum of three months between Julie's leaving and my commencing with the Chamber, not as much has been achieved as anticipated.

1. We have made good use of the grant offered to the Chamber last year to purchase a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system and we are beginning to see the payback in terms of better knowledge of communication with existing members and a great deal more focus on targeting new prospects.
2. The Website has undergone a transformation and is becoming a go-to resource in its own right and through combining back-end systems we are cutting down Kathryn's admin time so that she can spend more time promoting Chamber members and their initiatives to the local community.
3. Many of you have visited the Chamber office relocated to the newly opened Sevenoaks Business Hub for which the Chamber has taken over management.

It is not always easy to determine how our members first hear about us if they have not been introduced by an existing member, and I would like to think that it is a combination of the three initiatives, of knowing the market, having a good shop window and working at the business front that has led to there being 13 new members joining since July 2021 and only two members not renewing membership. The membership is now back up to 191 paying members compared with 204 in Jan 2020 and a peak of 220 in 2019.

Paul will be discussing the financial situation in greater detail.

As I say not all has been achieved as had been forecast and I have made some tweaks in the four months that I have been in place and that is what I would like to share with you now.

If anyone has not visited the website recently then this will be new to you and is a refreshing improvement on the previous site which had served its purpose but was overdue retirement. Following the example of the football and the Olympics we are delaying some of our 110 anniversary events until 2022 and making the most of the whole year. The 'look' is modern, clear, easy to navigate and reflective of the district and the character of the Chamber.

The Mission statement remains the same, in essence distilled into In Business to support Business. We interpret that as enabling members to Connect, Influence, Grow and we do this by always improving the service of the chamber by engaging its members, supporting them and attracting new members. So, we end up with a matrix that is at the heart of everything we plan to do. For the next year I see these items as the areas when the Chamber will concentrate its efforts, some of this information has been drawn from the members forum held last November 2020, some from the Business Partner meetings and some more recently.

Presentation of the Tuvey Trophy to Gareth Walters took place via Zoom link to Hever Golf Course with David Hawes Gatt and Roger McKerlie.

I have examined each part of the matrix and have come up with where I want to concentrate our efforts for the next year. WFHOMERS – new for most of us, COHESION – belonging is far more important than we realised, MENTORING, new initiative *Mentoring to Grow your Business* – a model I hope to repeat across a few areas of the Chamber demographic, RE-LAUNCH NEXT GEN and finally LEGISLATION the next big challenge to affect all of us in business and at home SUSTAINABILITY.

Green thread through everything we do. Share ideas, in it together, another use of the website to share best practice. Launching this idea at the Swanley Business Expo on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November.

This year has been one where the business mettle has been truly tested and has altered; become stronger and ready to continue and I look forward to the Chamber supporting it in every step of the way.

## **5 BOARD REPORT – KATRINA WALKER**

Incredibly, we find ourselves heading towards the end of yet another year, a year that I guess most of us, never imagined would be, still wrapped up in the aftereffects of the pandemic.

It's been a time of great change, not just for individuals, but for businesses, those that we work for, and those that we own; we've seen the struggles of the hospitality sector and of our retailers.

We've all seen times of isolation, but we've also drawn together, as a community, supporting each other, and finding new ways to communicate, especially through the medium of Zoom; and I have to convey my absolute gratitude to Kathryn, who has worked tirelessly, behind-the-scenes, to ensure that our events continued to run seamlessly throughout COVID.

For the Chamber Board, we've seen changes too, Kirsteen Allen who had been on the Board for over 6 years, and more recently as our Treasurer, stepped down shortly after last year's AGM; Nick Brooker, our then Chair, stepped away at the end of March, followed shortly after, by Julie Phillips our CEO, in April this year.

All extraordinary individuals who gave great energy and commitment to the Board and to the Chamber. I cannot thank them enough for their dedication, guidance and contribution over the years, they truly were instrumental in bringing the Chamber to where it is today and in preparing it for the future.

Of course, with each of those changes, new opportunities presented, and in December 2020, we welcomed Paul Baker from Wealden Properties, to the Board, as our new Treasurer.

I'm eternally grateful to Julie too, who was instrumental in the recruitment process for her successor, and we were delighted to welcome Dawn Blee, as our new CEO in July. As the months have passed, it is clear that our decision to appoint Dawn, was absolutely right.

We also saw Gareth Walters, WPA, step down from the Board towards the end of this summer, he too had been part of the team for over six years, and his contribution during that time, incredibly valuable, and I wanted to acknowledge that too.

For me it was an honour to be voted in as the new Chair, effective April, that was completely unexpected, but such an incredible privilege.

So as 2021 has unfolded, the Chamber has continued to reinvent itself, supporting its members and the wider business community, through the hosting of webinars, and topic and sector specific events,

information sharing and signposting, whether that related to government funding or other pandemic related support.

Irrespective of whether these events were business or social, the engagement was incredibly positive and reflected that as a Chamber, our approach was in the right direction.

We saw members offering support and sharing information to help others through these very surreal times; people really did come together. We also celebrated International Women's Day with the very talented Katherine Carter, Property Curator at Chartwell, another wonderfully supported event, with a few gents in the audience too.

Our coffee and chat zooms had already blended beautifully into our 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday's and although those remained virtual, as the months passed, the numbers continued to grow, and we all settled more and more into the virtual realms of networking and business meetings.

We re-launched Swanley and Westerham, virtually of course, and all successfully too. There's definitely a lot to be said for the power of zoom.

For those who joined in, feedback has been incredibly positive, members and guests alike, found great connection and engagement, especially within the breakout rooms. Some have even commented that those breakout rooms, for them, have been the most valuable, and given a preference, would rather virtual networking vs face to face any day.

