

## Hastings & Rother U3A

### Minutes of Committee Meeting

held at 10.30 on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 via Zoom video-conferencing

#### Present

Robert Hadland (Chair)	George Webster (Vice Chair)
Ken Saunders (Business Secretary)	Jenny Meteyard (Minutes)
Carol Crossley (Venues) <i>from 11.20</i>	Lynda Wood (Groups)
Mike Wilson (general) <i>briefly!</i>	

*NB Database, Website and IT Administrators, Newsletter Editor and SUN Representative are not committee members but may send reports and/or attend meetings at times if appropriate, and receive the relevant paperwork.*

*Note: This meeting was held using Zoom video-conferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic when physical meetings were not possible under Government guidance.*

#### 1. Apologies for absence

Barbara Spackman (Speakers); Bruce Henderson (membership); Ginny Edwards (general); Gail Oswald (Treasurer); Josephine Noyce (Assistant Treasurer)

Because of technical difficulties Carol Crossley was unable to attend until 11.20 and Mike Wilson attempted to join but was unable to connect with audio.

#### 2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020 were agreed to be an accurate record.

#### 3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

#### 4. General Reports

**Report from Chair** This had been circulated before the meeting.

##### Third Age Trust AGM held 29 September 2020.

Robert reported on this meeting, which was held via Zoom using an intermediary, with 421 U3As participating.

“Despite some technical problems the CEO Sam Mauger dealt with the complicated voting and procedural issues very competently.

Richard Teare (Treasurer) presented the accounts and stated that rising costs needed to dealt with by an increase in members’ subscriptions. He mentioned that an increase in people taking early retirement created an opportunity for increased recruitment. TAM magazine (5 editions p.a.) was showing an increase in advertising revenue.

A major issue was a proposed increase in member’s subscriptions for the first time since 2010. H&R U3A committee had voted unanimously to support a resolution to increase contributions from £3.50 to £4.50 with effect from April 2022.

Chipping Norton U3A proposed this citing the following supporting arguments:

- 29% inflation since 2010

- Since the 2006 recession, successive UK governments, from different parties, had made considerable cut-backs in government expenditure, with adverse effects on public services, but also with damaging effects on staff morale
- A typical U3A subscription is at or about £20. By comparison...
  - WI £43
  - RHS £65
  - NT £72
- There are 19 staff at TAT HQ; the WI has 90.

In a debate which lasted 25 minutes, other U3As assured the meeting that such an increase would cause a substantial drop in member numbers. The Chipping Norton motion was defeated (121 for, 621 against). A proposal to increase the amount to £4.00 in April 2022 was carried (508 for, 221 against).

Member Ed Link described Future Development Plans.

- Much of this centred on increasing membership numbers and diversity.
- The current membership is getting older; and is largely white-British, 66% female 33% male
- One proposal was to target younger members, those close to retirement, characterised as “our daughters and sons”.
- Allied to this, a recognition that our successors as members will be more tech-savvy.
- There was bold talk of “building the brand”, although much of this was less than compelling, with much use of platitudes, and focus on odd shapes and sizes of promotional material, rather than a more radical rethink of brand values”.

There was some discussion of this report. Doubts were expressed as to whether in fact people are retiring earlier, given the increase in State retirement age to 66, and the effect on finances of the current pandemic. It may well be however that more people are working part time or are semi-retired, which makes them eligible for membership. People in their late 50s or early 60s who are in this position should perhaps be approached, and publicity should make it clear that there is no specific lower age limit for membership and that it is not necessary to be fully retired (the H&R U3A website does state that people can join when ‘full time employment has ceased’). It was also suggested that membership packs could be sent to large organisations such as the Civil Service, for the use of those soon to retire.

Robert suggested that when the TAT National Conference can take place again, a couple of H&R delegates should attend (previously held in August in Nottingham).

