



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

4th June 2020

At 6.00pm at

With the Chamber team at The Generator Business Centre, and guests online via zoom (due to Covid19)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

John Merriman, Chair of Merton Chamber, welcomed guests to the very unique 28th AGM, online via zoom because of the Coronavirus pandemic which prohibited face to face events. A special welcome was given to the Mayor of Merton, Cllr Janice Howard, Stephen Hammond MP, Cllr Nick McLean, Cllr Hayley Ormrod and Cllr Adam Bush for joining the meeting.

John ran through the agenda items and confirmed that the meeting was quorate, in accordance with the Mems & Arts and introduced Diana Sterck, CEO who started the meeting with a review of the year.

Diana began the formal AGM by reminding guests that last year we met in June at the beautiful Cannizaro House and John Merriman reported to guests of the Chambers work around the 5 Cs – Connecting, Celebrating, Championing, Complying and Community - all of those apply even more during the difficult times and especially over the last 10 weeks.

Formal AGM

John Merriman asked guests to formally Approve the Minutes of last year's AGM. These were shared on screen for all guests to see and shared with members as a weblink. Guests were invited to put any questions on the minutes in the Chat function on zoom.

No action points were raised, so John requested approval of the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

The minutes were proposed by Nick Samuel and seconded by Nick Frank. No comments were raised. Guests were invited to raise hands in zoom to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the 2019 AGM.

John then went on to thank Diana for her strength and leadership, courage and creativity in leading not only the members but other businesses too. He recalled that back in March when lockdown was first announced she created a clear plan and inspired a team and led. She helped create a lifeline for many businesses and he went on to say how honoured he has been to have Chaired the Chamber of the past two years, and especially the past season. He said that if we were in the same room it would warrant a standing ovation.

Review of the Year

Diana Sterck, CEO, gave brief overview of the Chambers' work.



Diana said that for all of us this year has been a year of two halves – pre COVID and during COVID. With the chambers' year going very well up until March.

The Chamber worked in partnership with Morrisons Solicitors, and Love Wimbledon, by running the Merton Business Leaders Forum, bringing together the largest employers in the borough to discuss topical issues such as recruitment challenges.

The Climate Action Group was launched, sponsored by Centre Court Shopping, to drive forward actions around the Climate Emergency and with reference to the Council's cross party endorsed Climate Action Plan.

We promoted the benefits of Healthy Workplaces, working with LBM Public Health team and Healthy Dialogues.

The core activity of membership and b2b networking grew in popularity, and the Chamber currently has 720 members.

The Merton Best Business Awards. The 2019 Awards held last September were amazing and the Chamber was set to run another amazing Awards this year – with the total roll out plan for the 2020 MBAs ready to go in January of this year.

Then came March 2020 and the arrival of Lockdown and all our lives and the way we do business changed, almost overnight. Diana then explained how the Chamber responded to that and what has been happening over the last 10 weeks?

The Chamber quickly worked out that we needed to have an online presence and a way of engaging with our members so we initiated the Reach Out and Connect sessions very early on. So far we have held 11 Zoom meetings, with almost 300 participants attending, and feedback shows that these have really helped businesses to Connect and Collaborate. These will continue for the foreseeable future and the Chamber is pleased to be working with Merton Council on the forward plan for them. The chamber has recently introduced online training to support Compliance – despite COVID the requirements on businesses in relation to health and safety and fire risk still remains and guests were invited to see the details of those online courses on the website.

The Chamber continues to lobby on behalf of businesses, and this has been something that has been done since Day 1 of Lockdown. With the principal objective to champion the business voice. This has been done through working closely with Merton Council on the grants they are disbursing; working with the London Chamber to influence policy makers on grass roots experiences and information on businesses that fall into the gap on not receiving any help. Working with Stephen Hammond MP to make the case for businesses and also with the three local business improvement districts to work collaboratively with shared lobbying. There will be much more to come on that – with the process for new funds shortly to be announced by London Borough of Merton – on both the application process for the Discretionary Fund and how they will be using the High St Fund to support town centres and high streets.



Merton Giving – During COVID this has really taken off – the Chamber has worked with partners MVSC and Merton Council to quickly set up a Coronavirus Merton Giving Fund, which stands at £150,000 and includes £20,000 from the business community which has been matched with support from the Wimbledon Foundation and Clarion Estates, as well as funding from Merton Council and Moat Housing. The Fund has been distributing money on a weekly basis to local community organisations to support them in their work on COVID as well as their own survival. Diana also thanked businesses for their financial support and to those who took part in the 2.6 Challenge (a replacement to the London Marathon) and for the monies raised.

Merton Best Business Awards. Diana explained that everything was going swimmingly to March and the 2020 Awards were launched online one day after New Wimbledon Theatre (the original launch venue) closed its doors and then Lockdown was announced the week after. The Chamber team and directors reviewed and reviewed since that time as to whether the awards could and should go ahead with this year and finally, last week, the very difficult decision was made, along with the sponsors, to cancel this year's awards on the basis that they need to be timely and relevant. It was concluded that the Chambers' focus should be on supporting businesses as Lockdown is eased and as we move to our different stages into Reopening and Recovery.

Diana reported that we will be working closely with LBM on this phase and in determining the best support the Chamber can provide for businesses during the months ahead.

