

Minutes of the Group Leaders Meeting 2nd October 14:00 at The Friary Hall

Committee members attending: Jim McGough (Chair, also Group Leader (GL) Poetry), Margaret Lloyd (Secretary and minute taker), Graham Friday (Treasurer, also GL Tennis & Pickleball), Sue Parker (Communications Coordinator), Peter Beckley (Groups' Co-ordinator, also GL O&A 6), Jacqui Mercer (Members' Coordinator), and Janet Newson (Access Co-ordinator, also GL Amblers Extra).

Group Leaders attending: Ana Achucarro & Karen Darling (Painting & Drawing), Wendy Adams (Theatre), Jean Austin & Joelle Dumetz (French), Isabel Baker (Theatre, RUGS), Maggie Berrill & Maureen Bufton (Gardening, O&A 4), Judy & Andy Bridge (Cycling, Books), Graham Crozier, Julie Darlington (Storytelling 2), Maureen Dawkins (Topical Discussion), Trevor Duffy (Table Tennis), Craig & Linda Edwards (Air Rifle), Pat Gedge (Art Appreciation 3), John Hilder (Allotment, Folk Music), Bryan Kiely (Ukulele), Marion Lang (Science), Jean Manuel (O&A 1), Monique Tovey-Mansfield (Smart-Phone Photography), Sue Mearns (RUGS), Anne Thorn (Walkers Extra), Maureen Wicks (History, Quiz 1), Max & Heather Woodward (Short Mat Bowls), Christine Watson & Ken Toll (Family History), Bob Weddell (Folk Dancing), and John Wynter (Bridge)

Group Leaders sending apologies: Gill Cooban (Film Circle), Kathy Jameson (Bamboo Pipes), Yvonne Light (Craft), Jan Morris (Walkers Extra), Julie & Tony Neale (Petanques), Jo Slack (Storytelling 1), Elena Thorne (Rummikub/Canasta), Liz Tennant (Speaker and Seasonal Outings Organiser), and Mary Watts (Out & About 6).

Agenda Item 1: Chairs Introductions

Jim McGough opened the meeting at 14:00 and made the following points:

- 1) Although it was too early in the membership renewal process to know whether our u3a's membership numbers had increased, the indications so far were encouraging. We recruited good numbers of new members at both the Midsummer Eve Celebration and the Open Day events but, inevitably, some members had died and we only learn of many of these when they fail to renew.
- 2) The Committee intended to alter its focus from now on. Over the last 18 months it had been catching up on the various governance and legal matters derailed by Covid, and improving financial sustainability. From now on it would be concentrating on growth and development, essential if an organisation is not to undergo gradual decline.
- 3) In order to achieve growth Committee positions must be filled and we urge you to encourage your group members to think about volunteering – for the various Support positions advertised in addition to the vacant Committee roles.
- 4) As it was essential for the Committee to consult with Group Leaders (GLs) on new proposals and to hear GL's concerns generally there would henceforth be three GL meetings a year, one in each term.

Agenda Item 2: Discussion on 8th September Open Day

Sue Parker stated that overall this had been more successful than last year's event; almost 250 people had attended, the result of wider publicity, and the layout of the tables was much better no over-crowding. Nevertheless she was still aware that there were aspects which could be improved for future occasions and asked GLs for their views.

A GL commented that she felt the processing of new members took too long. A visitor might visit a Group table, like what they saw, but could not then join the Group until they had become a member and received a membership number which involved both standing in the membership

queue at the event and a wait of several days before receiving confirmation of their membership number.

The Treasurer explained that it was not possible to fully process new members at the Friary as the wi-fi system there was not sufficiently good to be able to use the Beacon system.

For next year:

- (i) All tables would hold copies of the new membership form
- (ii) The Treasurer & Members Coordinator to investigate developing a way of working around the lack of a working Beacon system so that prospective members could, once they have completed a membership form and paid their membership fee, sign up to Groups on the day.

GLs were reminded that the new members application form could be downloaded from the web at any time for handing out at Group sessions and elsewhere.