#### Hastings & Rother U3A AGM 26<sup>th</sup> October – final details

All the documents for the AGM have been sent out with the Newsletter. The deadline for receiving proxy votes is 16<sup>th</sup> October, with 28 already received. It was noted that even if expecting to attend the (Zoom) meeting, the proxy form should still be sent (scan/email or post). The member’s vote can still then be counted if for some reason they are unable to attend, and will be replaced by their ‘live’ vote if they do attend. Around 60 votes will be required to create a quorum. If a quorum is not reached, then because the meeting has already been postponed once, those present/voting would form a quorum. Only paid-up members will be invited to the meeting or have their vote counted.

The AGM is at 10.30 (members can log in from 10.00). This will be followed by a speaker, scheduled for 11.00. Robert will phone the speaker to explain the situation so that he is on ‘standby’ for whatever time the AGM actually finishes. It was agreed that George will wrap up the AGM, as the new Chair.

GW

Robert expressed his appreciation of the work of the committee and volunteers during the previous year(s). He offered hearty thanks to all members of the committee, both the present members and those from the immediate past. Robert said that he very much values everything that the committee members have done, collectively and individually – without complaint - and in the best spirit of the U3A, and that their guidance and support have sustained him through some difficult events. It has been particularly valuable that committee members have expressed their own opinions and debated matters thoroughly before reaching collective decisions.

We are still restricted as to our face-to-face activities, but will continue to monitor the situation in the expectation of a return to normal activities in the future, as soon as possible. A sub-committee had investigated the possibility of interest group meetings at St Peter's Community Centre, with the aim of investigating additional venues at St Leonards or Hastings later, but the new government Rule of Six brought in from 14<sup>th</sup> September means this is not currently viable.

Robert finished by thanking George Webster for stepping forward to take on the role of Chairman, offering him every good wish for the future, and asking him to speak about future plans and events.

### **Report from Vice Chair**

George had circulated a suggestion that, given the traditional Christmas celebration will not be possible in 2020, an alternative should be considered, to take place at some point in 2021. He felt that it is important at this moment in time that the committee be seen to be doing something for the membership to compensate for the loss of activities currently being experienced, although there is continuing uncertainty as to how long the current pandemic and resulting restrictions may last. If a suitable venue could be found to accommodate sufficient numbers (possibly 100-200) then an outdoors event might be possible. At this stage no decisions can be made other than to agree to investigate this possibility, and George suggested that a small sub-committee could be formed for this purpose. The suggestion could also be put out on Facebook and the website to canvas opinion and invite suggestions; members might know of a suitable venue or a member might even have a sufficiently large garden!

Discussion – given the vagaries of the British weather, several committee members felt that to plan an exclusively outdoors event would not be wise. It might be better to find a venue with both indoor and outdoor possibilities, so the event could be adjusted according to the weather. It was agreed that a small group could start looking at possibilities, although at this stage no commitment for date or venue can be made.

GW?

### Website

Usage of the website has gone down during the pandemic, and a new administrator is urgently needed since Brian is resigning at the AGM. George suggested more links between the website and Facebook would be helpful in future. Lynda commented that there are currently only 90 people in the Facebook group, from a membership of over 500. George considered that in future more events could be posted on Facebook, but care is needed on both Facebook and the website over security in relation to people's contact details and data.

### **Report from Treasurer** (circulated beforehand along with accounts and balance sheet)

Gail reported: "I am pleased to confirm that I have received a refund of £100 from the Royal Victoria Hotel being the deposit that we paid for our Convenors Tea. This was successfully negotiated by Carol Crossley.

Receipts are currently £6,000 in excess of outgoings. However, our two major expenses still to come will be the Capitation fee and the newsletter and AGM printing costs, so I anticipate that we shall run at a loss this year, which is not unexpected".

### **Report from Membership Secretary** (circulated beforehand)

Bruce reported: “To date we have 595 members for 2020/21. There are 143 renewals outstanding – but still 50 from the previous year. So, if we take the latter as a standard drop-out rate, fewer than 100 out of 700 members have so far failed to renew their membership, despite the lack of group activity. There is still a trickle of renewals coming through – 6 last week, 2 so far this, but the peak period is now over.

