

Hastings & Rother U3A

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held at 10.00 a.m. Tuesday 28th March 2023 in the Bell Room, St Peter's Community Centre

Present

Committee Members:

Richard Collisson (Acting Chair)

Josephine Noyce (Treasurer)

Matilda Jarvis (Membership)

Lynda Wood (Groups)

Jenny Meteyard (Minutes)

Gail Oswald (Assistant Treasurer)

Ginny Edwards (Business Secretary)

Christine Evans (co-opted member)

Non-committee: Brian Gould (Website); Sue Shilstone (Initial Enquiries)

Guests: Carole Benton; Derek Hussey; Liz Skelton; Richard Stanton, Barry Taylor

NB non-committee members in certain roles may attend meetings, and are sent the paperwork, but do not have voting rights. A number of additional guests attended this meeting who were potentially interested in joining the committee.

1. Chair

Richard welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly guests who had expressed an interest in potentially joining the committee or helping in some way.

2. Apologies for absence

John Goodwin (Newsletter); Pandora Bastian (Speakers); Patricia Jobling (Database).

Two guests had been invited who were not able to attend and sent apologies: Brekke Larsen and Wendy McNally.

3. Minutes of last committee meeting

The minutes of the last committee meeting held on 28th February 2023 were unanimously approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising (not covered in the agenda)

Ginny noted that copies of any Risk Assessments should also be held by the Business Secretary, not just the Venues Co-ordinator as stated at the last meeting.

5. General reports/areas for discussion

a) Chair

Richard apologised for the late reception by some members of the letter written and mailed to all members after the last meeting, appealing for volunteers and outlining the position if no Chair can be found (see Appendix A). The letter was sent out by the direct mailing company who send the newsletter, and seems to have reached members in stages; an electronic version was also sent by email.

Richard commented that the appeal had been successful in that six members had responded, four of whom had been able to attend today's meeting. He did note however that this represents only 1% of the membership. Former Chairs Robert Hadland and Lorna Couldrick had written letters to the Newsletter and Robert had also sent a memo to Richard, which Richard briefly summarised (see appendix B).

The job descriptions of Chair and Vice Chair were also included in the Newsletter. This has been sent out in pdf format, while the paper version is in process of mailing. It was noted that it may not just be the roles of Chair and Vice Chair that need filling, and some roles might benefit from an assistant. (see also Any Other Business below)

b) Newsletter (part 1)

Richard reported that John Goodwin had sent apologies for health reasons. He hopes to be fine and able to drive again by the next meeting. John had commented that there was an error in the pdf version of the Newsletter as two speakers have changed places and a correction will be sent. It was also noted at the meeting that Sue Shilstone's photo had been used instead of Pandora's as Speakers Secretary.

JG

c) Treasurer

Josephine reported that H&R u3a's finances are still in a good state and outlined the u3a's bank balances. She is still awaiting a large bill for the coach trip to Dover, the bill for the 3rd April special Speaker Meeting (the Murphys), and for the current Newsletter. The White Rock had not invoiced us for recent meetings but she has now chased this up and paid.

The groups whose venues were being funded by the u3a are aware that this will cease at the end of March, in accordance with the policy agreed at an earlier meeting and circulated to all convenors.

In response to a question, Josephine stated that the u3a has two debit cards, held by herself and by the Theatre Group convenor. The H&R u3a banks at Lloyds, and it was noted that while in common with other banks they are closing a number of branches, for the moment the Bexhill branch Josephine uses is staying open. It was noted that it is also possible to pay cheques (but not cash) in via the Post Office, and some banks enable cheques to be paid via an app.

There was a suggestion that a card reader machine might be useful at times, for instance to take membership payments by card. The disadvantage of this would be that these machines charge an additional percentage fee per payment. This could however be considered.

d) Business Secretary

Ginny stated that she has agreed provisional dates for speakers in the next year with Pandora (who is taking over Speakers). Ginny will email the White Rock and St Peter's CC to check availability. Speakers are already booked for September and October 2023 and Pandora is working on November. Ginny reported that the White Rock may be losing some of its Council funding, and like other venues including St Peter's CC is struggling with the huge increases in energy costs. We should therefore be prepared for possible increases in charges for venue hire.

