

# Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Enterprise Ltd

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## Minutes of the 31st Annual General Meeting

Held at Ashford Business Point, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025

### Directors:

Matthew Arnold, Natalie Benville, Adam Bryan, Annette Buss, Tracey Butler, Chris Hare (Chair), Nick Hawley, Ray Johnson (President), Richard Lavender, Andrew Metcalf (Vice-Chair), Tudor Price (CEO), Luke Quilter, Stuart Whorlow (Chair of Finance & Audit)

### Officers:

Lucy Druesne (Chief Contract & Policy Officer), Neil Vanstone (COO), Steph Stevens (Financial Controller)

### Present:

Adam Aitken, Stuart Alexander, Mandy Bearne, Lesley Bennett, Fazlin Blakemore, Matthew Bridger, Piotr Bytnar, Ben Capas, Joe Cochrane, Duncan Cochrane-Dyet, Phil Collins, David Dadswell, Christiaan de Lange, Marion Dinwoodie, Warren Dunham, Diane Dupree, Matt Edwards, Nick Fresson, Robin Natley, Renata Geciauskaite, Danny Gladdish, Anita Glover, Leon Hann, Chris Henry, Catherine Igoe, Damian Irvine, Jo James, Carly James, Alan Jose, Paul Kemp, Richard Kennett, Chris Kent, Neil Key, Richard Lavender, Michael Laws, Christian Lee, Liz Luesley, Ian martin, Chris Mcalonan, Paul McCartney, Nick McGowan, Tom Meadley, Lauryn Parker, Sally Paterson, David Peddie, Sam Perez-Lumbreras, Jason Rainbird, Drew Selman, , Tim Sheppard, David Skinner, Norma Thomas, Phill Thorne, Louis Tomlinson, Andrew Wenham, Gracey Wilsher, Martin Wyatt.

## 1. Welcome and House Rules

The Chair welcomed all attendees and read out the house rules for the meeting.

## 2. Apologies

Ruth Akehurst, Matthew Arnold, Declan Ausher, Jon Baker, Natalie Benville, Serita Boxall, Abby Burton, Graham Card, Adam Clegg, Simon Dolby, Melissa Dizon, Leigh-Anne Eason, Alison Gothard, Nick Hawley, Ray Johnson, Kulwinder Kaur, Kulwinder Kaur, Tracey Kerly, Pawel Kowalewski, Pawel Kowalewski, Tarisa Lamb, Julie Lawton, Ryan Lee, Paul McCartney, Noreen McKechnie, Trevor Murphy, Richard Nudd, Viktoriia Olenchenko, Andrew Osborne, Nick Potter, Hakan Şengül, Aaron Short, Richard Stafford, Tracey Butler, Benjamin Warner, Glenn Watson, Dave White, Harry Worrow.

### 3. Minutes of the Previous AGM

The minutes of the 30th Annual General Meeting held on 1st March 2024 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Proposed: Nick Fresson

Seconded: Robin Natley

Vote: Carried

### 4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

### 5. Chair's Report

Let me start by reflecting on the past year, the geopolitical situation remained volatile across the globe and continues to impact on the trading environment across the country and we're not immune to this here in Kent, and the impact on our supply chains, export markets, and local economies.

And of course, in the present day this remains unchanged. It was a year that saw economic uncertainty: fluctuating interest rates, inflation concerns, and global market instability have made it difficult for businesses to plan for long-term growth.

We've seen that attracting and retaining talent continues to be a challenge, with smaller businesses often struggling to compete with larger corporates that offer higher salaries, better benefits, and more resources for career development.

We continue to see technology advances: it was a period in which it seemed every other conversation was about AI.

In the same vein cybersecurity threats were ever apparent as businesses increasingly rely on digital operations, and the risk of cyberattacks has grown. We recognise that small businesses often lack the resources to implement robust cybersecurity measures, so it was great to see the Chamber supporting members with the second Cyber Crime Conference held in November.

It was also a year in which we saw sustainability continuing to be a focus for many businesses, with social responsibility an increasing feature in business models that is clearly appealing to eco-conscious consumers, but also our GenZ employees. This was ever apparent at last year's Chamber Business Awards where we saw some truly inspiring businesses that have transformed their green credentials.

Of course, the Chamber is not immune from these challenges with cuts to public sector funding, falling exports and employment costs. But, yet again, your Chamber Team have responded to the changing landscape and pulled together as one to deliver the support, protection and representation needed by our Members.

Despite these challenging conditions, we all continue to thrive, demonstrating agility and achieving ongoing success.

So, we're all in this together!

This year has also been a year of change for the Chamber.

We started the year with the appointment of Tudor Price as the Chamber's new CEO. With big shoes to fill, Tudor has been reviewing our products and services to ensure that membership is valued by all its members, and much more, and I promised Tudor that I wouldn't steal his thunder. so more on that later.

Looking back across the year as Chair there have been so many fantastic activities that the Chamber has delivered and too many to explore in the short time I have today.

So, I'd like to indulge you in just a couple that personally stood out for me and illustrate the diversity of what Chamber does.

- Firstly, the Chamber awards in partnership with Kent County Council was yet again a star-studded, glamorous affair celebrating Kent & Medway's businesses and recognising those individuals who have made a difference in the community. My gratitude to Neil and his team on yet another hugely successful event.
- and secondly, our continued drive to identify the skills gaps in our local economy, and our leadership in bringing education providers together to deliver the Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan. That's certainly kept me on my toes in my day job and I'm pleased to confirm that the funding for this activity has recently been extended into 2026. My thanks to Lucy and her team for this really important work.

