

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Merton Chamber of Commerce

Date: Wednesday, 18th June 2025

Time: 6.45pm

Venue: Hotel du Vin, Cannizaro House

1. Welcome

The AGM commenced with a warm welcome from Charlotta Harbour, CEO, who opened the 33rd Annual General Meeting. She thanked Hotel du Vin, Cannizaro House for hosting the event and emphasised the Chamber's commitment to balancing the formal proceedings of the AGM with time for summer networking and dinner.

Charlotta extended her thanks to Sarah Austin, Chair of the Board, the Board of Directors, and the Chamber team for their work and support.

Special thanks were given to Patron Members Hartley Fowler and South Thames College Group, and to Premier Member Roehampton University for generously sponsoring the drinks reception.

Charlotta acknowledged the Chamber's members as the reason the organisation exists and thrives, expressing gratitude for their support and involvement.

2. Agenda

Charlotta introduced the agenda for the evening:

- Chair's and Executive Report
 - Apologies for Absence
 - Approval of Minutes of the 2024 AGM
 - Presentation and Approval of Accounts
 - Reappointment of the Accountants
 - Reappointment of Existing Directors
 - Appointment of New Directors
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3. Chair's Report

Sarah Austin, Chair of the Board, presented her fourth AGM report, covering the Chamber's activities for the financial year ending June 2024.

She described the year as one of Partnership, Collaboration, and Growth, highlighting:

- The final three Business Masterclasses, delivered in partnership with Love Wimbledon, on Sustainability, Digital Transformation, and the Future of Workspaces.
- Strong attendance at networking events as businesses sought in-person connections.
- A successful Merton Best Business Awards at AFC Wimbledon.
- Continued collaboration with Merton Connected on Merton Giving, which channels funding to local charitable organisations. Thanks were given to Merton Connected CEO, Tony Malloy, for attending.
- Thanks were also extended to members of Merton Council, including Cllr. Eleanor Stringer (Deputy Leader) and Executive Director, Jeremy Smalley.

Sarah confirmed that the meeting was quorate and proceeded with the formal agenda.

4. CEO Report – Looking Back and Forward

Charlotta Harbour outlined the Chamber's progress and future vision, structured around three goals:

1. Trusted, credible, and informed resource for businesses
2. Relevant and influential voice for business in Merton
3. Financially stable and sustainable organisation

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Key updates included:

- A year of transition with the retirement of Diana as CEO (April 2024) and operational upgrades including a new CRM system, new website member area, and enhanced communication.
- Growth in events and interactions, including Women in Business, Young Chamber (sponsored by South Thames College Group and Roehampton University), Business Leaders Forum, compliance training, and networking breakfasts.
- The launch of the first online AI workshop.
- The appointment of Janet Benjamin as Business Engagement Lead (July 2024).
- New Patron Partnership with South Thames College Group (STCG), enabling joint events linking businesses with students and aligning local curriculum to business needs.
- A new cross-borough collaboration: the first Merton Kingston Business EXPO (Oct 2024), attracting over 300 attendees. Plans for the next EXPO in October 2025 were confirmed.
- A record number of entries for the Merton Best Business Awards 2024, with a Bollywood-themed celebration.
- Ongoing partnership with Merton Connected to drive business community fundraising.

Charlotta emphasised that the Chamber ended the financial year in surplus and continued to grow membership to nearly 700.

5. Membership & Communications Update

Janet Benjamin, Business Engagement Lead, presented a membership update:

- +34 new members joined since June 2024, including 8 new Premier members.
- Greater engagement through enhanced onboarding, automated communications, and a Patron and Premier Tracker to ensure members fully benefit from their packages.
- Ongoing opportunities for members to advertise in the bi-monthly newsletter, participate in the Member Spotlight, and post Member-to-Member offers via the website.
- Social media and newsletter communications have expanded, with membership news now reaching over 3,700 business contacts.
- Launch of the SME Exchange Podcast as part of the Chamber's communications strategy.

Members were encouraged to like, follow, and share Chamber posts, and to submit their offers via the member portal.

