

Minutes of the 128th Annual General Meeting
Held on Thursday 21 November 2024 at 8:45am
Priory 1101, Great Yarmouth

Present:

Nova Fairbank
Jonathan Cage
Paul McCarthy
Paul Vincent
Jack Weaver

Chief Executive
Vice-President
President
Chief Financial Officer
Chief Operating Officer & Company
Secretary

Together with representatives of member firms who attended this meeting – as per the list attached to these minutes.

Jack Weaver welcomed all to the meeting and ran through the format. Apologies were received from David Armstrong, Treasurer and Paul Vincent, Chief Financial Officer would instead present headline financials. Jack then introduced the President of Norfolk Chambers, Paul McCarthy to formally open the AGM.

Opening Welcome

Paul McCarthy said:

“Notice is hereby given that the 127th Annual General Meeting of the Norfolk Chambers of Commerce is being held at The Priory 1101, Great Yarmouth on Thursday 21 November 2024, commencing at 8:45am, for the purpose of transacting the business outlined in the agenda.

Welcome everybody, so nice to see you all here at this fantastic venue.

My first duty as President is to acknowledge and say thank you to the small but perfectly formed Chambers of Commerce team for the amazing work that they do on all of our behalf. Also thank you to my fabulous Board who freely give their time and expertise to support me and to provide guidance and governance to the Chambers.

As you know, our mission is to connect, support and give voice to every business in Norfolk, and your Chambers team have spent the last year doing just that.

Our numbers continue to grow off the back new members joining each month and retention rates likely unparalleled amongst membership organisations today.

Co.Solo will become a community and support network for what is the catalyst of all enterprise, the solopreneur; and the award winning Co.Next continues to empower, engage and encourage young professionals across Norfolk.

In addition to our annual flagship events – The Big Debate, Festival of Knowledge, Royal Norfolk Show and B2B – we’ve put on over 110 events this year as we increasingly become demand led, after all *‘What you need is what we do’*.

In the past couple of months our fabulous new Business Hub has opened at Hardwick House in Norwich. If you haven’t had the chance to see it, or better yet use it, then I encourage to do so – it’s a fabulous, high-quality resource and amazing value for you, our members.

Nova and the team continue to represent your views and needs at numerous policy forums attended by multiple stakeholders, and we are well placed to take advantage of whatever form of devolution is granted in due course.

And coming very soon, our Digital Chamber is almost ready for launching – it's been a long time in the making, and for those of you who have had experience of scoping, delivering, debugging and commissioning IT solutions, you will know what a complex and complicated world this can be. But the great news is that we're just about there and when we do go live you will certainly be impressed by both the functionality and the form.

So, it is with a great deal of happiness I reflect on the past year but also a little sadness as today sees the end of my two year tenure as President but, subject to your approval later on, I'll be passing on the privilege to Jonathan Cage, who having been President once before, brings with him a wealth of experience for the Chambers team to call upon as required.

So, thank you for being our members, here's to our future, and I hand over to our Chief Financial Officer Paul Vincent for the financial update.

Minutes of the 127th AGM

Jack Weaver asked for a proposer and seconder for the minutes of the 2023 AGM. James Howells of Turning Factor Ltd proposed, and Alexandra Hemen of the New Anglia Growth Hub seconded.

Annual Update including Headline Financials

Paul Vincent presented a summary of the financials for the 2023/24 year.

"During 2023/24, Norfolk Chambers of Commerce continued to deliver the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Norfolk and Suffolk, this is confirmed contract income which has improved the profile of the Norfolk Chambers to the education providers, helping to aligning the Business community's future education needs to training courses offered.

The Chambers delivered 2 New flagship events in 2023/24; the Royal Norfolk Show was a great success, enabling businesses to have access to stand and sponsorship opportunities at this high-profile event whilst the Festival of Knowledge gave businesses and education providers the opportunity to connect and provide a platform to meet the next generation.

Membership numbers increased slightly during 2023/24, with an increase in Strategic Partnership, those businesses with specific aims that align with a higher profile membership option. Customs documentation income has remained challenging since Brexit, however the demand for Carnet documentation to exhibit and travel abroad remains high.

There are ongoing cost pressures, on event delivery costs, staff wages costs and utilities. These costs have been maintained during 2023/24. In terms of innovation, the Chambers has launched a member portal enabling members to self service their directory, upload news, book events and access invoices. This is the first step towards further potential digitalisation

We have also just launched a co-working space in Norwich with desk and meeting space hub, enabling businesses to book meeting and desk space at a reduced rate.

Jack Weaver then asked for a proposer and seconder of the accounts. Paul McCarthy proposed and Chris Spinks of Westcotec seconded.