VE

PB

The Annual Return of membership to Third Age Trust is due on 31st March. The current number of members is 582 and the H&R u3a's total annual subscription to TAT will be based on this at £4 per member. Although an increase to this was debated at the TAT AGM, the proposals all failed, and Ginny is not aware of any increase. It was explained to the guests that the £4 is included in the £15 currently charged by H&R and covers the services provided by TAT such as insurance, database and website, support and training. Ginny reported that there is a new portal on the TAT website for committee members.

VE

Ginny has also updated the ESCIS website entry on the u3a. Paperwork for new committee members is in hand.

VE

VE

Ginny and Richard will be attending the East Sussex East cluster group meeting on 31st March. The main items on the agenda are associate membership fees, study days, and publicity. This smaller local cluster group has replaced the large Sussex-wide (SUN) network, which tended to focus on West Sussex. We do need to ensure that we have direct contact with the TAT South East trustee.

There was a query whether a member of one u3a can join another as an associate. At the moment we have a reciprocal arrangement with Rye u3a but there was some uncertainty about the situation with other local u3as.

e) Membership Secretary

There are no outstanding new members. Of the previous members, 97 have not renewed. One of the guests asked if it is possible to pay membership by direct debit or standing order, as she felt people often forget to pay. Gail (assistant treasurer) stated that when she worked in banking, small charities such as H&R u3a were not able to set up direct debits, although this might have changed. Standing orders would be possible although this can cause problems if the subscription amount changes, or the bank account changes, as people forget to amend their standing orders. Members would still need to send a membership/renewal form, and might be less likely to remember to do so if the payment has gone out automatically. In the past the u3a has not offered this option and the administration implications would need consideration.

f) Groups

One new group is in the process of setting up, and will meet in the Bull pub. Risk assessments will be needed. It was reiterated that all group convenors must do a risk assessment and copies will be kept by the Venues Coordinator and Business Secretary. Convenors must also ensure that everyone in their group is a paid-up u3a member; there have been occasions when people have continued to attend groups despite being lapsed. Apparently one or two convenors have said they felt awkward asking their group about this. Lynda can check if necessary but convenors could also check via the Beacon database, and Lynda has sent out information explaining why it is important to use Beacon. The Database administrator Tricia Jobling will send passwords to convenors if asked, and has also offered to assist people. TAT provides training but this is for specific key roles (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary). Ginny mentioned that there is a guide with screenshots, showing how to use the database to update group information, which Tricia could also send out. However it is not possible to force convenors to use the system! Richard confirmed onvenors do not have access to other areas of the database such as finance.

(LW)

(PJ)

g) Venues

April has been sent the Venues job description by Ginny. April did not seem aware of some aspects of this role, so while she is prepared to co-ordinate venues and risk assessment for groups, she does not feel able to carry out other key elements such as booking the venues for the monthly speaker meetings and liaising with the Speakers Secretary and others as necessary. Ginny is therefore liaising with Pandora to book the venues at the moment, but we should find someone else to take this on. This does not need to be a committee member and is not an arduous role, but the venues do need to be booked, checked and listed so that the annual bookmark can be produced showing events throughout the next year (September onward).

(VE)

h) Initial Enquiries

Sue commented that a continuing problem is that people want to know about group availability before committing to joining. Some people only seem interested in one specific group and are very disappointed if they join and then cannot join the group they want; in fact one member has resigned because of this. It was agreed that in this or similar cases the Membership Secretary could write expressing regret at the resignation but explaining that membership includes a range of benefits such as speaker meetings, monthly coffee mornings, Third Age Matters

MJ

magazine etc. The annual subscription was agreed to be excellent value for money even without group attendance, but not all members are interested in these aspects.

The problem of lack of group vacancies is perennial and difficult to solve: most groups need to be limited in size in order to function effectively. A group could have a waiting list, and a new group could be started, but people are often unwilling to do this.

i) **Speakers**

Pandora is working on speakers for the autumn and will then move on to 2024. While many speakers can be booked for either White Rock or St Peter's CC, there needs to be awareness of any particular facilities required: for instance Ken Roberts has changed from White Rock to St Peter's after it was discovered that the piano (which was terrible anyway!) is no longer available, and it is difficult to move equipment including keyboard, speakers, instruments etc in and out of the White Rock – this is much easier at St Peter's. Venues and Speakers therefore need to liaise on this.