The system has proved more than robust enough for this newcomer to cope with and the banking operation, recently modified, has worked very well. My thanks go to Gail and Tricia in particular for their help.

I look forward to receiving the laptop being arranged by Richard Collisson. Hopefully, that will enable me to join Zoom meetings in the not-too-distant future”.

Bruce had also suggested that the committee consider putting the monthly speaker meetings on YouTube. Gail however reports that she had suggested to one of the speakers that meetings could be recorded, so that members could access them at a different time, but this was refused citing copyright reasons. Robert also felt that speaker meetings should be kept as meetings, not just something members watch if they get round to it, since part of the appeal is the social side of seeing other members and having a shared experience, and this was agreed.

RC

Robert confirmed that the speaker will normally start at 11 and apologised for allowing an early start last week!

### **Report from Groups Co-ordinator**

Lynda reported that there seems to be a wide range of feelings amongst members about meeting in the current circumstances, from those who don't seem at all apprehensive, to some who are scared to meet anyone. Others do want to meet if this can be done safely, but the current Rule of 6 regulations make this difficult. It was agreed that the current rules are confusing: some larger group activities are allowed in 'covid secure' community venues, but groups of more than 6 must not interact and only certain activities are exempt. Most U3A groups have previously been located in homes, which is an added difficulty. It is possible that some groups are continuing to meet 'under the radar' but most members do seem to have got the message.

Lynda noted that some group convenors have not renewed membership, and a few of these ran more than one group. This means that unless another convenor can be found, these groups will not continue even when meetings are allowed. A couple of new groups have started however, for instance an outdoors cycling group.

### **Report from Venues Co-ordinator**

As reported by the Treasurer, a refund was obtained from the Royal Victoria hotel for the cancelled Convenors' Tea. Carol has heard nothing from the White Rock, although we did have bookings for meetings. St Peter's Community Centre had been very helpful to the sub-group looking at possible room bookings, although this is now in abeyance.

### **Report from Initial Enquiries & Database Co-ordinator**

Tricia reported that there has been a trickle of initial enquiries, but not many. Prior to the meeting she had circulated a copy of the current publicity leaflet; this needs updating, and the committee were asked to send her any suggestions or updates for this.

### **Speakers**

A series of speaker events has been planned. There were 51 attendees for the last Zoom meeting; a few of these were couples logging in with the same device so the actual number is slightly

All

higher. This is nevertheless far fewer than there would be at in-person meetings. There has been some very positive feedback about the last speaker (Churchill, with Tony Harris).

### **Newsletter & publicity/Regional**

No new reports.

### **Report from Business Secretary**

Ken is currently dealing with returned Proxy Forms, and will write a report for the AGM. He reported that some people when returning forms have also expressed gratitude to the committee for their efforts and for trying to keep things together during the pandemic. Ken is also updating the Volunteers List, not an easy task. Someone will need to be in charge of the ‘thankers’ for Speaker Meetings, once these are running again, and it was suggested that George or Mike might do this.

KS

Hastings Voluntary Action are holding their AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> October. Our usual representative Anne Lowndes is unable to represent us; Ken will therefore write and send apologies.

Ken noted that Lesley Almond had resigned from the committee. Raquel Berdichevsky has been nominated for the role of Business Secretary and Ken is doing a hand-over with her.

KS

### **5. Any Other Business**

Robert and the committee thanked Ken for all his work over the past 5 years as Business Secretary. The committee also thanked Robert for all his work and dedication as Chair over the past 2 years. It was noted that the last months have been particularly difficult, and both have had to stay on longer than expected because of the postponement of the AGM from July.

KS/RB

### **6. Date of next committee meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November at 10.30 via Zoom.

*Signed*

*Date*

*Minutes were taken by Jenny Meteyard.*