

Unlock Democracy Council Meeting Minutes Draft
5th Floor 9 King Street London EC2V 8EA
20th February 2016

Present: Vicky Seddon (Chair), Peter Hirst, Andrew Blick, Danny Zinkus Sutton, Mary Southcott, Phil Starr, Stephen Carter, James Grindrod, Finola Kelly, Jack Maizels

Apologies: Phil Davis, Owais Rajput

In Attendance: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Simon Howard (Minutes), Emily Randall

1 Minutes and Matters arising

Vicky Seddon (VS) informed Council that Avtar Singh had resigned. A discussion followed re attendance at Council being posted on the web with election addresses.

AR to circulate proposed wording for publication.

The minutes from the Council meeting on 12th July were approved and the special meeting re Strategy were approved subject to 2 amendments.

Page 1 agenda item 2 – Council thanks should be changed to thanked and in the following paragraph which should be changed to while.

Management Board minutes from 24th November and 16th February had been circulated for information, likewise AGM minutes. There were no matters arising that were not already on the agenda.

2 Finance

The draft accounts were presented by Alexandra Runswick (AR) who advised Council that there is not a £74,000 surplus. There are 3 reasons: the implementation of the new SORPs, website expenditure has been capitalised and the income of the Magna Carta has been included whilst costs and accruals have not. There will be a small surplus. AR will keep Council updated by email regarding filing the accounts.

On the draft budget AR commented that this is very much a work in progress and that there was still work to be done to ensure the figures were accurate. Arti has done a lot of work to improve our financial reporting and this can be seen in the way that budget headers have changed and categories expanded. No grant money has been included and the same level of support from Rodell has been assumed.

Council accepted the draft budget in front of them as a working document.

3 Response to AGM Motions

AR spoke the paper she had circulated with draft responses to the AGM motions. She reminded Council that some of the responses were quite brief at this stage as the staff team had not yet done the work on the projects discussed but that this would be updated in due course.

There was then a more detailed discussion of all the motions in turn starting with the response on a PR alliance. There was broad agreement on the principled and pragmatic approach to the motion but it was felt that the tone needed to be more positive and reflect more of the work that UD has already done to support building an alliance whilst rejecting a pact. Mary Southcott referred to polling evidence that demonstrated that parties are unable to deliver their own voters to a particular cause. While people may vote for a particular party they do not follow the party blindly. SW raised concerns about the draft response to the local government motion and that it failed to recognise the breadth and impact of the issue. AR confirmed that this was not the case and reiterated the different ways in which this issue was being handled and that she would be happy to take suggestions for future drafts as these were a response from Council to the AGM.

It was agreed that AR would redraft the response in light of the debate and that this would be circulated for approval by email. It was further agreed that the other motions would be kept under review and responses would be finalised closer to the 2016 AGM.

4 Membership

AR advised Council that there had been much internal work on membership. As Council was aware merging a membership organisation with a proudly non membership organisation to create UD had created a complex system of membership. There have been different ways of being a member, different approaches to membership renewals and now was the time to simplify this, in particular to separate membership and donations. This will make dealing with membership administration more efficient and improve the situation for our membership who have asked for a clearer systems for renewals among other things. Going forward members will have a clear start date and automated communications to remind them to renew. It should also help UD recruit more members as there will be a clearer differentiation between members and supporters. Council needs to specifically look at membership strategy today. Following a short discussion about how to improve engagement with members AR thanked Emily Randall and Pete Mills for their work on drafting the strategy.

The membership strategy was approved.

5 Strategy Implementation

AR pointed out that it was less than a month since Council had approved Strategy but that progress was being made. There already proposals for additional strategies on membership, digital campaigning and media. UD has started to put together a more detailed campaign strategy. Emily Randall (ER) took Council through a presentation using Trello. AR pointed out that using this will enable UD to show it is starting to implement strategy. It can be used to report against objectives and good for funders.

AR referred to the local campaigns initiative that can involve Council members and local groups and gave as an example James Grindrod asking London Mayoral candidates about electoral reform. A discussion followed with AR pleased to have Council's feedback on ER's brilliant idea.

AR observed it was positive for the staff to have the Strategy decided.

6 Elections

AR confirmed to Council that Nan Sloane has agreed to be the returning officer and that the elections would be run by Electoral Reform Service Ltd. Quotes had been sought from other election services providers as is usual when looking to put in services but none were suitable. A leaflet has been produced in respect of the elections that deals with the constitutional aspects of the election which will be going out with the next mailing. UD is deliberately trying to put more information on the website and promote standing for elections to Council more widely. As agreed at the previous meeting the election is being run as a single constituency with additional rules to ensure regional, gender and ethnic minority representation.

7 Rodell Properties update

Simon Howard (SH) informed Council that the refurbishment of Cynthia Street had finished on time and on budget. Rodell had offers for both floors that had been accepted that will increase Rodell's income by £100,000. SH explained what was happening with Grays Inn Road and the difficulties of finding finance. FK asked how this was funded and PS gave a breakdown of how the bridging finance had been used.

Council thanked both PS and SH for their hard work on Rodell.

8 Director's report

AR started with the Trades Union Bill which would dramatically cut funding to the Labour Party but leave corporate donations untouched.

The House of Lords passed an amendment to the Bill to establish a cross party select committee to consider the party funding elements of the Bill. UD has been working with Lord Paul Tyler on this and has submitted evidence arguing that changes to party

funding must be done on a cross party basis. The select committee has a very short time period in which to operate but could be very influential within the House of Lords.

This will be the focus of a fundraising mailing.

Lobbying

The main focus has been on getting a lobbying register introduced in Scotland. UD has been influential in helping set up the Scottish Alliance for Lobbying Transparency which has been doing the work on this. In general the Scottish bill is an improvement on the UK lobbying register as it includes in house as well as consultant lobbyists, although there have been some odd elements that had to be challenged. For example a face to face meeting counted as lobbying but a skype call did not. DZS commented that if UD had not started work on this years ago, supporting Neil Findlay's private members bill and in particular organising a large public meeting in Edinburgh in support of the bill, then the Scottish Government's Bill would not exist.

Local Election Campaign

AR reminded Council that UD was planning a campaign on local electoral reform. This was not an alternative to reform for Westminster but a step to achieving that and using the local elections as a hook. Staff are contacting Councillors they have a relationship with to hone the best arguments to use and then to sign a public letter calling for local authorities to be able to choose their own electoral system. There will also be a petition for the public to sign.

Europe Project

Funded by the James Maddison Trust UD are putting on 3 deliberative, participatory events in Birmingham, Leeds and finally in Parliament. Compass and Talkshop are also involved.

9 AOB & close

AR added that she had been invited to give evidence in respect of MPs' Code of Conduct, while ER asked Council for blogs and content.

There was a query about Local groups and rebate. It was confirmed that the rebate is £1 per member for groups that qualify.

PS said that this is the last Council meeting before the UD election, and thanked VS on behalf of Council for her Chairing and concern for the staff. Council concurred.

The date of the next meeting is 16th July.