



**Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade  
Annual General Meeting  
Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
1pm By Zoom**

**Attendance:**

<b>Attendee</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Emma Mullen-Marmion (President)	Emerald HR
Michael McKeown (Treasurer)	Matt D'Arcy & Co
Julie Gibbons (Vice-President)	AbbeyAutoline
Paul Convery (Past-President)	BT
Colm Shannon (CEO)	Newry Chamber
Jessica Kane (Chamber Development Executive)	Newry Chamber
Jarlath Meehan (Marketing Executive)	Newry Chamber
Attracta Magennis	AIB
Niall Parfitt	Atlanticus Digital
Paul Slevin	Bank of Ireland
Edwina Flynn	Best Property Services
Peter Murray	Buttercrane
Colum Lynch	Colum Lynch Photography
Raymond Jackson	Confederation of Community Groups
Jackie Reid	Deli-lites Ireland
Anthony Boden	Digney Grant Insurance
Mark McGivern	First Derivatives
Leo McParland	Hamilton Shipping
David Hanna	Hanna-Hillen Financial Services
Linda Heaney	Hanna-Hillen Financial Services
Shaun Doran	Health Matters
Jerome Mullen	Honorary Consul of Poland
Marie Farrell	KPMG
Martin McEvoy	McEvoy's
Deborah Loughran	MJM Marine
Conor Patterson	Newry & Mourne Co-operative & Enterprise Agency
Paul Welsh	Newry Reporter
Jonathan McGilly	NMDDC
Martin Murdock	Norbrook Laboratories
Martin Lennon	O'Hare & McGovern

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Gerard O'Hare	Parker Green
Kevin McGovern	Danske Bank
Tracy Rice	Southern Regional College
Gillian Baxter	Staffline
Kieran Tumilty	Talon Security
Cathal Austin	The Quays
Caroline McKeown	Ulster Bank
Kieran Grant	Warrenpoint Harbour Authority

## 1. President's Welcome

The President, Emma Mullen-Marmion, welcomed everyone to the 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade. The President commented how like everything else, the AGM was held against the backdrop of Covid-19 therefore regrettably, it took place by Zoom with hopes to meet face-to-face at the next AGM.

It was confirmed that the agenda would follow the normal format with the President, Honorary Treasurer and CEO joining by video. Attendees were welcoming to interact at each section of the agenda using the chat and Q&A functions at the bottom of the screen.

## 2. Apologies:

Gemma Murphy	Jack Murphy Jewellers
Nuala Martin	AIB
Judith Poucher	The Clanrye Group

## 3. Approval of Minutes of AGM 2019

With no matters arising, the 2019 AGM minutes were approved:

**Proposed by:** Paul Convery     **Seconded by:** Conor Patterson

The President asked members for any matters arising which did not feature on the agenda and no further matters were raised.

## 4. President's Report

The President expressed how honoured and privileged she felt to lead the Chamber entering its 200th anniversary year in 2020. The term began with excitement and optimism, beginning 2020 with a strong series of events including the Meet the President Networking Breakfast event at Granite Exchange, the North South Conference in the Carrickdale Hotel and Newry Chamber's First International Women's Day celebrations in Killeavy Castle Estate. These events were attended by hundreds of business leaders from across the greater Newry area and the success of which, were to be the catalyst for similar events throughout the year. Then 10 weeks into the year, the business community and people of Newry faced unimaginable challenges. Lockdown and social distancing became part of daily vocabulary, face masks and screens became part of daily routines. In Newry,

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like around the world, the global pandemic had a dramatic impact on public health, with immediate and far reaching consequences for businesses. Business continuity planning stretched to the absolute limit as the business community struggled to cope with the double blow of lockdown and the consequences of Brexit, simultaneously.

The President noted how, as often said by dignitaries and guests who have visited the city, there is something so unique about Newry. That resilience is in the DNA of Newry city, newry business and newry people. 2020 will be a further testimony to the resilience that lies deep in its foundations. The President expressed amazement and pride in how the business community responded, adapted and changed in the face of such adversity. As working from home became the norm and some markets disappeared overnight, businesses developed new product lines and explored alternative market opportunities. Some businesses rapidly changed their business to support health service with face masks and screens. Also came the rapid digitalisation of the economy, which many local businesses were at the forefront of, benefitting from increased investment in IT and improved resilience. Equally the Chamber responded, adapted and changed.

