

**Cotswold Link u3a network**  
**Minutes of half yearly meeting held on 11 October 2023**  
**at Malvern Rugby Club**

**Present:**

Sue Russell (chair), Ann Kelly (treasurer), Marion Collighan (secretary), Jenny Harrison (committee member + Ledbury), Chris Hucker (committee member).  
Gillian Thompson, Margaret Cleverley & Rose Hawkins (Bishops Cleeve), Anthea Whitehead & Mike Byrne (Bromsgrove), David Edwards (Cam & Dursley), Ken Inglis & Janet Ropner (Cheltenham), Paul Grierson & Jane Moore (Churchdown), Suzanne Bottomley, Ruth Sanders, Elizabeth Swinscoe & Kate Zhao (Cirencester), Mike Bracey, Geoff Stollard & Barry Tait (Droitwich Spa), Denis Riley & Clive Harper (Gloucester), Kim Brinkworth (Hereford), Richard Phillips & Bill Culshaw (Malvern), Jules Everett & Miriam Harding (Newent), Liz Reeves (North Cotswolds), Sally Whyte & Jackie Jolley (Pershore), Sue Gee (Redditch), Mark Eardley & William Lyons (Ross-on-Wye), Richard Bedford & Sylvia Pearse (Stroud), Duncan Fraser & Mike Jones (Tewkesbury), Phil Hawthorn & Paul McDonald (Winchcombe), Alan Russell (Worcester).  
Susan Parker (Regional Trustee South West)

**1) Welcome from the Chair of Malvern**

Bill Culshaw welcomed everyone to Malvern u3a, which was founded in 1995. There are currently around 1,500 members, with about 230 having joined this year. Over 100 groups are running in about 27 venues. Various events that have taken place recently were highlighted.

**2) Apologies for absence**

There were voting delegates representing 20 u3as out of the 27 Cotswold Link members, which is 74%, making the meeting quorate.

Apologies had been received from: Deborah Andrews (Evesham), Anni Plummer (Hereford), Mike Goodwin (Leominster), Lorna Marshal (Northleach), Carmel Burton (Tetbury), Roger Steer (Thornbury), Laurence Wale (Worcester), Jean Jackson (Regional Trustee West Midlands).

**3) Acceptance of minutes of half yearly meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

No issues were raised with the minutes from the previous half yearly meeting in March 2023. They were approved unanimously with one abstention.

**4) Matters arising from the minutes**

a) Feedback on peer support groups

Ann advised that the peer support group for Treasurers had been meeting during the year and she can now contact most treasurers directly. Recently the topics of Gift Aid and Beacon had been discussed.

Marion advised that she has not managed to get any peer support groups for

Chairs, Secretaries, Groups Coordinators or Membership Secretaries off the ground due to lack of interest, with only 2/3 persons per role expressing a willingness to join. It was agreed to resend the offer of peer support groups for these roles to u3as, as delegates felt that lack of reply did not mean there was little interest. Support groups for Webmasters and Speakers Secretaries will also be offered.

There was some confusion about the different levels of peer support group available within the wider u3a organisation. Many had joined the Chairs Forum, which has a very large number of persons attending its Zoom meetings. Sue R. explained that the Chairs Forum is not part of the official u3a offering but is organised by members outside the formal structure. Marion commented that within the South West we are encouraged to set up peer support groups within networks, so that the number of persons attending stays at a size that allows everyone attending to contribute and might even allow in person meetings.

## **5) News from the committee**

### a) U3a member changes

Sue R. welcomed Redditch u3a as the newest Cotswold link member. Cotswold Link now has 27 member u3as.

### b) Committee changes

Sue R. advised that Chris Hucker was co-opted onto the Cotswold Link committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. We now have 5 committee members, although we would prefer to have 6.

### c) Cotswold Link Fee 2024

Ann advised that the Cotswold Link fee for 2024 will remain at £14 per u3a.

### d) Special Interest Day 2024

Chris advised that, following on from the soundings taken amongst u3a members, the committee have settled on title of "Our Brave New World" for the special interest day 2024. The Pavilion in Cheltenham has been booked for Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024. 2 speakers have already agreed to participate and a further 2 are being sought.

## **6) Report from the regional trustee for the West Midlands – Jean Jackson**

Jean was unwell and could not attend.

## **7) Report from the regional trustee for the South West – Susan Parker**

Susan first commented on the visit of Liz Thackray to Gloucestershire and Bath & Wilts, which finally took place this year after having to be delayed from 2022. Liz had a very enjoyable time and was able to meet many members.

Susan then made some comments about the Pilot Council. This is part of a trial for a different structure of governance within the Third Age Trust. The current

thinking is that there will be a smaller Board, made up of experts who understand things like finance and legal obligations, and that the membership will be represented by a separate Council. A pilot version of this has had three meetings to date.

The restructure is being investigated because currently the regional trustees spend a lot of time working on behalf of the u3a, including attending board meetings and chairing committees. Even though they are elected by the members, the trustees are currently responsible to the board. Under the current structure, the trustees are not responsible to the members and have very little time available to meet with them.

Currently different models for the working of the Pilot Council are being trialled. The pilot council is chaired by regional trustee Susie Berry, with all the current trustees and the chair of Network link being members. Several additional attendees are also invited, which makes it quite unwieldy. Once the investigations are complete a proposal for change will be presented at the AGM for members to vote on. Nothing will change before that.

Susan reminded members that u3as should send their regional trustee ideas for issues of national or regional importance that they think the council should discuss.

Janet asked how u3as will receive feedback from the Pilot Council. Susan advised that she sends round the summaries of the meetings to all Chairs and Secretaries in the SW, whenever she receives them. However, Sue R. added that the members of the council don't get communications themselves very often. Sue G. pointed out that Secretaries get so many emails that it is difficult to identify what is important.

Finally a discussion took place on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, where Susan is the chair of the national committee. The Trust have been running a presentation on personal awareness of the subject for some years and it has now been re-written to address the legal obligations of a u3a. It is aimed at committee members and group leaders, although it is available to any member.

The new presentation can be booked on the Trust's website. It has already been given to the Board and the Pilot Council and volunteers are being sought who would be able to present the material face-to-face.

Susan recommended that each u3a identifies a committee member whose role includes being the point of contact for members on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This is not a rule, as u3as are responsible for managing themselves, but is a strong recommendation. Many of the u3as felt that their committees are already aware of the requirements in this area and questioned the need for a specific role on the committee. Sue R. commented that when she had held the role for Worcester, she had kept abreast of the legislation to be able to advise

other committee members and acted as the first point of contact for members who had issues that needed to be resolved. However, it was not a time-consuming task and could be undertaken as a secondary role.

Susan expressed the view that single sex groups were not allowed in the u3a under the equality legislation. Mike Byrne agreed but added that in society more generally single sex groups are not illegal, if they are small and informal with less than 25 persons.

Geoff asked if disability regulations are included within the remit of advice to committees, as he does not feel that all meetings are accessible to disabled members. He asked that Cotswold Link take an action to inform u3as of their responsibilities in respect of disability access.

Some u3as shared how they performed risk assessments to ensure they had considered disability access. It was reminded that whilst advice can be offered to u3as and they can be informed of their responsibilities, each u3a is managed independently and must put its own policies and procedures in place.

**8) AOB**

There was no other business.

**9) Date and time of next meeting**

This will be hosted by Evesham on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024.

Signed..... Date .....