The Treasurer also said that he and the members Coordinator would look at a more automatic membership renewal process for 2023/24, whereby members update details themselves on Beacon. Many u3as do this without apparent problems if adequate guidance is available to members.

Agenda Item 3: Finance Matters

(a) 2022/23 Year-end Group Position

- (i) The Treasurer commenced by thanking all GLs for submitting their income details and expense forms on time. As a result he had been able to produce the full year accounts quicker and more easily than last year.
- (ii) He was happy to talk on an individual basis to any GL with questions on their own figures;
- (iii) Overall the activity Groups show a surplus of £2.2k for the year indicating that:
 - The increase in the indoor group fee per meeting from £1.50 to £2.00 for 2022/23 was the correct decision;
 - The outdoor groups spent only a small proportion of their fee receipts, suggesting that there was scope for reducing their fees for 2023/24.
- (iv) Trips overall showed just a small deficit (<1% of income) which suggested good financial management. The Groups managing the trips which yielded deficits show more than sufficient surplus from their other activities to absorb these.

(b) Restricted Funds

The Treasurer drew the GLs' attention to Annex 3, a new schedule, showing funds built up over the years on Group activities. Under charity law income received for a specific activity can only be spent on that activity. The level of the fund made been generated through a combined of:

- (i) Anonymous donations received in 2015/16 specifically intended to fund the start-up of new Groups and to support those which were struggling financially.
- (ii) The actual surpluses generated over the two years since he had taken over as Treasurer.
- (iii) An analysis going back through past years' accounts to separate out the surplus/(deficit) built up collectively by Groups since 2017/18.

He confirmed that he had gone through the figures from 2008/09 onwards and that Groups in total had produced a surplus every year except for the years 2020/21 & 2021/22 which were impacted by Covid.

He confirmed that the aim is to achieve a financially sustainable position for all Groups, whilst spending, over time, surpluses brought forward.

- (i) It is acknowledged that those groups operating in fields of minority interest may struggle to cover their costs, so their costs will be supported, but we will try to keep the deficits as small as possible.
- (ii) Those groups with substantial reserves are encouraged to spend these - by investing in new equipment, relevant books, DVDs and other learning materials, or by not charging group fees for one or more years (the approach adopted by most outdoor groups for 2023/24). GLs are reminded that any planned spend of > £20 requires his permission in advance.

(c) Group Fees for 2023/24

From this year onwards we are introducing more flexibility into the way in which those Groups other than the St Pauls based indoor groups are managed financially, with GLs determining, with assistance from the Treasurer, the level of fee required to cover their costs. This reflects the more diverse operating models adopted by some of our new and planned groups. The implications of this are:

- (i) Groups whose members wish to meet at venues more costly than St Pauls are able to charge higher group fees if these are necessary to cover their costs
- (ii) To reflect this diversity three classifications are now being used, as explained in the new Finance section of what was the GLs Procedures & Reference Guide (to be broadened in scope to become the new Group Leaders handbook - see Agenda Item 4 below).

(d) Taking Group Subscriptions by Debit/Credit card

The Treasurer explained that Crawley u3a was fortunate in that our bank, unlike some, was still willing to deal with receipts in the form of cheques. However, it is only a matter of time until they too start to charge. For context, in 2022/23 we paid in around 2,500 cheques. Hence we need to start looking at the possibility of taking debit/credit cards. Some new members already express surprise that we do not already offer this facility and say they no longer possess a cheque book (banks are legally obliged to provide cheque books for personal accounts, though they often make requesting one tricky).

The debit/credit card machines cost in the range £20 to £120 each and charge small fees for use. The only other option for the u3a to receive payments is via bank transfer, which is not practicable for group fees due to the difficulty in matching lots of small receipts to individuals.

GLs confirmed that so far requests to pay by debit/credit card had been few.

Agenda Item 4: Group Leaders Handbook

The Treasurer explained that it might be easier to recruit new GLs if we had a GL Handbook available giving guidance on a broader range of issues than covered by the current Procedures & Reference Guide. The meeting papers sent out on 24th September included a page (p11) which showed the contents of the latter together with a list of topics that could be added to create a GL Handbook. There may well be other topics on which GLs would appreciate guidance.