The President expressed pride and gratitude to the entire Chamber team, Board and staff for all their efforts in navigating the challenges which Covid-19 presented. While the community may have felt disconnected, due to travel restriction and isolated because of physical distancing; Newry Chamber responded to the crisis with such unity and clarity. 2020 plans were shelved to refocus attention on providing much support in the wider community, the business community, and ensuring that the voice of businesses here were heard as the NI Executive responded to the crisis. Chamber Sub Committees for Finance and Marketing/Events were formed and met frequently to redirect plans. Seminars moved in person to zoom; and online training was responsive to the needs of the business community to overcome the challenges.

In difficult times, the role of the Chamber is to ensure that the voice of Newry is heard. Often this work goes unseen, but this year lobbying hard for businesses, large and small, ensured that the challenges faced were clearly understood, advocating for practical solutions that benefitted the community and impacted real change. This was achieved by the Board, Chamber members and the staff of the Chamber who had been very active in meeting stakeholders and government ministers over the past 12 months.

The Chamber has always valued the importance of a strong partnership with local stakeholders. The pandemic will have a much wider impact on work going forward behaviourally. The President stated that although Covid 19 may have forced everyone to stay further apart, community stakeholders came closer together and leadership came to the fore. The Greater Newry Vision Partnership became a community response hub, meeting at times weekly, and stakeholders continued to work collaboratively in ensuring the needs of the local community were met, and the business community was supported.

The President acknowledged the many people in the community who suffered directly because of Covid-19. A huge debt of gratitude is owed to health workers who worked through unimaginable pressures to save lives and keep everyone safe. Many volunteers, community workers and public service staff worked to help and support the most vulnerable in communities during the lockdown. Businesses opened their shops to serve communities and factories remained operational to put food on tables.

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The Chamber has always valued a strong partnership with the local council. The President commended the local council for their recently published Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy 2020 -2025. While there has been much debate about the regeneration plans for Newry City Centre, the proposals in the Belfast Region City Deal, will be transformative for the Greater Newry Area looking ahead. The Southern Relief Road is a vital infrastructure project which will improve access to Warrenpoint Port and the Mourne, as well as reducing traffic congestion in Newry City Centre. The investment in a new theatre and conference centre, civic centre, Grade A office accommodation, public realm, and a new park at the Albert Basin, will reinforce Newry's position as a key gateway city on the island's eastern economic corridor.

One of the core strategic pillars of the Chamber continues as Brexit. Covid 19 has distracted businesses from the concerns of Brexit but through the year it remained a dark shadow over business planning. The continuing delays and general lack of direction left businesses in a challenging position. This year saw the formulation of the Brexit Subcommittee to support the Chambers activities for the year on Brexit development. The Chamber continues to lobby, and provide necessary ongoing support to the business community in working through the consequences of Brexit together. Covid created many challenges and threats to businesses, to wellbeing, to communities that it will be etched in memories. In spite of its challenges, Newry has a strong and vibrant Chamber representing the needs of members which is reflective of membership of the Chamber which has remained buoyant during this difficult year. The Chamber can only be successful with the support of its members.

The President thanked members for their support and engagement over the last year; reassuring that the Chamber will continue to provide members with opportunities to make contacts and grow their business. The President thanked the Board, Colm and the entire Chamber team for all their efforts throughout the year. Human bonds, connection and community support are what people really miss during this time, but the President received all of this in abundance this year and appreciated the advice, support and guidance she received which allowed her to carry out the role, in a year no one could ever have anticipated. Despite uncertainty around the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of Brexit, the Chamber approaches 2021 year in a very strong position. The Chamber's clearly defined strategy continues to focus on meeting the needs of members while highlighting 'Brand Newry' as a premier destination to work, live and do business.

The President ended "I look forward to 2021 with optimism, determination and hope. I look forward celebrating our belated 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in the year ahead and celebrating the success of our community and business here as we embrace Newry 2021."

There were no questions from members for the President.

Jerome Mullen congratulated The President on her first year of term and work on keeping members informed during a difficult time.

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## 5. Treasurer's Report

The President invited the current Honorary Treasurer to deliver the financial report for the previous financial year ending 31st Dec 2019. The Treasurer thanked the President for her report which would act as a piece of history for 2020.