Our finances

All members had been sent the link to the formal accounts.

Following a restructuring and reduction in cost base in 2018, the strategy agreed by the Company had positive results. A key plank of that strategy was to bring the organisation of the Merton Best Business Awards in house and to increase sponsorship revenues. Membership and events activity has also been positive. As the Chamber moved into the 2019/20 financial year we entered a new agreement with the Willow Lane Business Improvement District to welcome 127 new members, and also secured five year's income for Merton Giving, a charitable partnership with MVSC and Merton Council. The Merton Best Business Awards 2019 were a great success and will continue in the same format for next year. Merton Chamber continues to serve the business community and launch new and relevant services.

Despite income of £169,000 - down from £248,000 in 2017/18, the Chamber ended the year with a small surplus of £7817 – a massive step change on the year before.

Diana thanked our Director Nick Frank, as well as Jonathan Askew from Hartley Fowler and Paul Seamen from Barclays Bank for their contribution to the Finance Committee and working with herself and Bernadette Cook, Finance Manager. She confirmed that the Chamber has very robust controls and strong financial management which is important as they made the decision last year to move from audited to management accounts.



Guests were invited to ask any questions on these accounts in the chat function. No questions were raised.

Guests were asked to approve the accounts which were proposed by Janet Borrow and seconded by Naomi Martin. These were approved by members on a show of hands.

In the past Merton Chamber has always had a resolution about appointing the auditors and accountants – Hartley Fowler Chartered Accountants. However, as the Directors made the decision to not have audited accounts, there is a resolution today is to seek members approval to remove this resolution as it is no longer applicable.

Diana asked for members to approve for the removal of the resolution to appoint auditors, which was proposed by Delrose Earle and seconded by Charles Hylton-Potts. They then were asked for a show of hands for approval. This was approved.

Diana passed back to chair, John Merriman.

Membership

Firstly because of the COVID Pandemic the Directors have agreed not to ask members to approve an annual increase of membership subscriptions. John confirmed that membership rates would be held at the current levels for the next 12 months and that monthly direct debits were offered to make membership very affordable. He confirmed the current membership rates.

Secondly – he went on to welcome new members who have joined over the last year and also make some recognition to a number of members for the longevity of their membership and support ..

He thanked Patron members – Hartley Fowler Chartered Accountants and Morrisons Solicitors. He then went on to welcome the new businesses who joined the Chamber this year. These were:

127 business from Willow Lane Estate;

14 New Love Wimbledon businesses;

13 from the South Wimbledon Business Area

Along with 26 new members – who were listed in the presentation.

John celebrated those longstanding members of the Chamber, which as a small business are particularly valued by the Chamber. These businesses are:

- Barclays Bank plc
- Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development
- Elys
- Hartley Fowler Chartered Accountants
- London Borough of Merton
- Marcus Beale Architects Ltd
- Microbee Ltd
- New Wimbledon Theatre
- Parkside Hospital



- Peacock & Co
- Polka Theatre
- WSM Partners LLP

Those businesses who were in the audience were presented with virtual certificates.

John then moved on to **COVID Kindness**

There has been an amazing response to the Lockdown and John mentioned just a few members who have carried out amazing work. These included Merton's Community Fridge, The Don's Local Action Group (part of AFC Wimbledon) and Kommunity Kitchen, set up by Wimbledon Print Co.

He then asked some members to share their experiences of Lockdown for their businesses. They were:

- 1 Nick Parr, Theatre Director at New Wimbledon Theatre
- 2 Emma Burns, Corporate Fundraiser at St Raphael's Hospice
- 3 Paul Harvey, Managing Partner at Morrisons Solicitors

Directors

John introduced the Board of Directors :

Janet Borrow

Delrose Earle

Nick Frank

Naomi Martin

Himself - John Merriman

Nick Samuel

James McGinlay co-opted from London Borough of Merton.

And at the last AGM Charles Hylton-Potts was welcomed.

Also Sarah Madden and Ash Daud – both of whom have recently resigned for personal reasons.

He thanked the Directors for the work they do and asked that the members confirm the reappointment of these Directors for a further year. This was proposed by Simon Marsh and seconded Dave Dadds. Members were invited to show hands to approve the Directors. This was approved.

Delia Porter from Business Clan had been invited to join the Board of Directors, and was invited to say a few words about herself.

Members were invited to vote Delia Porter to the Board of Directors. This was proposed by Nick Samuel and Seconded by Naomi Martin. This was approved by a show of hands.



So what happens next.

Whilst the team at Merton Chamber can't wait to get back to some networking events, to hold the business awards in 2021 – as asked some members how they see the short term picture.

These were:

1. John Merriman – Founder and Director of Crown Lane Studio and Metronome
2. Karine Torr, Founder and Editor at Darling Magazine
3. Helen Clark Bell, CEO at Love Wimbledon

John then thanked the Councillors, Officers, Staff and Directors at Merton Council who have joined us here today.

John then passed to Diana who opened the 'floor' to members to raise any questions or issues that they would like to share.

Diana thanked the team at Merton Chamber, and John and the Directors. Our members and sponsors and business improvement districts. Through collaboration we can get through this together.

She left guests with the message - Think Local, Act Local and Shop Local.

John thanked everyone for joining the formal AGM, and guests were invited to stay on and chat and network together.

- THE END -