

MARLOWE THEATRE

Appointment of

Chair

April 2026



Saxton Bampfylde

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About

The Marlowe Theatre is an independent charitable trust redefining how a theatre can combine commercial success and cultural purpose. Our mission is to be the engine house for the performing arts in Kent and shape the spirit of our region. We bring a presented programme of West End musicals, national companies, a symphony orchestra season and high-profile tours to Kent audiences, in a year-round programme of theatre, dance, opera, music and comedy in our 1,200-seater Main House. We are now in our second year of successfully producing high-quality drama for the UK's mid-to-large scale touring circuit, plus a series of small-scale family musicals, commissioned from exciting early-career creatives. We also co-produce our pantomime with Evolution Productions, which reaches audiences of 100,000 each year. Our 150-seat Studio is dedicated to the development of new ideas, with a mix of Research and Development, sharings and presented shows.

We are committed to nurturing creative talent across the region. We support over 500 creatives as part of our Artist Network, alongside our Writers' Room which develops regional talent and supports our producing aspirations. Our annual Writers' Room Festival showcases work developed in the Writers' Room, as well as new plays by leading writers.

Our ground-breaking work with young people gives them access to one of the best regional theatres in the country at the earliest stage of their careers and includes co-delivery of a UAL Level 3 Performing Arts course with East Kent Colleges Group;

being the national home of Matthew Bourne's New Adventures' Cygnet School; supporting the BA in Performing Arts at Canterbury Christ Church University; a Youth Company that equips young people with vital social skills, confidence and creative experience, while offering their first access to professional theatre-makers; a Youth Voice initiative that amplifies young people's opinions and influence. As the largest performing arts employer in the region, we also provide apprenticeships and over 1,000 hours of work experience and careers-focused workshops for 800 students every year.

We are fast outgrowing our spaces and developing major capital projects as a result, including turning the 800-year-old Poor Priests' Hospital within the city walls into a Creative Learning Centre and free heritage destination, with support from Levelling Up and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are also looking towards the long-term development of our theatre building, increasing our technical and producing capacity.

All of this is achieved without any public revenue funding. We operate through a resilient and entrepreneurial model driven by box office income, secondary spend, memberships, and philanthropy. Our loyalty strategy has built one of the most successful membership schemes in the UK, with over 9,500 members. Situated in the heart of the city centre, each year we welcome nearly 400,000 audience members and generate an estimated £50 million in regional economic impact.

Key Facts

9,500

Members

£50 million

Regional
economic impact

400,000

Audience
members



Creative
Green
Organisation
in 2020



Kent's engine
house for the
performing
arts



The Opportunity

The Chair's role is to lead the Board of Trustees, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities in overseeing the development and delivery of a strategic plan and in safeguarding The Marlowe Theatre's future. The Chair seeks to optimise the relationship between the Board of Trustees, the charity's staff and those people the charity seeks to serve. The Chair also acts as the supervisor to the Chief Executive and as an ambassador for The Marlowe across local and national networks.

Key Responsibilities

- To ensure that the Board of Trustees fulfils its duties and responsibilities for the proper governance of the charity.
- To ensure that the charity has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction and that the charity, the Trustees and the Chief Executive are focused on achieving these.
- To act as the charity's most senior representative and ambassador.
- To be the backstop when the unexpected happens or things go wrong.

The Chief Executive

Deborah Shaw has been the Chief Executive at The Marlowe since 2018 and has worked as a director, artistic director and producer in regional, national and international theatre for over 25 year. This includes 8 years as Associate Director with the Royal Shakespeare Company, where she directed the World Shakespeare Festival for London2012, commissioning work from across the world and collaborating with 30 UK theatre companies, festivals and venues.