Commenting on the accounts ending on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, the Treasurer gave credit to the previous Treasurer during that time and the current CEO, whose efforts resulted in a positive position at year end. The CEO displayed the accounts on screen for members to view. The Treasurer referred to successful events including Business Awards which resulted in an increase of almost £10,000 of overall income in 2019 compared with 2018. The accounts showed a breakdown of each event alongside administrative costs. Strict control reduced 2019 costs to £97,421 from £123,132 in 2018. This enabled a break even end of year position with profit of £1853 compared with large deficit in 2018, to which the Treasurer congratulated the CEO. The 2019 accounts were signed off in August 2020 by the President and current Treasurer before submitting to Companies House. Providing some insight into the current year's financial position, the Treasurer and the CEO predicted a similar satisfactory position. A predicted break even position at the 2020-year end is the result of cost reduction and grant funding secured by the CEO to support the Chamber following the loss of income associated with the cancellation of events due to Covid-19.

Members submitted comments congratulating the Chamber on its strong financial performance in 2019.

The Accounts for 2019 were approved:

**Proposed by** Deborah Loughran

**Seconded by** Edwina Flynn

The President thanked the Treasurer for his support to her, the Board and the Chamber staff during his first year in the role.

## 6. Chief Executive Officer's Report

The CEO described how the Chamber entered 2020 in a very buoyant position. 2019 had been a positive year with increased membership, restored financial stability and exciting plans in place to mark the Chamber's 200 years supporting local businesses. In early 2020, direct engagement with members through events proved a real success, attracting hundreds of attendees. However, everything changed on the 12<sup>th</sup> March with the introduction of a lockdown in the Republic of Ireland and the PM's announcement on the 23rd March introducing a similar lockdown across the UK. Like other businesses the Chamber reassessed its business plan for 2020. The CEO in partnership with the Board, focused on two key priorities albeit daunting challenges; supporting members and maintaining the viability of the Chamber. A sudden lockdown sent shockwaves through economic life, leaving little time to deliver business continuity plans, causing confusion and real concern about the future of businesses. Government support was welcomed although delivery was, at times uncoordinated. Chamber members required considerable advice and support therefore the Chamber's model changed from in-person delivery to direct engagement.

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Since March, Newry Chamber issued nearly 80 Covid and general Business Updates; organised over 20 webinars with some 1000 attendees to help businesses deal with the twin challenges of Covid and Brexit. The Chamber's representation role in times of crisis ensured the voice of Newry businesses was heard. In support of local businesses, on several occasions the Chamber met with the Economy and Finance Ministers, the Infrastructure Minister, the Secretary of State, and the Shadow Secretary of State. Newry Chamber joined forces, with Belfast, Derry, and Causeway Chambers to add weight to calls for a more effective government approach to meeting the challenges of Covid 19. The request by the CEO to introduce Click & Collect for retailers at a recent meeting with the deputy First Minister and Junior Ministers from the Executive Office, was agreed by the Executive the following day.

The uplift in the Chamber's social media channels from 11,000 to over 12,000 followers reflected the value of the intensive support and advice provided to businesses in need. Despite the pressures on local businesses, Chamber membership increased in 2020. This was further recognition of the importance of the Chamber's role in supporting local businesses and the value attached to being a member of Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade. As Chief Executive Officer, managing the day to day business and governance remained key responsibilities. Responding to shutdown of the local economy and the loss of income stream from events, the Chamber undertook a fundamental review of income and expenditure to protect cash flow and secure the financial viability of the Chamber. The establishment of subcommittees ensured a break even financial position for the second year in a row. Although it will be challenging, Newry Chamber enters 2021 with financial stability and security, focused on meeting the needs of a growing membership base.

Within the Chamber's policy priorities, confidence and reassurance was provided by the NI Protocol which gave protection for businesses. The transition period and significant delay in securing the EU/UK Free Trade Deal caused real uncertainty for the business community. The Chamber continued to represent the interests of members on Brexit issues, with a range of successful webinars and direct engagements. Looking ahead, the delay in securing a deal during the transition period will undoubtedly result in implementation issues post 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. More recently, we are seeing the increasing complexities of what Brexit means for local businesses. The Chamber's recent webinar on the new Trader Support Service demonstrated for businesses large and small, how the security of supply chains and access to markets in early 2021 will be critical challenges. Brexit therefore remains a significant challenge for members and the Chamber will work to support businesses as the new GB/EU trading arrangements bed in.