A working group of 3 or 4 people could then agree on the content. The Secretary stated we had many guidance documents and policies on our website but that substantial parts of these were aimed at Trustees and that it was not always easy for GLs to identify which parts were relevant to them. It would be fairly easy for the Secretary to extract the elements which were pertinent to them.

- Actions:** (i) GLs to feed back to the Secretary any topics they would like to see included in the Groups Handbook
- (ii) Any GLs keen to be part of the Working Group to let the Secretary know

Agenda Item 5: 10th November AGM

(a) Resolution to amend the Constitution

The Chair explained that in view of the fact that there was now to be more flexibility around the setting of Group Fees the annual meeting for members to approve fees for the forthcoming membership year (the first of which was held in June this year) should approve membership fees only. Clause 10.1 of the current Constitution needed to be amended to this effect.

(b) Need for volunteers to assist in running the Crawley u3a

The Chair repeated again the remarks he made in his introduction (see [Agenda Item 1](#)) on this, and said that he had drafted a plea for volunteers in the October newsletter, to be disseminated later today.

(c) Presentations

In order to make the AGM of greater relevance and interest to ordinary members the Chair is keen that there be some recognition of individual member's contributions and achievements.

Action: Any GL who has an idea for an award or some other recognition of achievement to contact the Secretary.

A break was taken whilst refreshments were served

Agenda Item 6: Group Resilience

The Chair drew GLs' attention to the paper "Group Resilience" e-mailed out the previous day. He explained that:

- The u3a membership was continually changing, with new members joining and long-standing members becoming unable to continue.
- Many GLs had become GLs by default than by intention, stepping in to prevent the Group closing when the previous GL was forced to step down. The intention was to become less reliant on this default process, and to plan future succession well in advance to give prospective GL plenty of time to become familiar with the necessary tasks.
- Group members should be encouraged to participate in the running or presentation of material from the start
- Research suggested that members of voluntary learning groups keep attending at least as much for the social contact as for the learning content.
- It was important to find out from members what they wanted to do during the sessions.

- A prospective GL coming up with an idea for a new group should be encouraged to trial it for a short period, say four meetings, before a decision being taking as to its longer-term viability.

The Chair was keen that some sort of checklist be produced – to be part of the new Groups Handbook – guiding a prospective GL through the matters needing consideration when setting up a new Group (e.g. venue, frequency of meetings, whether the activity was covered by the standard Third Age Trust insurance arrangements etc).

Agenda Item 7: Items for Open Discussion

The following topics were covered:

(i) Safeguarding

The Chair explained that all charitable organisations were legally compelled to have a Safeguarding Policy and urged GLs who have cause for concern over one of their members to contact him immediately.

(ii) Risk Assessments

The Secretary explained that risk assessments must be available/shared with participants to ensure that the possible risks are highlighted and anybody responsible for the mitigation of any risks identified in a risk assessment needed to be made aware of this.

She acknowledged that sometimes a risk assessment form might pose a question concerning the venue building which the GL was not on a position to answer. She would contact venues used by Groups to request copies of their building risk assessments.

(iii) Personal E-mail and phone numbers on the website

For GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) reasons the Third Age Trust very much discourages personal e-mail and phone numbers being displayed within the public domain. The Secretary had spent some time searching the Group pages of other u3as and could not find any displayed. She had now set up a special web Contact e-mail codename for each group to be used for enquiries.

Some discussion took place on how we might deal with enquiries from people without internet access.

Action: The Committee to investigate further the suggestion of a using a publicised central Crawley u3a mobile phone number for enquiries. Trustees could take it in turns to keep the mobile. This would eliminate the need for GLs to be made publicly available.

(iv) Equipment

The Treasurer reminded GLs that there was a substantial amount of general and old group equipment available for GLs to use. Details were on the web. He intended to bring some of these items to the next GLs meeting to show what is available.

Agenda Item 8: Date for next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on a Monday afternoon in early February. Date subsequently suggested Monday 5th February at 14:00 (if the Friary is free).

The Chair closed the meeting at 16:10