

Unlock Democracy Council Meeting
5th Floor 9 Kings Street London EC2V 8EA
10th September 2016

Minutes

Present: Danny Zinkus Sutton (meeting chair), Jack Maizels (co-chair), Peter Hirst, Lisa French, Stephen Carter, Phil Starr, Sepi Golzari-Munro, Rachel Collinson (skype), James Grindrod (late), Jenny Cronin, Andrew Blick.

Apologies: (because of date change) Vicky Seddon, Debbie Chay, Andy Manning, Stuart Weir

In Attendance: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Arti Vyas (Minutes)

1. Minutes and Matter Arising

A query was raised about the AGM, Alex Runswick replied that this was covered later in the agenda. There were no other matters arising.

The minutes from the previous Council meeting were approved.

2. Finance

Budget

Alex Runswick presented the revised budget with the additional new staff costs and pay rise as previously agreed at Management Board. She reported that while there were some small increases in expenditure it remained tightly controlled. The main concern was improving income through additional fundraising.

Council approved the budget.

Annual Accounts

Alex Runswick and Arti Vyas reported on progress with the annual accounts and were confident that they would be finalised in time to be circulated with the AGM Papers.

Danny Zinkus Sutton briefed about the changes involved on charity accounts FRS102.

Arti Vyas mentioned that she would look into Community Interest Companies and whether that would be a suitable move for Unlock Democracy.

3. Rodell Properties

Phil Starr gave a brief overview of the structure and work of Rodell Properties and reminded Council that they are the shareholder of Rodell. He then reported on the current status of the two properties that Rodell owns and manages. Rental income from the Cynthia Street property is a key source of income for UD and covers the organisation's running costs, whilst the Grays Inn Road property is vacant and awaiting redevelopment.

Danny Zinkus Sutton agreed that it was vital to secure Rodell's income hence redevelopment was crucial.

Sepi Golzari-Munro asked how the properties were managed? Phil Starr replied that they were managed by Unlock Democracy's Office manager, Simon Howard. Alex Runswick further briefed everyone on Simon Howard's role.

Phil Starr thereafter explained the company structure of Rodell Properties and that it was managed by a board which included people directly elected

by the Unlock Democracy membership and people appointed by the Management Board.

Alex Runswick commented on the history of Rodell Properties and how its administration had been improved in recent years. She particularly thanked Phil Starr for all his hard work on this.

Danny Zinkus Sutton suggested that the constitutional arrangements for the appointment of Rodell directors may need to be reviewed by Council as one of the directly elected members had resigned and that this accountability mechanism was not as effective as had been originally hoped. Alex Runswick explained the reasons for the resignation and agreed that as these arrangements had now been in place for three electoral cycles, a review would be a good idea.

Sepi Golzari-Munro asked who was responsible for Rodell's financial planning.

Phil Starr informed that currently he, Danny Zinkus Sutton, Simon Howard and Arti Vyas were involved in drafting financial plans but that these were then submitted to the board for approval.

4. Five Year financial plan

Danny Zinkus Suttons poke to the financial plan he had drafted for Unlock Democracy, setting out the assumptions that he had made both in terms of expected future income and possible expenditure. He emphasised that this was for modelling purposes only. There was wide ranging debate about the model and how any future income should be used.

5 Policy Working Group

Stephen Carter spoke to his paper on setting up a policy working group. He explained that its purpose was to support the staff in developing policy for Unlock Democracy. He emphasised that it would be for developing specific

pieces of policy not revisiting the strategy. He outlined some possible areas of work for the group.

Sepi Golzari-Munro queried the process set out in the paper and why Alex Runswick had not been given the final say in its priorities.

Stephen Carter explained that the initial proposal on what the group should focus on would come from staff and that Alex Runswick would be directly involved but that this had been deleted in error from an earlier draft.

Jack Maizels expressed support for the proposal, though cautioned against the structure becoming too bureaucratic or time-consuming for both staff and Council.

Stephen Carter explained that the policy group would not involve all Council members but a small group that can concentrate more on policy discussion and drafting documents that can be put to Council for approval - more like a forum rather than a structure.

Phil Starr agreed that Council should be looking at process of reviewing Unlock Democracy's policies to ensure policies are in place to make organisation more informative on policies.

Jenny Cronin mentioned that identifying issues which are under developed was important across the board, and to ensure that the information is up to date.

Lisa French expressed concern that this structure may just duplicate work and distract the organisation from its primary purpose.

The proposal to form a policy working group was approved. It was further agreed that this would be reviewed in March 2017.

6 EU Referendum

Alex Runswick commented that UD had decided not to take a position on the EU referendum but had run deliberative events that gave voters in Birmingham and Leeds the opportunity to investigate the issues behind the campaign slogans. Historically UD had policy in favour of using referendums more, for example in citizens initiative and against thresholds being used in referendums. However this was drafted before the UK had much experience of referendum campaigning and it therefore appropriate that it is reviewed. She then asked for any comments on the papers that had been circulated.

Andrew Blick agreed that the policy should be revised and that it was important that any future referendums gave voters meaningful choices and that there was a strong public information campaign that gave accurate information rather than relying on campaigns which could often be deliberately misleading.

Lisa French clarified her concerns about the policy working group and agreed that this is key opportunity where it could make things better.

James Grindrod said that referendums should be as infrequently as possible. That until we have written constitution that defines exactly when and how they should be used, referendums are a very problematic way of engaging the public.

Rachel Collinson commented that the government should not take an active role in campaigning for or against a referendum.

Alex Runswick concluded that she did not intend to make referendums a key part of UD's campaigning work but that it would be useful to have a set of principles for direction and so we can clarify our policy position.

6 AGM Preparations

i) Council response to policy motions

Alex Runswick reminded Council that they needed to formally respond to the motions from the previous AGM and replied to comments on the draft response.

The responses from Council were approved.

ii) Plans for the 2016 AGM and discussion about the future

Alex Runswick outlined the plans for the 2016 AGM. She then spoke about discussions at Management Board about improving the experience for members at the AGM to make sure that the day is interesting and worthwhile for them. She added that the staff team were also interested in exploring ways in which members could be involved in the organisation outside of the AGM.

Phil Starr requested that motions be moved to the second part of AGM meeting and identify a main debate involving members to make it interesting.

James Grindrod agreed that it was a new trend with AGMs to have more time for policy debate rather than formal motions.

Sepi Golzari-Munro mentioned how Friends of the Earth had an away day with speakers and training session. Rachel added that fun activities on an away day was a good way to engage people.

Alex Runswick agreed that this would be a good thing to do although it would require funding. She said that the staff team would continue to work on improving the way we involve members and would report back at the next Council meeting.

7 Directors Report

Alex Runswick spoke to about her report. There was a wide ranging discussion which included the importance of recruiting new members,

ensuring that there was adequate handover to the new staff team for the new systems that were being set up and the next steps in developing the theory of change.

8 AOB

Alex Runswick informed all that Council member Barry Stokes had resigned and that she would confirm with Electoral Reform Services who the next person to be elected would be and see if they were willing to serve on Council.

Danny Zinkus Sutton thanked both Vicky Seddon & Stuart Weir for their work & support.

Danny Zinkus Sutton ended the meeting requesting that Council think about the papers they receive and the changes that have been made to the format of the agenda and to let him know if they had any feedback. He also asked members to approach him if they felt they did not have a voice in the meetings.