The Chamber recognises its role in promoting Newry as a place to invest in and a place to work. It is important for businesses that Newry as city and region continues to attract investment to build on its position as a key regional city on the eastern economic corridor. The investment as part of the Belfast Region City Deal will contribute significantly to the growth of local economy and create opportunities for businesses. The Southern Relief Road is a key infrastructure priority and an important part of the City Deal. Equally important, is the District Council's regeneration plans for Newry city centre. A consequence of Covid, imaginative and creative ways are needed to attract people into the city centre. The new Theatre and Conference Centre, the Civic Hub, further investment in public realm and a new park at the Albert Basin will breathe new life into the traditional heart of Newry city. The Chamber looks forward to working with the Council to help with the implementation of these plans and represent the interests of members in how the plans are developed.

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Finally, in what has been a unique year and how it was planned to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the CEO thanked members for their continuing support, Chamber sponsors and partners, the Board, Honorary Treasurer, and President for all their support. The Chamber had to adapt significantly to meet the new priorities of members and the CEO thanked the loyal team of Jessica and Jarlath for their flexibility, resilience and above all their support.

In comments from members, Kevin McGovern commented on the benefit of the Chamber's Business Updates in supporting members firstly through the rapidly changing government policy and secondly for access to governmental supports and eligibility. Kevin enquired about alternative income streams for 2021 to which the CEO acknowledged how grant aid and furlough helped balance income lost from events and provided a buffer zone for next year. The CEO expressed reasonable confidence that events could be delivered in the second half of 2021. The Business Awards are planned for September 2021 when the vaccine programme is scheduled for completion. Other events including the NI Small Business Conference is planned as an in-person event but like all events, can be held virtually if necessary. The 2021 Chamber programme is in development and will be published for members in December 2020. Events scheduled for early 2021 will be held virtually with the hope of moving to in-person as the year progresses.

## 7. Election of Board Members, Council Members and Officers

The President invited the CEO to take members through the election process.

### Board Members

The following Board members had come to the end of their three-year term of office, after being elected at the AGM in November 2017 and were re-nominated to stand for a further term:

- Cathal Austin - The Quays Shopping Centre
- Dr Conor Patterson - Newry Co-operative & Enterprise Agency
- Gary Digney - PKF-FPM
- Kieran Grant - Warrenpoint Port
- Jerome Mullen - Clanrye Group & Honorary Polish Consul NI

In line with the articles of Association, all had been nominated by two members of the Chamber. The re-election of the above Board members for a three-year term until 2023 was approved:

**Proposed by** Paul Convery                      **Seconded by** Leo McParland

## 8. Council Members

The ratification of the Council members for 2020 took place in line with Paragraph 60 of the Chamber's Articles of Association. Each year several Council members elected in 2018 are required to stand down and are eligible for re-election. This ensures a balanced number of Council members facing election each year, rather than all Council Members standing down in 2021. New nominations to the Council were received and there were sufficient vacancies to cover the nominations.

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The following members were proposed as new members to the Council:

- Anthony Boden - Digney Grant
- Graeme Finegan - Grounded Espresso Bars

Given the vacancies, the new appointments, and previous appointments, three existing Council members were required to stand down and seek re-election. The following three members have stood down but have sought reappointment and will be re-appointed for a period of three years:

- Caroline Courtney – Smart Sales Hub
- Kevin McGovern - Danske Bank
- Tracy Rice – Southern Regional College

The re-election of the above Council members for a three-year term until 2023 was approved:

**Proposed by** Jerome Mullen

**Seconded by** Conor Patterson

### 9. Appointment of Officers

The CEO confirmed that at the 2019 AGM, the President, Vice President and Past President had been appointed for a period of two years. Michael McKeown agreed to stand again as the Honorary Treasurer and in advance, that appointment had been approved by:

**Proposed** Emma Mullen-Marmion (President) **Seconded** Julie Gibbons (Vice President)

No questions were raised in relation to the appointments.

### 10. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB

The President ended the meeting by thanking members for their attendance this afternoon and for their support over the past year. The renowned resilience of Newry businesses had certainly been to the fore this year, following an incredibly difficult year. The importance of supporting each other was reiterated, in order to see a return to normality towards Easter 2021. The President wished members an enjoyable Christmas at home with their families and hoped for a more 'normal' 2021.

**The meeting ended at 1.40pm**