

Chairman's Report
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting
Friday 25th February 2022

Good afternoon and a very warm welcome to our second virtual AGM.

Whilst the world is slowly returning to events where we can physically see each other, our virtual experience last year was a positive one and we've found this an inclusive formula.

This will be my last AGM as Chairman as I have now completed my term; the post is being filled by Chris Hare, a stalwart of this Chamber, and I believe he is just what Jo and the Chamber need as they navigate the emerging landscape. You will hear more from Jo and Chris shortly.

It would be fair to say that my period as Chair has been unusual – the vast majority has been fulfilled from behind a screen and laptop. One of the best aspects though, has been my mostly early morning calls with Jo, before the world has really woken. If you think she's a dynamo, then you would be right! Our Chamber is so fortunate to have a CEO at the helm with such drive, tenacity, and rooted passion for this county. Jo – thank you for everything you do for Kent; thank you for allowing me to experience a different side of Kent business life and for introducing me to your brilliant team. I will continue to support you all as the Chamber moves onwards and upwards.

Despite the pandemic conditions, I've been able to take part in, and support some exceptional initiatives; International Women's Day with the inspiring Holly Tucker, from Not on the High Street; chairing my first hair-raising webinar, aptly called 'How to utilise your Crisis Communications, Social media and digital footprint'; another on Mental Health and Wellbeing and the first ever Kent Invicta Chamber Virtual Conference. Thank you, Molly Hall, and Neil Vanstone, for always being unflappable and calm! I will be honest and say that I was quite relieved to attend our physical Chamber Awards at the tail end of 2021, albeit Jo had me standing in for winners who could sadly not attend! I must admit that I am going to miss the fun and laughter that this role has afforded during some very challenging times.

Externally, the Chamber continues to be at the forefront of the business world, working hard to support members be resilient, innovative, and resourceful. It's clear that the UK economy is not out of the woods yet. There remains a great deal of uncertainty for businesses across all sectors, whether that is rising costs, labour shortages or supply chain disruption, I know that Jo and her team remain fixed on representing members where it counts the most – at a government level, working with regional partners, in the media and of course often directly with you as members.

Before I go, I would like to take a short moment to also thank the board of this Chamber. If you have not taken the time to learn more about the people who sit on the board, I urge you to visit the website and read the biographies. This is a board jam packed with talent – it's represented by folk from finance, law, communication, education, public service, HR, commerce, and whole lot of life experience. They are dedicated professionals who are truly batting for the members – thank you, thank you.

So finally, I would like to thank you one last time for your continued support as members of this outstanding Chamber; to encourage you to continue to share your business journeys with us; to engage, collaborate and encourage each other. I wish you all a healthy and happy 2022.

I would now like to welcome Jo James, CEO, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, who will take you through an operational update.