

Hastings & Rother U3A

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held at 10.00 a.m. Friday 20th October 2023 in the Bell Room, St Peter's Community Centre

Present

Committee Members:

Derek Hussey (Chair)	Jenny Meteyard (Minutes)
Josephine Noyce (Treasurer)	Patricia Jobling (Database)
Virginia Edwards (Business Secretary)	Lynda Wood (Groups)
John Goodwin (Newsletter)	Christine Evans (committee member)
Matilda Jarvis (Membership) <i>until 11.06</i>	

Non-committee: Sue Shilstone (Initial Enquiries)

NB non-committee members in certain roles may attend meetings, and are sent the paperwork, but do not have voting rights.

1. Chair

Derek welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Ewa Goulding (assistant treasurer), and non-committee members Carole Benton (regional), Pandora Bastian (Speakers), Brian Gould (Website), April Yasamee (Risk Assessments).

3. Minutes of last committee meeting held on 7th September 2023 (approval)

The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising (not covered in the agenda)

Financial year/accounting period change.

At the last meeting on 7th September it had been agreed to change the financial year.

This was because it was noted at the meeting that the membership year had been changed (at the June committee meeting) to run from 1st April-31st March, in the mistaken belief that this would then align with the financial/accounting year, whereas in fact the financial year currently runs from 1st May-30th April. The purpose of the change had been for membership fees to come in at the start of each financial year, rather than part way through as at present (September), in order to clarify reporting and simplify budgeting.

Members had been informed in June that the u3a would collect 7 months of subscriptions now, pro rata to cover 1 September 2023 to 31 March 2024, then in April 2024 would collect £17.00 for a full 12 month subscription year.

It was therefore agreed at the last meeting that to correct the anomaly, the financial year should be changed to align with the new membership year, and that in future the membership year and the financial year/accounting period would both run from 1st April to 31st March each year.

Since that meeting the Chair had explored this further and had stated in an email sent to the Officers and Minutes Secretary that after discussion with the Treasurer "it was clear that amending the accounting year in Beacon [database] is not feasible...we leave the accounting year as it is." This was agreed.

The Business Secretary suggested that the membership year could be changed again to align with the financial year. Members could be informed that the new membership year will run from 1st May 2024, rather than 1st April, and they would in effect receive a 'free' month. The practical implications of this need to be explored (e.g. Beacon) and a decision made at the next meeting.

DH JN PJ
MJ

Photographs A member of the Photography Group has agreed to take photographs at u3a events and was able to do so for the Convenors' Tea, but missed the Jive Evening with a confusion over dates. There should be clear written communication in future for events.

5. General reports/areas for discussion

a) Chair

TAT AGM. The East Sussex East cluster had sent a resolution for the Third Age Trust AGM on 18th October (see last meeting). Richard Collisson, the former Acting Chair, was attending online, but because of technical issues at TAT, both he and the Hailsham Chair who was seconding the resolution (and others) were unable to log into the meeting. The resolution was therefore debated in their absence, but they have since been informed that it was not passed.

b) Business Secretary

- **Convenors' tea** 21 September 2-4.00 at Royal Victoria Hotel, St Leonards. Unlike in years past we asked repeatedly for RSVPs, which helped us keep our costs in line. Out of 72 convenors and 25 volunteers invited, we had final numbers of 60 with about 6 no shows. Guests were served a cream tea for £6.95pp. The atmosphere was good, with lots of chat, and it was agreed that it had been both successful and appreciated.
- **East Sussex East cluster meeting 12 October.** We agreed to share information on the following:
 - a) makeup of our committees including posts which are vacant
 - b) lists of our speakers for the year, highlighting the top 3 of 2022
 - c) list of trips each has organised in past years

We have also examined the process of becoming a network, and as it does not require any formal structure or financial arrangements we can see no disadvantages, therefore we have voted unanimously to apply to TAT for network status in 2024. Currently this includes: Battle, Crowborough, 3 Eastbourne branches, Hailsham, Hastings & Rother, and Heathfield. Mayfield and Rye representatives were absent so will be contacted shortly (though they have expressed interest) and Uckfield will also be canvassed. Application will take the form of a letter to our regional representative Susie Berry and a simple process will begin. A draft of the letter will be circulated before our next meeting in January.