Main Activities & Responsibilities

Board Leadership

- Lead the Board in ensuring The Marlowe Theatre's vision and strategic goals are achieved.
- Ensure the Board delivers on The Marlowe's artistic and organisational ambitions, with appropriate strategies, plans, funding, and governance frameworks in place. This includes championing The Marlowe's commitments to environmental sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion, community engagement, and access for all.
- Govern the charity in the long-term interests of The Marlowe, its audiences, and stakeholders.
- Safeguard the wellbeing of all individuals who engage with The Marlowe, including audiences, staff, artists, and participants.
- Oversee The Marlowe's financial integrity, ensuring that all dealings are properly accounted for, audited, and transparent.
- Foster a positive and inclusive Board culture that brings out the best in all Trustees, ensuring focus on The Marlowe's purpose as a leading theatre and cultural hub for Canterbury, Kent, and beyond.

Governance and Board Effectiveness

- Chair meetings of the Board of Trustees and liaise with the Chairs of sub-committees and working groups.
- Ensure effective communication and implementation of Board decisions.
- Take a lead role in determining the composition, structure, and development of the Board, including the recruitment, induction, and ongoing development of Trustees with the right blend of expertise and experience.
- Engage the Board in evaluating and continuously improving its own performance.

Executive Relationship

- Build a constructive, supportive, and accountable relationship with the Chief Executive and Executive team, ensuring alignment with The Marlowe's strategy and values.
- Work with the Board to guide, support, and monitor the Executive Team, particularly in relation to financial performance, audience development, and artistic ambition within agreed parameters.
- Ensure that the Chief Executive is equipped and supported to deliver on strategic objectives, including through performance review, professional development, and succession planning processes.
- Respect the non-executive nature of the Chair's role, providing guidance and challenge without encroaching on executive responsibilities.

External Representation

- Act as a principal ambassador and advocate for The Marlowe Theatre, promoting its work and impact to funders, stakeholders, and the wider public.
- Support fundraising and partnership-building initiatives across public and private sectors, strengthening The Marlowe's sustainability and reach.
- Represent The Marlowe within the wider publicly funded arts landscape, maintaining constructive dialogue, local government, and other strategic partners.

Person Specification

Personal qualities

The Chair of The Marlowe Theatre will be altruistic, confident, focused, open, and an active, reflective listener. They will also be organised, flexible, respectful and empowering as well as demonstrating:

- the highest standards of integrity and probity, personally and in relation to The Marlowe Theatre, ensuring the organisation aspires to excellence in all its work and relationships.
- the ability to build consensus through balanced, inclusive discussion at Board level, supporting clear decisions that everyone can stand behind.
- a genuine passion for the performing arts, community engagement and creative learning, with a strong empathy for The Marlowe's mission; to be Kent's engine house for the performing arts and shape the spirit of our region.
- strong leadership and interpersonal skills, working effectively with Trustees, staff, artists, audiences, partners and other stakeholders.
- clarity about the non-executive nature of the role and the level of commitment it requires; can see the big picture, collaborate well, handle contentious issues positively and be assertive and constructive.

Skills and experience

The successful candidate will ideally bring all or most of the following:

- an understanding of good governance and Board leadership and development, ideally gained through prior experience in a chair or non-executive role in the charity, public or commercial sectors.
- a strong track record of leadership, with the skills required to support, challenge and champion an excellent Executive team.
- a willingness to play an active role in fundraising, working alongside the Executive and Development teams where appropriate.
- the appetite to be an outstanding ambassador and advocate for The Marlowe Theatre and its mission, building relationships with funders, partners and stakeholders.
- the capacity for strategic thinking to support The Marlowe's ambitions and long-term development in Canterbury, across Kent and beyond.
- a demonstrable commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and to ensuring that The Marlowe is welcoming, representative and accessible to everyone.

“Our mission is to be Kent’s engine house for the performing arts, shaping the spirit of our region.”



**MARLOWE
THEATRE**

Terms of Appointment

Time commitment

It is expected the Chair will be able to commit around 2-3 days a month to the role.

Remuneration

This is an unpaid role though reasonable expenses may be claimed.

Location

The Marlowe Theatre is based in Canterbury.

Due diligence

Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.



How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to The Marlowe Theatre on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **EBYYB**

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Monday 18th May 2026.**

* The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.



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