

Cotswold Link u3a network
Minutes of half yearly meeting held on 12 October 2022
at Bodenham Village Hall near Leominster

Present:

Sue Russell (chair), Ann Kelly (treasurer), Marion Collighan (secretary), Jenny Harrison (committee member + Ledbury), Sue Gibson (committee member + Cam & Dursley), Chris Hucker & Jim Dunn (Hereford), Patricia Condy (Leominster), Theresa Howard & Mike Byrne (Bromsgrove), Mike Bracey (Droitwich), Jackie Jolley & Sally Whyte (Pershore), Laurence Wale (Worcester), Ken Inglis (Cheltenham), Paul Grierson, Roger Streatfield & Jane Moore (Churchdown), Denis Riley & Clive Harper (Gloucester), Duncan Fraser (Tewkesbury).

Allan Walmsley (Regional Trustee West Midlands + Trust Vice-chair), Susan Parker (Regional Trustee South West), Alan Russell (Beacon Administrator), Lesley Brook (Chair of Leominster).

1) Introduction from the Chair of Leominster

Lesley Brook welcomed everyone to this half yearly meeting and summarised the current position of Leominster u3a. She explained the practical arrangement for the day, which were being managed by members of the Leominster committee.

2) Apologies for absence

Sue Russell welcomed everyone to the return of our in-person meetings. We have 18 delegates representing 12 u3as, which is less than 50% of the u3as in the Network.

Marion gave apologies for absence from; Jim Christie (Ross-on-Wye), Alun Davies (North Cotswolds), Joan Toon (Stroud), Carmel Burton (Tetbury & District), Norman Taylor (Thornbury), Deborah Andrews (Evesham & District), Sally Ferrers (Bishops Cleeve). A further 7 u3as had not replied to the invitation.

3) Minutes of half yearly meeting 23 March 2022.

Marion noted that in section 2 of the minutes the title refers to previous minutes on 24 March 2021 and should reference the previous minutes on 27 October 2021. Also, that in section 8 the following meeting is referred to as the AGM when it should be referred to as the half yearly meeting.

Apart from this, no issues were raised with the minutes from the previous half yearly meeting in March 2022 and they were agreed as a true record by those u3as present.

4) Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

5) News from the committee

a) Cotswold link fee for 2023

Ann Kelly explained that, after a 2-year gap due to no in-person activities being organised, the annual fee for Cotswold Link will be requested for 2023. A request for payment will be sent to u3a representatives in December 2022 and will be unchanged since before the pandemic at £14 per u3a.

b) Recent and forthcoming committee changes

Sue Russell explained that Jeremy Furtado has stepped down from the committee and expressed her thanks for his service and his support to her during the transition. She advised that Sue Gibson from Cam & Dursley has agreed to be co-opted onto the committee. There is still one committee place vacant and we are looking for anybody willing to join.

c) Update on Beacon for Cotswold Link

Marion explained that Cotswold Link started using Beacon in spring 2022 and most mails are now being sent from the system. As well as capturing the main u3a contacts, it is now possible to capture more easily information about other u3a committee members, dates of u3a AGMs and approximate numbers of members. Some u3as have supplied this information. The registrations for the half yearly meeting have been captured on Beacon and Ann Kelly is about to start to use it to capture the financial information for the accounts.

Duncan Fraser from Tewkesbury commented that he did not feel he always received information from Cotswold Link. Marion advised that up to now one contact has been named for each u3a, who receives all mailings. It is then up to that contact to inform the rest of their u3a committee. However, if a u3a wants to explicitly list more than one contact to receive all mailings this is now possible. She also encouraged u3as to advise her of their various position holders so that mails can be sent directly to them if appropriate.

In response to questions, Marion explained that Cotswold Link for Beacon is operationally separate from Beacon used by any individual u3a. This means that u3a contacts can be added to the Cotswold Link Beacon even if their u3a does not use Beacon itself. It also means that no information from a u3a's Beacon is passed to Cotswold Link but only information supplied directly to the Secretary by a u3a can be included.

d) Special Interest Day 2023

Sue Russell explained that the initial registrations for our recent Special Interest day were rather low and we almost had to cancel. In view of this we thought it would be useful to discuss why not many members registered and what we might do differently to ensure a successful event in 2023.

Advertising

Clive Harper asked if the advertising could be better. Susan Parker pointed

out that information from her does not always find its way to members, even if she asks for it to be passed on. Marion suggested that most u3as advertise the Special Interest Day in their Newsletters, so the information for this event does seem to reach individual members.

Covid concerns

Jane Moore asked if there had been a problem with attracting attendees in the past. Sue advised that she did not believe so, as the event had attracted about 80 people. Ken Inglis expressed the view that people are still reluctant to mix following the pandemic. Jackie Jolley suggested that a hybrid meeting might attract people who did not want to attend in person.