VE

In addition we are actively pursuing putting on a Study Day in autumn 2024. H&R regional representative Carole Benton will coordinate suggestions for workshops which will appeal to both male and female members, as well as an overall theme. The event will be held somewhere in our East Sussex region. TAT could be petitioned for a grant.

CB

c) Treasurer

Josephine reported that the Jive Evening on 5th October came in just in credit. She is awaiting the invoice for the balance of the Manor Barn hire charge. The Dover day trip is also in credit.

Josephine reported that there may be some issues with Gift Aid reporting, and is communicating with HMRC on this. At a Beacon (database) training event she attended it was also made clear that in order to be compliant with the requirements of the Charity Commission all expenses need to go through the main accounts, including any incurred by groups. She also reported that Lloyds Bank have a problem with their cheque reader which has led to inconsistencies and problems e.g. a cheque being read again because it was stuck in the machine. The Bexhill branch of Lloyds will be closing in February and after that cheques and cash will need to be paid in via the Post Office. It may also be possible to pay in cheques via a mobile app.

JN

(JN)

d) Membership Secretary & Database

After observing the membership renewal process, Derek felt the process was too complicated and took too much time to administer. He had obtained information on how several other u3as nationally deal with this and had circulated some thoughts on future renewals and membership:

1. All members to be individual, no joint members.

Discussion: There is no financial advantage to joint membership and it was stated that the only advantage is that joint members can receive one issue of Third Age Matters between them. Joint membership reduces the number of renewal forms to be processed but often creates problems matching up payments and forms. (see item 3 below).

2. Encourage renewals by BACS/online payments as this is now the default payment method in Beacon.

Discussion: It was acknowledged that not everyone is able to use online banking, and some members may continue to use cheques, but if the majority pay online this will significantly reduce the administration. (Also see below re card reader). Members must use a clear reference in order to identify membership payments from other payments in the account. It was reported that some u3as have a separate 'membership' bank account to facilitate this.

3. No need for renewal forms, members should notify any changes in contact details etc.

Discussion: Matching up renewal forms and payments is enormously time-consuming and the Membership Secretary spends time and sometimes postage money chasing up members who have paid but not sent a form, or have not completed the form correctly. Other u3as in the Chairs' Forum reported that they do not use renewal forms. At the previous meeting the Membership Secretary had suggested that forms are essential to ensure members' details are correct on the database. It was agreed at this meeting however that this does not justify the time taken, and members should take responsibility for updating details.

It would be possible to set up a portal to the Beacon database for people to check and change their own membership details, although not all members could/would use this; others could contact the Membership Secretary with any changes. New members would still need to complete a form as they do at present, but they would then be responsible for any changes. Those eligible for Gift Aid would also need to complete an initial form, but again are responsible in future years for any changes in status. It was noted that for Gift Aid a title (e.g. Mrs, Sir) is required by the HMRC system.

Derek asked if emails sent via Beacon ever bounce back if not delivered, and Tricia confirmed that this does happen, usually because an address has changed. They will then try to follow this up by other means.

4. Website renewals Discussion: It may be possible to move to website renewals at some point. In the meantime initial membership forms, change of details forms (e.g. address, phone, name, email) and Gift Aid forms could be on the website for members to print. The Website administrator is also looking into the possibility of online forms.

5. Card Machine. Discussion: A card reader, e.g. SumUp, could be used for members to pay membership fees by card, for instance at speaker meetings, coffee mornings or possibly a 'meeting' purely for this purpose. The card reader (which would give receipts) could also be used for other payments such as tickets. It was noted that a small fee (1.69%?) is taken from each payment, so this would need to be factored in when deciding ticket prices, and payments cannot be made where the person is not present e.g. over the phone.

BG

It was suggested that a members log (list) could be maintained and updated separately from the financial list on Beacon; apparently some other u3as do this. This could enable a quicker check on who is or is not a member at any given time.

It was reported that some members pay more than once. This might be less likely with the change of membership year – at the moment members are initially reminded about renewals in June with the AGM papers, although renewal is not until September. By September, particularly if asked for the renewal form, some have forgotten they've already paid!