As a Chamber we've had to be incredibly mindful of our members and of those guests who choose to join us, knowing that we needed to find a balance between our online networking and a way back to face-to-face; and for the time being, we'll retain that balance of both.

We've seen the opening of the new Business Hub, adjoining the council offices on Bradbourne Vale Road, where we too, as a Chamber have moved in, and taken up our own office space.

There's no question, we're settling in nicely, and we already have five new businesses who've moved in and are renting either hot desks or pods. It's really exciting to see this new venture opening up, and one we'll continue to encourage within the community.

September saw us host our first, face to face - 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday at the newly refurbished Plaza Suite at The Stag, 45 joined us and you could feel the excitement and the energy in the room, as people deliberated whether it was elbow bumps or hugs that were up for grabs, it was wonderful.

By our October 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday, we had over 60 in the room. It was fabulous, and lots of new faces too. This event also doubled as the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for Chamber member host, FW Conway, and all those wonderful cakes brought in by Board director, Sharon Field.

And whilst on the subject of anniversaries, this year also marks the 110 years of the Chamber ... and with all good things, we've decided to carry our celebrations into the summer of 2022, when hopefully, life will feel a little more comfortable.

We also engaged with the Sevenoaks Business Show at the newly refurbished Bat & Ball Centre, hosting the pre-show networking and breakfast at the Bat & Ball Station, and next month we'll be hosting the Swanley Business Expo, (so sign up if you can) ... life is returning, slowing, but surely.

So, as 2021 heads into its final few months, it's also brought with it two new Board appointments, Jade Pluck, Jade Consultancy and Jay Finch, Hospices of Hope. This now completes our Board, and one that is truly representative of the wonderful cross section of businesses, sole traders and charities from within our own membership.

I guess on reflection, and for as much as this year has brought some incredible challenges, heartache too, the support and community within the Chamber and within Sevenoaks itself, remains ever resilient, and as we plan for the new year ahead, we as team, remain wholly committed to our members. We are here for you, to listen to you and to help you and the community.

My thanks too, to the Board, for their commitment to the Chamber and for their confidence in me, you are an amazing team and I feel incredibly lucky to be working alongside you all.

## **6 RECEIVE AND APPROVE ACCOUNTS 1 APRIL 2020 – 31 MARCH 2021**

Chamber Treasurer Paul Baker summarised the previous year's accounts. Along with all businesses, the financial year up to March 2021 was dominated by the Covid pandemic. The Chamber continued to operate during this period offering continued and necessary support to members. Although the pandemic did impact our membership income through some of our members unfortunately failing, deciding not to remain with the Chamber as their businesses were forced to close for long periods such as the hospitality sector or taking the decision not to remain with the Chamber whilst their businesses contracted, all our members enjoyed the support and information that the Chamber offered including the ability to still meet people albeit virtually.

Against this background membership income did fall from £31k to £27k (primarily due to the loss of subscriptions from the larger business members) but just as significant was the loss of additional income from not being to host face to face events, down £6,000 when compared to the previous year. Overall, a loss of income from normal trading over the year of £10,000. A Government grant of £5,000 was received but this money was ear-marked for the redevelopment of the website and CRM system – an exceptional cost for an exceptional source of income

Admittedly, this inability to host events did lead to a reduction in some costs however during this period the Chamber did rent premises for the full year for the first time. The rent was reduced because of Covid, however, rent of £3300 was paid out during the year.

Most other costs were largely in keeping with the previous year which meant that although the Chamber experienced a £10,000 drop in core income a loss of only £2861 was recorded – this loss was funded by drawing on our cash reserves which fell accordingly.

Looking ahead it is anticipated that income from hosting events will return this year (despite recent media speculation) and an increase in membership fees is proposed to take effect from April 2022 – the start of the next financial year. These new fees will be communicated soon, and it is the view that the additional membership income will not only bridge the gap caused by the loss this year but also allow the Chamber to continue to offer an increased range of services. Overall, it is considered that the financial position of the Chamber has remained stable over this period, and we look forward to a stronger 2021/22 and beyond.

Angela Dadson from Lakeview Accountants thanked Kathryn for a very accurate set of records which makes their job much easier.

Accounts Approved proposed by Mark Tuvey and seconded by Dawn Blee. Motioned carried (voted for at end of meeting).

## **7 CURRENT BOARD DIRECTORS**

Andrew Raby, Sharon Field, Katrina Walker and Sandya Iyer will all remain on the board until the end of their 3 year tenure – motion carried (voted for at end of meeting).

## **8 RATIFY NEW DIRECTORS**

Dawn Blee, Paul Baker, Jade Pluck and Jay Finch (from October 1<sup>st</sup>) were ratified as new board directors – motion carried (voted for at end of meeting).

## **9 SPECIAL RESOLUTION**

Some discrepancy between the use of Sevenoaks District and Sevenoaks on its own. We are proposing that all words highlighted are changed to Sevenoaks District to reflect the name of the Chamber and the area that we cover. Proposed by Dawn Blee and seconded by Angela Dadson.

## **10 TUEVEY TROPHY**

The criteria for selection:

A member who attends meetings and events regularly

A member who regularly offers their support to other Chamber members

A member who demonstrates commitment and support to the Chamber

### **Winner for 2021**

Gareth Walter, WPA Healthcare

## **AOB**

Elizabeth Dolding explained that technically we hadn't voted on anything. We have proposer and seconders. All points above there then voted on. Approve Minutes, Approve Accounts, Current Board Directors and the Ratification of New Directors and the Special Resolution.

Meeting closed 11.11am