

Statement from the Welcome to Yorkshire Board in response to an email from Sir Thomas Ingilby and the subsequent story in the Yorkshire Post on 6th July 2021.

“Sir Thomas Ingilby was a member of the Welcome to Yorkshire Board from January 1996 to April 2009 and then again from 23 April 2014 until he resigned on 21 December 2019. During that time, he was Chair of the Private Sector Members Group and served on various committees. He was a board member during the time of the two independent reviews of the organisation in 2019 and the events leading up to those reviews and, as a long standing member of the board he is more aware than most people of the challenges the new Welcome to Yorkshire leadership team are working to overcome.

The reasons for the gap in publication of the accounts is well documented and has been reported on, the financial accounts filed with Companies House cover the 18 months up to September 2019 and then to March 2020. This period precedes the current make-up of the Welcome to Yorkshire board of directors and the significant operational, staffing, cultural and strategic changes which have been made since March 2020 but does include the period that Sir Thomas was a board member.

Welcome to Yorkshire is currently undergoing a review of governance arrangements and each of the Private Sector Members Group (PSMG) has received communication to make them aware of the review and ask them to confirm that they are members of that group. The review has taken longer than we would have hoped because of the restrictions placed on us throughout the pandemic. Welcome to Yorkshire is now in the final stages of the review and will be contacting the PSMG to make them aware of the proposals from the governance committee. Welcome to Yorkshire will also arrange to hold an AGM in the Autumn.

Sir Thomas is mistaken when he says “the company hasn’t even held a meeting of the PSMG, who represent the bulk of Yorkshire’s tourism industry, for over two years”. As Chair of the PSMG Sir Thomas met with Peter Box, Chair of Welcome to Yorkshire in October 2019, two weeks after Peter was appointed as Chair. In November 2019 Peter met with two members of PSMG and Sir Thomas arranged a meeting of the PSMG which was held in the office of Welcome to Yorkshire on 21 November 2019. The composition of the PSMG is a historical group of past and present Welcome to Yorkshire members. A range of Welcome to Yorkshire staff liaise with many of these on a regular basis on matters appertaining to their individual membership, opportunities and challenges that they are facing and have faced over the past 18 months. In the next few weeks Welcome to Yorkshire will launch an Ambassadors programme which will truly reflect Yorkshire’s diversity of people, place and sectors.

Regarding transparency, Peter Box gave a commitment that board meetings would be held in public and board agendas and minutes published on the website. During the pandemic board meetings have been held using Teams and anyone who wishes to attend can contact Welcome to Yorkshire and request an invitation, some meetings have been attended by

partners, members and the press. Board minutes and agendas are available on the website, this level of transparency was not something that the previous board had in place.

Welcome to Yorkshire are committed to supporting the tourism industry. Initiatives launched throughout the pandemic include a three-month freeze on membership fees, a series of webinars to provide advice and support to businesses, the creation of the Recovery Task Group (chaired by Nicky Chance-Thompson DL), work with the North Yorkshire LEP to provide support to North Yorkshire businesses and partnerships working with local authorities across the region to support the reopening of the tourism and hospitality sectors.

With regard to membership, we are fully aware that prior to the pandemic the much publicised investigations following the departure of the previous chief executive led to difficulties for the organisation, including loss of members. A piece of qualitative research was done to ascertain what members thought of and wanted from their membership of Welcome to Yorkshire. This is something the new team and board are addressing but have been hampered by the restrictions placed on us during the pandemic over the last 18 months. Thanks to a new membership offer, which has seen the entry price level reduce and an investment in new marketing platforms, we have seen a stabilisation of membership and growth in our partnership packages.

Welcome to Yorkshire's current Board, created over the last 18 months, consists of a wide range of diverse and inspirational individuals with a wealth of public and private sector experience, representing the whole of the county with a collective, in-depth knowledge of the tourism industry across the arts, heritage, hospitality, attractions and so much more.

The board and leadership team at Welcome to Yorkshire value the opinions of all of our members and partners, James Mason and members of his team regularly visit the South, West, North and East of the region to meet and listen to our members. The team welcome both positive feedback and constructive criticism and are always willing to listen to and consider helpful suggestions for improvement.