6. Formal Business of the Meeting

1. Apologies for Absence – Received and noted.
2. Approval of Minutes of the 2024 AGM – Approved unanimously.
3. Accounts – The accounts for the financial year ending June 2024 were presented and approved.
4. Reappointment of the Accountants – Approved unanimously.
5. Reappointment of Existing Directors – Approved.
6. Appointment of New Directors – Approved.

7. Closing Remarks

Charlotta thanked members again for their continued support and reiterated the Chamber's role as a trusted, connected, and influential organisation for businesses in Merton.

The meeting concluded with thanks to all attendees, after which the summer networking reception and dinner commenced.

Meeting Closed: 7.30pm

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Formal AGM

Apologies were noted. There were 8 in total.

Wendy Patterson- WSM

Peter Mayhew-Smith - STCG

Simon Foulkes – Rainbow Productions

Board Directors: Janet Borrow; Mark Williams; Kieran Burge; Eleanor Merrick

Ulrika Hogberg -AELTC

Nick Teunon – UK Business Mentoring

Mel Burgess – Time and Leisure

Approval of the 2023 Minutes

Proposer: Paul Ahearn – Samuel Estates

Seconded by: Stacey Fraser - NWT

These were accepted as an accurate record of proceedings and were unanimously received. There were no actions required.

Financial Report

This covered our accounts from July 2023 to June 2024, a motion from our directors to increase membership subs and reappointment of accountants.

Our finances are overseen by a Finance Committee which meets 6 times a year and is Chaired by Director Nick Frank. Also on the Committee are Jonathan Askew from Hartley Fowler - our accountants, Gustavo Mofati from Barclays Bank, Bernadette Cook, our previous Finance Manager, Charlotta Harbour our CEO and Sarah Austin, Chair also attends.

Turnover was £270.6k – marginally up from 269.2K in the previous year. Our income is made up of membership subscriptions, sponsorship, income from events and managed contracts. We have further reduced our admin expenses vs the year before and have a small surplus of £498 vs a deficit of £11.2k the previous year. We have healthy reserves of £33.5k.

Proposer: Nick Luke

Seconded: Jack de France

These were accepted as an accurate record of proceedings and were unanimously received by a vote of hands.

Membership Subs

Sarah shared a slide to illustrate the motion from our directors to increase our membership fees.

We have a policy to increase our membership fees every year in line with the rate of inflation. This year it is 3.4%

	Current price	After increase
Classic not vat registered	£189	£195

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Classic vat registered	£415	£430
Premier	£924	£955

Proposer: Stacey Fraser

Seconder: Nick Samuel

These were accepted as an accurate record of proceedings and were unanimously received by a vote of hands.

To reappoint our Accountants

Hartley Fowler have been our accountants for over 19 years, and we are very thankful for the support they give us and for producing our annual accounts. We recommend that they are reappointed.

Proposer: Craig Hurring

Seconded by: Charlie Hylton Potts

To re-appoint existing members of the Board of Directors

There was one resignation this year, Nick Franck, Chair of our Finance Committee and Board member for 20 years. Nick received a token of our thanks.

Board director Kieran Burge has taken over as Chair of the Finance Committee.

James McGinlay – a co-opted member representing the London Borough of Merton, will step down due to health issues. We welcome Jeremy Smalley, Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development, in his place.

We are recommending that our existing directors are re-appointed.

Proposer: Amie Younger

Seconder: Seamus Murphy

To appoint one new member to the board of directors

Alex Woolf, COO of Romulus Group and serving as a non-executive director the past year.

Proposer: Seamus Murphy

Seconded by: Pooja Pillay

These were accepted as an accurate record of proceedings and were unanimously received by a vote of hands.

Charlotta ended by thanking the following:

To our members for their support and belief in our mission, Merton Council, our sponsors, and our partner businesses. Thanks to our Chair, Sarah, and Directors for giving their time freely to support our

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governance and development. Also, thanks to the Merton Chamber team - Lauren, Janet, Fredrick and Emily.

And finally, thanks to Natalie & Dalma from Hotel du Vin for this beautiful space and Rebecca Cresta our photographer.

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