Timing

Jackie Jolley suggested that the timing in early July might not be good, as people are often busy around this time. She wondered if winter might be a better time, although others felt that this might not be good because of weather issues and concerns around ventilation. Jane Moore suggested that June might work better.

There were no issues raised around the topic or the venue in Cheltenham.

e) Treasurer's Peer support group

Ann Kelly explained that she has set up an initial meeting of a peer support group for Treasurers on 21 October over Zoom. The aim is to share best practice and those joining the first meeting will discuss the sort of issues they would like to get help with. She will develop a programme for future meetings based on the outcome of the initial discussion.

Sue added that if this group works well we will try to set up groups for other role holders.

6) Report from the regional trustee for the West Midlands – Allan Walmsley

Sue introduced Allan and pointed out that he had just taken over as Vice-chair of the Trust. Allan was pleased to be able to see people face to face. It seems that apathy is a big problem across the u3a movement, with the majority of members not engaging with things outside their own interest groups. We can either let everybody do their own thing or find ways to share and help each other.

The Charity Commission requires every charity to have a strategic view of where it is going. There has been a lot of change in society over the last 40 years but the u3a has changed very little. The Trust has recently run some focus groups to ask members what they want. This is in the context of membership falling from about 460,000 before the pandemic to about 385,000 now, with recovery in numbers being slow. Some u3as have closed either due to covid or due to an aging membership, with smaller u3as being particularly vulnerable.

u3as value their independence and it is expected that learning will continue to

be focused on u3as and interest groups. Face to face meetings are still the basis of the u3a, although some hybrid meetings are now being held.

Comments from the consultation raised concerns that fell into 4 categories

- how to create a more collective movement
- most people prefer learning in a social context
- there is concern about recruitment of the next generation of members
- how to emerge from hibernation after the pandemic

Proposals will be developed in these areas for discussion with the membership.

Trust u3a, which has 1,000 members and 80 interest groups, is now to become “Interest groups online”.

There has been a collaboration with Specsavers Home Service over recent months. Collaborations are useful as they widen community relationships, allow complementary messages to be delivered and costs to be shared.

Various National Projects are running and a new one is being set up on Hadrian’s Wall.

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

Sue introduced Susan who spoke first about the recent AGM. Over 50% of u3as attended either in person or on-line. Allan commented that the main resolutions were ill-advised and as a result neither they nor any of the amendments were passed. Allan will be meeting with all the u3as who tabled amendments.

Jackie Jolley asked how the Trust will be affected by the lack of a capitation increase. Allan replied that some activities do not cost anything, so will be unaffected. Apart from this, proposals will need to be assessed against the funds available.

Susan then summarised the plenary session “Fit for Purpose”. She explained that consideration is being given to the governance of the Trust and particularly the make up of the Trustees. It is felt that there are members who have the skills to be involved in the governance of the Trust and understand u3a well but who don’t enjoy travelling around meeting people and would therefore not consider a regional Trustee role as currently defined. It is recognised that people have different skills and it is not necessary for every Trustee to have all skills. The Trustees are therefore considering the make-up of the board and want to hear the views of members.

Susan encourages everybody to review the proposals and send their comments to governance@u3a.org.uk. The presentation is on the National website and the session was filmed and is being added to U-tube.

Susan had arranged for some workshops to be held exclusively for members in the SW but they had to be cancelled as not enough people signed up.

Susan had attended the unveiling of the 40th anniversary quilt, to which the SW had contributed 8 squares (2 from Gloucester). This is available to view at the Blanket Hall in Whitney from Wednesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. She also advised that one member from the SW had made the shortlist in the Star Awards national creative writing competition.

Liz Thackray's visit to the SW had to be cancelled due to the heatwave and we are currently trying to reschedule. We are discussing whether it would be possible to co-ordinate with the Cotswold Link AGM.

There will be a Zoom coffee morning on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion on 20th October.

8) AOB

Mike Byrne asked about peoples experiences of u3as sharing activities with one another. Bromsgrove had shared talks with Evesham using technology but this does not seem to work so well for interest group meetings.

Sue Russell said that she had heard of clusters of u3as for topic groups. Susan Parker explained that some u3as in the SW allow members from other u3as to join their groups but ask them to leave if places are limited and one of their own members wants to join. Avalon Network have a special category for Network membership, which gives members of other u3as the right to a place in an interest group. National subject advisors are also creating subject networks.

Paul Grierson mentioned that collecting payment for Zoom speakers is tricky.

Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting, which is the AGM and half yearly meeting, should take place in March 2023 and is scheduled to be hosted by Bishops Cleeve u3a. Bishops Cleeve have begun investigations to set a suitable venue and date and have advised that the date the committee originally proposed is not possible in their usual venue. Contacts will be advised as soon as we are able to set a date.

Signed..... Date