PB

j) **Database**

Tricia had stated that there was nothing new to report.

k) **Website**

There are still some apparent anomalies in the page visit statistics (e.g. 2 visits to the non-existent gallery!). Brian emailed the TAT Sitebuilder (website) support but has had no reply. He has also signed up to be kept informed about the proposed new website 'Siteworks' which would have an integrated database, but again has heard nothing. Richard commented that a new integrated website/database would make it much easier to manage the hru3a emails.

BG

l) **Newsletter (part 2)**

It was noted that the next newsletter needs to be sent in early June, since the mailing includes paperwork for the AGM and membership renewals. The direct mailing seems to spread over a couple of weeks, and members must, as required by the constitution, receive the AGM notice and paperwork 28 days before the AGM date of 24th July. Membership renewal forms also need to be checked and updated if necessary.

VE JM
MJ JG

6. **Open Day**

There was some discussion as to whether in fact an Open Day is a good idea at the moment. Given the already large membership, which puts a considerable burden on those doing the administration, and the statements made earlier about people joining but then being disappointed at the lack of groups, do we actually want or need to recruit more members?

It was therefore agreed that an Open Day for non-members would not be held, but one of the guests suggested it might be more helpful to have one or two 'meet the convenors' internal 'open' meetings, perhaps more like a coffee morning. The venues used for coffee mornings are not suitable but in Bexhill, perhaps St Peter's CC could be used, or an area on the 2nd floor of the DLWP above the café. This will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

(JM)

7. **Quiz/Social evening**

John had been looking into this, but the Manor Barn venue in Bexhill he had planned to book had gone into liquidation. It has been reported that a new company is taking this over and it will re-open, but in John's absence no further discussion was held.

(JG)

8. **Any other business**

Richard commented that the future of the u3a was in doubt if volunteers cannot be found to take the **roles of Chair and Vice Chair**. Vice Chair is required by the constitution, while Chair is required by both the constitution and by the Charity Commission, and the u3a cannot continue without one. A meeting to start the dissolution process for the u3a would require 21

days' notice and would need to be held before membership renewal forms are sent. The AGM requires 28 days' notice if an election is to be held. We therefore need clarity on this soon.

It was noted that the roles of Chair and Vice Chair have some flexibility and can function more or less as a job share. Individual Chairs in any organisation sometimes take on functions which are not specific to the role of Chair, so to some extent the role can be tailored to the individual. The current job descriptions are not therefore set in stone. There would be support available from the Third Age Trust, and from former chairs and committee members.

As well as Chair and Vice Chair there are a number of smaller roles and 'jobs' we need volunteers for including Venues, possibly assistant Treasurer, IT administrator.

It was agreed that a deadline of the end of April should be set for finding people to fill the roles of Chair and Vice Chair, as being the most urgent. Richard will organise a meeting for all interested parties, and suggested that this could take the format of an informal working lunch. It was agreed to hold this on Thursday 20th April from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at St Peter's Community Centre.

RC

9. Date of next committee meetings

Tuesday 2nd May 10.00 a.m. in the **Cotton** Room, St Peter's Community Centre

Signed

Date

Minutes were taken by Jenny Meteyard.

Appendix A – letter sent to members appealing for volunteers March 2023

Dear Member of Hastings and Rother u3a,

Message from Acting Chair Richard Collisson

Over recent months at monthly meetings and in the Newsletters we have appealed for more members to come forward and help run our u3a. We have successfully recruited volunteers for Initial Enquiries, Venues, Groups and Speakers. Thank you to those volunteers.

However, we have been unsuccessful in filling the vacant posts of both Vice Chair and Chair. May I remind you that I am Acting Chair having stepped up to the position at the last AGM as an interim measure. As a member of H&R u3a I have been involved with various committee roles for 20 years. Therefore I will NOT be standing as Chair at the AGM in July.

