

Report: Welcome to Yorkshire Update Report  
Report to: North and West Yorkshire Business Rates Joint Committee  
Date: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020  
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## **Purpose**

This report sets out progress made since the first report, considered at the North and West Yorkshire Business Rates Joint Committee of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

## **1. Introduction**

### 1.1 Background

Welcome to Yorkshire (WTY) was established in 2009 and is the strategic Destination Marketing Organisation for the region which aims to promote Yorkshire regionally, nationally and internationally. It is a not for profit membership organisation, funded through income from membership, corporate membership, specific projects, sponsorship and public sector income through LA agreements. Currently WTY's funding consists of a 50:50 split of public and private sector funding.

At the Committee of 7<sup>th</sup> October the North and West Yorkshire Business Rates Joint Committee resolved:

*– That approval be given to the release of Business Rates Pool funding for £1m in 3 tranches in October, December and February conditional on:*

- (i) That a public report on progress of implementation of the recommendations be brought back to the Joint Committee in advance of future funding tranches being released*

PROGRESS – This report details the progress to date.

- (ii) Recruitment to the Welcome to Yorkshire Board be carried out immediately and the interim Chair arrangements cease with immediate effect, and for a period of 12 months, a public sector appointee becomes interim Chair and the new Board is in place no later than the end of the financial year.*

PROGRESS – In October the interim Chair of the WTY Board stood down and Peter Box was appointed by the Board as interim Chair of WTY.

A recruitment campaign for Non-Executive Directors was implemented in October and advertised in the Guardian, Sunday Times, Yorkshire Post and a range of on line recruitment sites. More than 50 applications were received and recruitment of the first tranche of Non-Executive Directors took place in December 2019 with a focus on those people with skills and experience in areas of finance and legal. Subject to due process two new Board members have now been recruited.

The second tranche of recruitment is planned for February 2020 and the new Board will be in place no later than the end of the financial year.

A review of governance arrangements is complete and initial findings will form the basis of discussions at the WTY Board meeting on 22 January 2020. Implementation of the agreed recommendations will follow thereafter.

*(iii) A Chief Executive is recruited as soon as possible through a clear and transparent process.*

PROGRESS – Following a robust recruitment process supported by a specialist recruitment agency a new Chief Executive has been appointed.

James Mason took up the post on 6th January. Bradford born Mr Mason, brings a great deal of experience in business growth, finance, marketing and public relations. He is a former Chief Operating Officer at Bradford City Football Club and held a similar role at global sports agency, First Point USA. James has a passion for Yorkshire and a clear vision for the organisation moving forward.

The board of WTY firmly believes that Mr Mason will be a strong, creative and inclusive leader of the organisation. Prior to his formal appointment, he met with staff and stakeholders throughout December 2019.

*(iv) Until the recruitment of a Chief Executive is complete, Jacqui Gedman, Chief Executive, Kirklees Council be requested to provide strategic support to Welcome to Yorkshire, including authority to draw down the approved Business Rates Pool funding, as required.*

PROGRESS – Jacqui Gedman has continued to provide strategic support to WTY. She will now revert back to her previous role as an observer on the WTY Board and Chief Executive regional link and be a support to the new Chief Executive.

The recommendations and actions contained within the Improvement Plan are being delivered at pace, some of which require the input of the new Chief Executive and a more detailed progress report will be provided in April.

The financial position of WTY continues to be a priority. The funding from the North and West Yorkshire Business Rates Joint Committee was factored in to the WTY baseline budget for 2019/20. The funding received to date has contributed to planned activities throughout the year, in addition to meeting the additional financial pressures that resulted from implementing the recommendations from the independent investigations and recruitment costs.

The publishing of the accounts, year ended 31st March 2019, was delayed due to the audit process being put on hold last year whilst independent investigations were carried out into the organisation's expenses, governance, culture and management.

Given the WTY Board structure has recently been refreshed, it is also important that new board members are given the appropriate time to fulfil their corporate governance responsibilities when approving these accounts. WTY is currently working with the auditors to complete the process as soon as possible.

A strategy to build upon income levels is the key priority for the WTY Board and new Chief Executive.

A Business Plan is in development and will be completed by the end of the financial year. A report on the development of the Business Plan is attached at Appendix A

- (v) *Reports designated as exempt in respect of this item, be made available for public inspection, with the commercially sensitive information being removed in the first instance.*

PROGRESS – All reports were published on the WTY website. A discussion will be held at the January WTY Board meeting on how the board can be more open and transparent, building on the immediate changes that were implemented in October 2019.

- (vi) *A four month consultation process, led by the public sector, about the future of regional tourism be carried out.*

PROGRESS - Qualitative in-depth interviews took place with a range of partners and stakeholders in November to help inform the development of an appropriate quantitative survey. Staff workshops were held in mid-December. The consultation survey is live from 13<sup>th</sup> January to 17<sup>th</sup> February and the findings and initial report will be available in March 2020, these findings will inform the future strategic objectives of WTY.

## **2. Summary**

There has been significant progress on each of the conditions that were set by the North and West Yorkshire Business Rates Joint Committee in October 2019.

Work to implement the recommendations and actions from the two independent reports that are contained within the Improvement Plan continues at pace, and a detailed report will be completed at the end of the financial year. An update report will come back to this meeting in April.

The new Chief Executive and WTY Board now require time to focus on working with stakeholders to establish the strategic direction for the forthcoming period. It is anticipated that one of the topics that Yorkshire Leaders will collaborate on in the coming year is tourism and the visitor economy; WTY has a vital role to play in that.

## **3. Recommendations**

Members are recommended:

To agree the release of the remaining tranches of Business Rates Pool funding

To request a further progress report in April from the new Chief Executive and WTY Board early in the new financial year.