Governance & Key Board Appointments

Jack Weaver, provided an overview of the governance changes and key board appointments, saying:

“Current Treasurer David Armstrong of Flagship Group has served his term and will stand down, once the new Treasurer has been appointed. We thank David very much for his invaluable contribution to Norfolk Chambers of Commerce.

We are in advanced discussions with a new Treasurer. This person, once confirmed with join the full Norfolk Chambers board in Q4 2024/25 meaning formal confirmation would be at the next AGM.

Paul McCarthy will now stand down as President and serve as past president for one year. Huge thanks to Paul for his leadership and contribution to the Board.

Meanwhile, two Vice President positions have been vacated by Lizzy Dring and Michael Baldwin. We thank them both for their contributions too.

We now elect a new President with Jonathan Cage who will serve a term of two years. Can I have a proposer and seconder please?” Chris Spinks of Westcotec proposed, and Alexandra Hemen of New Anglia Growth Hub seconded.

“We also now elect a Vice President 1 with Simon Girdlestone for a term of two years. Can I have a ‘proposer’ and a ‘seconder’?” Paul McCarthy proposed and Carl Crysell of CJC Transport Consultants seconded.

“To advise there have been the following resignations from the Board of Directors since the 2023 AGM;

Gez Chetal
Michael Baldwin
Neil Foley

Thanks to them all for the work to support the Board in the last couple of years.

On to the recruitment of 3 new Board members

Alex Durand from Saxon Air
Catherine Richards from East Norfolk Sixth Form
Chris Spinks from Westcotec

Can I have a ‘proposer’ and a ‘seconder’ please?”

James Howells of Turning Factor Ltd proposed, and Jonathan Cage of Create Consulting Engineers seconded.

“Finally I can confirm that Price Bailey will remain in place as our auditors for another two years.

That concludes the governance changes. I will now hand over to our Chief Executive Nova Fairbank for a look ahead to an exciting year to come.”

Future View

Nova Fairbank presented a look ahead to 2024/25.

“At last year’s AGM, I outlined our early-stage thinking for collaborative work space in the heart of Norwich. As many of you will be aware, this came successfully to fruition and opened in August this year. The Business Hub has 36 hot desks, including rise and fall desks, breakout meeting space, privacy pods, a 20 person executive board room, superfast wifi and bean-to-cup coffee. Think high-end London collaborative space and it’s right here in Norfolk. For anyone that has not yet visited – what are you

doing?! Come and visit us and see for yourselves what an amazing space we have. Accessible by any business – member or non member.

We had another fabulous Royal Norfolk Show – bigger and better than the previous year and attended by over 4,000 people. We are now talking to the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association about how we expand still further for 2025.

B2B was our biggest and best yet – with over 130 exhibitors and a footfall in excess of 1,500 people. I think it is safe to say we went viral across social media that day. The stand quality was superb and we want to thank all those businesses who put in extraordinary effort to make our B2B the largest most successful business to business exhibition in East Anglia.

Our first large-scale Festival of Knowledge, which replaced the previous Norfolk Skills & Careers Fair was delivered in March 24, with just a 8 week lead-in time – for that size event, that's tight by anyone's standards and all praise goes to our brilliant Chambers team, our sponsors and stakeholders for helping us to pull off the nigh-on impossible. Whilst a success, we will be looking to learn and improve upon the 2024 event – to support even more schools and students in 2025. We will be aiming for a greater level of student interaction and a true careers experience for all.

We will of course be continue to deliver our flagship events such as The Big Debate, the Business Hub at the Royal Norfolk Show and B2B, as well as a whole host of networking events, Bank of England lunches and many more.

Our initiatives, Co.Next and Co.Solo continue to go from strength to strength ably supported by their Boards and their Chamber leads. From Mentors Mondays for the under 35 young professionals to Co.Knowledge Sessions for sole traders – everything we deliver is demand-led - so tell us what you need.

But probably the most momentous milestone for Norfolk Chambers is the full launch of the Digital Chamber. This has been nearly 7 years in the making and effectively puts everything we do as a Chamber of Commerce into a digital format. Fit for another 128 years plus

It is designed to support you, our customer, and puts you in the driving seat via a Dashboard that shows you everything about your Chamber membership, from your users and their permissions; to what events they have booked onto.

We have built our own version of Eventbrite – with extra whistles and bells, but with none of those pesky Eventbrite fees. You can see and access your invoices, membership certificates, the events you have created, and the news you have uploaded. 27/7, 365 days a year.

All of it is self-service – what we, as the Chambers team can see, you can also see and update/amend, as required. You are in control.

We would like to thank all those Chamber Champions, who volunteered to help us test the DC to breaking point before launching – your support and feedback was invaluable and very much appreciated.