There was some discussion of how long members should have for late renewals before they are designated as 'lapsed' in the database. It was agreed that this year the cutoff point should be November 15th. This will need to be decided for the next membership year.

JN, MJ

It was agreed unanimously that the current renewals should be sorted and completed first. **The above points will be further explored and a decision made at the next meeting in January 2024.**

All

There was a query regarding the Third Age Matters magazine. Each u3a is charged according to the number of members who have opted to receive this, based on a database requested and sent to TAT. It is not clear when this was last done. Tricia will check this with Richard Collisson.

PJ (RC)

e) Groups

Lynda reported that a new list was sent on 1st October, along with an email addressing various issues with groups and convenors. It had been clarified that a Keep Fit or Zumba group needs an accredited teacher, but u3a groups cannot hire an external tutor.

Although members and potential members often complain that 'all the groups are full' there are in fact 24 groups with vacancies. 16 new groups have started since January and 3 more are in the pipeline. It is encouraging that more people are coming forward to be convenors. It can still be seen as onerous by some potential convenors, particularly if the group is to be held in a home, as this is a big commitment. Convenors also said that if they have a small group of 8 and several people do not turn up, this is frustrating. It was reported that The Bull in St Leonards is a good venue as it does not charge.

Lynda was approached by a dance group convenor from Battle u3a, suggesting that H&R members could join. This was turned down as we do not have a reciprocal arrangement with Battle.

f) Venues

There is currently no venues coordinator. The Business Secretary reported that the White Rock, used for speaker meetings, has said that a decision is imminent on whether it will be available from January, and hope to inform their regular users as soon as possible. In the meantime Ginny is visiting the Masonic Hall in St Leonards to see if this would be a suitable alternative. The location is good (just behind the Royal Victoria Hotel) and hire charges seem similar. Derek Mitchell would need to check it out for sound equipment.

VE

VE, DM

g) Initial Enquiries

This has been quite brisk, although with the perennial frustration of 'groups are full'. It was suggested that we should perhaps place a cap on membership numbers. This had been suggested before and decided against (committee meeting January 12th 2023) but perhaps

should be reconsidered. Battle u3a has a cap of 300 members; H&R currently has over 600 members.

h) **Speakers**

Nothing to report. Ginny commented that if the venues for 2024 can be confirmed soon, it might be possible to produce the bookmark listing speakers/events in time for the Christmas party.

i) **Website**

Brian had sent a summary of page visits on the website and is working on the possibility of online membership forms.

(BG)

j) **Newsletter**

The next newsletter will be sent early in the New Year, and the deadline for content is 1st December 2023.

JG

6. **Social events**

- Feedback on the **Jive Evening** was very positive, and great thanks go to John Goodwin and his wife for organising the evening. The Business Secretary suggested that a social sub-committee is definitely needed if we are going to offer more social events. The photographer did not attend because of miscommunication over the date, but John did get a few photos and video on phone. Ginny suggested a **slideshow of photos** from events held over the past year could be created and shown at the AGM.
- **Christmas Party** The date has been changed from Monday 4th to **Tuesday 5th December** because the whole of St Peter's Community Centre is available on that day, giving more space for preparations. There will be a Quiz, and Lorna and a team from the Strollers group are organising refreshments again. There will be a glass of Prosecco rather than mulled wine.

?

A committee member commented that there had been feedback from last year requesting more savoury options (sausage rolls?) and also mince pies. This will be passed on to Lorna, although it was noted that at £5 a head people should not expect too much!

DH

It was suggested that a Christmas tree and background Christmas music would add to the atmosphere – John offered to liaise with Derek Mitchell on the latter.

?
JG/DM

Tickets went on sale at the October Coffee Mornings and speaker meetings. 25 tickets have been given to Lorna to sell to the catering volunteers, and 8 to Richard to sell to year-round volunteers.

7. **Recruitment**

Attempts to recruit a Vice Chair have currently been abandoned!

8. **Any Other Business**

Tricia is trying to arrange a **day trip** to visit the Romney Marsh churches.

PJ

9. **Date of next committee meeting**

Wednesday 10th January 2024 at 10 a.m. in St Peter's Community Centre.

Signed

Date

Minutes were taken by Jenny Meteyard.