For H&R to continue both a Chair and Vice Chair are needed as a matter of urgency. Currently without a Vice Chair we are in breach of our constitution. Without a Chair, we would be in breach of Charity Commission rules and H&R u3a could not continue. These posts need to be filled before the AGM in July to enable a hand-over period when these volunteers can gain insight into the role. Copies of the job descriptions are at

<https://u3asites.org.uk/hastings-rother/links>

The committee meets roughly every six weeks (8 times a year) and all aspects are open to negotiation and delegation. Do come to our next committee meeting on 28th March at St Peter's at 10.00 a.m. to see how we collaborate together. You can decide how long you want to do it for – it is not forever.

If you are able to offer yourself for the post of Chair or Vice Chair please do get in touch with any committee member or contact me [phone number given] or chair.hru3a@gmail.com. We have a lovely committee and you will be most welcome. Coming forward in the next few weeks will give you the opportunity to shadow me. If the public speaking at monthly meetings concerns you we will find someone to do this aspect.

If no volunteers come forward by April 3rd it is the committee's intention to call a Special General Meeting to start the process of the Dissolution of Hastings and Rother u3a. This will require a notice period of 21 days and will take place in May. If volunteers come forward no such meeting will be called and the AGM will take place in July as usual.

Please do give serious consideration to this appeal.

Without a Vice Chair and Chair H&R u3a will cease to exist.

*With best wishes
Richard Acting Chair*

Appendix B – memo from former Chair Robert Hadland to Richard Collisson (Acting Chair), March 2023

Hello Richard

Just a follow-up to your recent letter to members and our subsequent discussions.

It is really encouraging to hear that there are a number of members who might be putting themselves forward as potential Chair or Vice Chair. I know that the committee will be meeting this week and they have been invited to attend. Here are some points which people might like to consider.

Several important changes over the last 5 years or so have improved the working of the committee; and a number of former Chairs and Officers have contributed to this.

- Following some detailed work by Lorna Couldrick (former Chair) and Ken Saunders (former Business Secretary), our constitution was overhauled and amended in line with Third Age Trust requirements*.
- Finances are sound. We have a very healthy sum in the bank and this would allow us to buy necessary equipment – lap-tops, audio-visual kit etc. Under the stewardship of Gail Oswald our finances were tidied up and a new bank account opened with a more helpful provider. Josephine Noyce is a competent and helpful successor to Gail who is keeping us on the right lines.
- Over recent years new members of the committee have been recruited and they make a valuable contribution with their expertise and experience. The important posts of Business Secretary, Minutes Secretary, Beacon (Database) Administrator*, Membership Secretary, Initial Enquiries* and Newsletter Editor have been filled. In my view the committee membership is stronger than it has ever been. It is a body which works well together for the benefit of all members.
- Our Interest Groups play a significant part in Hastings & Rother U3A. Our 60 Group Convenors are supported by Lynda Wood, who has been an efficient and friendly Groups Coordinator for a number of years*.
- There are other more minor points, which still contribute to the running of our U3A.
 - Not all committee members* are required to attend every meeting if they do not need to or wish to. This applies to more “background posts” such as Beacon coordinator*.
 - Committee meetings are held at St Peter's rather than in an individual's home. This makes for a more business-like atmosphere. In everybody's interest, meetings are limited to a maximum of 2 hours, but with many taking place over a shorter time!

- Because of our sound finances (see above) we are able to use a print & mailing company to circulate printed matter. This saves committee members some of the tedious tasks such as filling envelopes.

I believe that the above factors should reassure anybody who is considering applying for the post of Chair or Vice Chair. They would inherit a sound structure and plenty of support.

One final point: we need a Chair and a Vice Chair. Nevertheless I suggest that there are ways in which the duties could be shared between the 2 people. One person might be happy with the administrative duties, whilst the other might be happier with the public-facing areas. Perhaps this is a good time to consider this informal type of sharing?

Best regards

Robert Hadland – March 22 2023

**Notes:*

- *The constitution was further amended in line with new Third Age Trust requirements under the chairmanship of George Webster in 2021.*
- *The Database Administrator and Initial Enquiries are important roles but the holders are not currently committee members. Committee members are also trustees of the charity and should therefore attend meetings if possible. Other role-holders will be sent paperwork and invited to attend meetings, but are not required to do so.*
- *Lynda Wood has recently returned to the committee as Groups Co-ordinator, to replace Bruce Henderson.*

Jenny Meteyard, Minutes Secretary