We will not stop continuing to innovate the Digital Chamber to ensure it remains relevant to the needs of businesses today and tomorrow – however, that future innovation must be driven by you, our members. So don't be shy – if there's something you would like to see the DC do, then let us know, so we can build it into our future innovation plans.

The beating heart of Norfolk Chambers is our amazing team:

Jack, Paul, Victor, Katie, Lorna, Haze, Shelley, Cath, Dean, Bianca, Mike, Ethan, Tom and Ben. Collectively they are our account managers that connect, support and give voice to you all. Our marketing team that broadcasts your brilliance, our international team that helps you to expand beyond the UK's borders and our skills team that puts employers at the heart of the skills landscape. Chambers are the only business membership organisations to have dedicated resource on the ground, so do continue to let them know what you need.

The Norfolk & Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), which Norfolk Chambers leads, has helped to fundamentally shift the dial towards greater employer input in terms of the local skills landscape. We are now waiting for the Department for Education to advise what they see as the next Phase of the LSIP – obviously with a change of Government, you see a different remit and different priorities – so we will let you know what happens next, just as soon as we know! Despite this uncertainty, we are still looking at what's beyond the LSIP and we have some exciting plans for the future.

Speaking of future, what will be new for 2025 /2026?

Beyond the LSIP, we will be launching Co.Sortium. At present the majority of adult skills training in Norfolk is delivered by providers based outside of Norfolk – we want that to change. As such, we are working with a whole host of independent, Norfolk-based, training providers to create a consortium of training expertise in order to bid for the Norfolk training contracts that meet employer demand and adds greater value to what is already happening with our colleges and universities. Delivered for Norfolk by Norfolk. The advantage of Co.Sortium is our flexibility and agility to plug the identified skills gaps quickly and deliver across the whole of Norfolk. So, if you are an ITP that would like to get involved, please do contact either myself or Dean Pierpoint, our Skills Engagement Manager.

Still on the theme of supporting businesses – we will be bringing another initiative, Co.Spark into being. This is the brainchild of one of our Gold Patron's Batchelor Electrical Services. Rob Batchelor has successfully grown his business, but as he put it, he had to learn and do it the hard way. He wants to help the next generation of business leaders to better access that kind of knowledge to make their own growth journeys better.

Co.Spark will initially bring together a group of Patrons and Partners to start an initiative to support those business looking to grow, to offer them peer to peer knowledge and learning, mentoring and how-to-tips. We look at a range of support from events to Q&A sessions; mentoring to online support. We will bring our digital media platform, the Norfolk Knowledge Hub back to the fore, to not only provide signposting to expertise and support but to deliver a free source of knowledge for all businesses and to showcase those organisations supporting Co.Spark.

The coming year will bring both challenges and opportunities. Every business is looking at increased costs and Norfolk Chambers will be no different and steps will need to be taken to mitigate this. We will all need to continue to settle into a new government here in the UK; we need to build bridges with our European neighbours; and we will need to watch carefully what a Trump Presidency does for the USA and the UK's ability to trade with them.

Through all of this Norfolk Chambers will continue to connect, support and give voice to every business in Norfolk. We can all strive to grow and build a strong economy for Norfolk together.

Thank you"

Incoming President's Inaugural Speech

Jonathan Cage gave an inaugural speech as incoming President.

"Thanks to Paul McCarthy for doing brilliant job as President for last 2 years. It's always a challenge to helm the Chamber during a period of growth and thanks go to Nova, Jack, Paul, Victor and the whole Chambers team for their efforts.

I've been involved with Norfolk Chambers for 13 years now, I run my own business called Create Consulting Engineers based on Norwich. I am myself an SME and I see lots of opportunities and challenges in the years ahead. I got involved with Chamber originally to try to make a difference and having been President once before some years ago, I'm excited to do it again to continue to give back to the business community.

Over the last 8 years there's been a lot to get involved with, and the Chambers is a completely different beast! It has better offices, offers more support and continues to evolve. With fixed offices increasingly becoming obsolete – the option to use the new Business Hub gives an easy, cost effective place to work in a really good environment.

There's a huge amount of work that goes on behind the scenes and a lot of exciting stuff happening. What you often don't see is the sheer amount Nova and the team do in terms of political engagement, lobbying and influencing on behalf of the members

The link to British Chambers nationally is really important and gives us in Norfolk that access to politicians and ministers.

We recently held a training session as a Board, looking at governance and our next steps, and we were asked to simply write down a sentence that summed up what the Chambers is here to do. I wrote simply 'support the growth of Norfolk business' and I'll do my best over the coming two years to help the Chambers do that.

So, come and see me at events, say hello and let me know what you need.

Jack Weaver closed the AGM at 9:10am