Now, bringing us back to today...

Despite Kent & Medway not being selected for an accelerated devolution deal we remain committed in supporting any subsequent process and representing the interests of local businesses.

We continue to work with the British Chambers policy team in supporting major regional projects such as Lower Thames Crossing, Gatwick North runway, and the return of Eurostar to Kent to name but a few.

And of course, Tudor has been kept busy building relationships with the many new MPs across the county.

The year ahead is full of opportunity and whilst there may be challenges along the way, your Chamber will be in your corner to support, encourage and represent your interests.

Before I go, I would like to take a short moment to also thank my fellow board members. I'm very fortunate to work with some awesome people and our board is jam packed with

talent – it's represented by folk from finance, law, communication, education, public service, HR, commerce, and a whole lot of life experience. They are all Kent based professionals who are truly batting for the members – thank you one and all.

And of course, the STAFF here at the Chamber itself, who make it all happen so brilliantly...!

Finally, I would like to thank you, the members, 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.

## **6. Annual Report and Accounts**

The Director's Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025 were submitted for adoption.

Proposed: David Dadswell

Seconded: Lesley Bennett

Vote: Carried

## **7. Directors**

### **7.1 Resignations**

Tracey Butler, Nick Hawley, Richard Lavender. The Chamber thanks them for their service and commitment.

### **7.2 Continuing Directors (Second Year of Term)**

Matthew Arnold, Andrew Metcalf, Adam Bryan, Natalie Benville, Stuart Whorlow, Annette Buss

### **7.3 Continuing Directors (Third Year of Term)**

Chris Hare

### **7.4 Directors Offering Themselves for Re-election**

Ray Johnson, Luke Quilter

### **7.5 Co-opted Directors Seeking Formal Appointment**

Andrew Osborne

Proposed: Jason Rainford

Seconded: Paul McCartney

Vote: Carried

## **8. Nominations**

Tim Sheppard

Vote: Carried

## 9. Appointment of Auditor

The Board has appointed Azets to continue as Auditors for the year 2025/2026.

## 10. Fixing of Auditor's Remuneration

Members authorised the Directors to set the Auditor's fees.

Vote: Carried

## 11. Chief Executive Update

Thank you Chair and thank you fellow Directors for your commitment to the Chamber and I look forward to working with you closely over the next year to take the Chamber forward.

It's been almost a year to the day when I stood here in front of you as the newly appointed CEO of the Chamber. Then of course it was St David's Day and whilst we now meet on the eve of St David's Day, it's close enough still for me to wish you all a Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Hapus from the country with the coolest flag

So, what have we been up to this year and what lies ahead.

For those of you with perfect recall, you may remember I shared with you my working maxim of "nothing changes if nothing changes".

Well, as expected there's been a lot of change as we've strived to modernise our internal processes, working practices and environment.

To give you a flavour of our work behind the scenes, we've,

Established a staff wellbeing group that has organised social events, provided guidance to the SMT on key issues which has led to initiatives such as paid leave for birthday's increased healthcare cover, flexible working and set health friendly challenges.

We've invested in training for all our staff providing incentives and opportunities to upskills and develop. Notably, Neil Vanstone our COO completed his Level 5 apprenticeship and qualified as a Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. And our Financial Controller, Steph Stevens is on the brink of completing her Level 3 AAT course. We've also been working with Chamber Members B-Mix, to provide a supported employment opportunity for her in our conferencing department.

We've simplified and modernised our terms and conditions, moved to more flexible payment terms for members, invested in CRM and AI tools that will provide a more responsive and intelligent service for members

With our events, we've responded to member feedback for "member only" events, added two further county conferences to our programme on skills and thought leadership, increased the number of our successful chamber connections programmes, and created a further two sector specific focus groups in manufacturing and hospitality.

Our international team have expanded their services to include Carnets to the existing services of Customs Declarations and of course Export Docs.

We've invested in improvements and upgrades to our meeting and conferencing facilities, including podcast equipment, video conferencing and improved air conditioning.

It's been mentioned before but I'd like to acknowledge the brilliant work our Skills Team have delivered benefitting not just members but the wider business community of Kent & Medway and look forward to the next year on this programme

Looking ahead, we'll be pressing forward with some more visible changes to the Chamber through our Sales Transformation programme which will see the introduction of new membership packages designed around the life cycle of a business.

Again, for those with perfect recall, you will remember that last year I talked about the Chamber being more joined up in its approach to the members and these new packages will embody this ambition with benefits tailored to the needs and wants of your business at key stages in its growth. We excited to share these with you as they evolve.

But of course, we will be making sure not to rock the boat too much and will continue to offer the same core networking and collaborations opportunities enjoyed by so many of our members. Choice will be our watch word.

Our representation and advocacy work will be a key focus as the government brings forward some of the much-promised infrastructure. We will also be watching the Local Government Reform agenda closely and making sure the voice of Members is heard at every point as we see councils transition to Unitary Authorities.

Hopefully that's given you some insight into what's been going on and what's to come. All that's left is for me to thank you Patrons for the continued support of the Chamber, my Senior Management Team, and all the Staff here at the Chamber for the commitment and dedication they've shown across the year.

Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you all a prosperous year ahead.

## **12. Vote of Thanks**

Jason Rainbird gave the Vote of Thanks, expressing gratitude to fellow Patrons, members, the Chamber team, and Directors for their support and dedication.

## **13. Closing**

The Chair outlined that another AGM will take place in the autumn to realign the AGM timeline post-Covid.

The meeting was formally closed, and members were invited to partake in the buffet and networking, with a reminder to return for the next session at 1.30pm.