

Unlock Democracy's 2016 AGM Minutes
Saturday 12th November 2016
At the National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Present: Jack Maizels and Danny Zinkus Sutton (co-chairs), and 29 members

Apologies were received from Rachel Collinson, Darrin Green, James Grindrod, DJ & JC King, Jill Leeming, Phil Starr, Stuart Weir

Staff in Attendance: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Sam Coates, Tim Rouse, James Graham, Arti Vyas and Jessica Sargeant.

1. AGM open and welcome from Co-Chairs and the Director

Jack Maizels thanked everyone for coming and welcomed attendees. Jack then introduced himself and Danny Zinkus Sutton as the new co-chairs and outlined the procedures for the day.

2. Approval of AGM 2015 minutes, and matters arising

Minutes were approved nem con. There were no matters arising

3. Response from the Council to Policy Motions passed at the 2015 AGM

John Cochrane asked a question about Council's response to last year's motion on a Proportional Representation Alliance. There was a brief discussion of this issue.

Council's response was approved nem con

4. Finance Items:

4.1 Approval of accounts

Alex Runswick explained that the accounts are consolidated to include both Unlock Democracy and Rodell Properties Ltd. Alex explained that although the group has posted a loss for this year, Unlock Democracy has posted a surplus this year and is building its reserves, this will help protect the organisation in future. Rodell posted a loss due to that fact that the properties were being renovated to make them more profitable in future. This is part of the Rodell Board's financial plan.

John Strafford highlighted an inconsistency between note 22 and the balance sheet. Arti Vyas confirmed that the balance sheet is correct and agreed to amend the note. There was a discussion about the financing of the redevelopment of both the Cynthia Street and Gray's Inn Road properties and in particular the payment reschedule for the loan. John Strafford also

asked for clarification that the property revaluation had been carried out by a professional. Alex confirmed that this was the case.

The accounts, subject to the correction, were then approved nem con.

4.2 Appointment of reporting accountants

It was proposed that Unlock Democracy's current reporting accountants, Berley Chartered Accountants, be reappointed.

The motion was carried nem con

4.3 Membership subscriptions motion

The following was proposed:

The meeting resolves that the standard annual membership subscription of the organisation shall be £24 and the minimum subscription shall be £12. The rebate to Local Groups shall be £7.20 or 30% of the subscription, whichever is the lower. The rebate to Devolved Organisations shall be £2.40 or 10% of the subscription, whichever is the lower.

Amendment

The following amendment was proposed:

Delete all and replace with: The meeting resolves that the standard membership subscription of the organisation shall be £24 annually, £6 quarterly and £2 monthly. The minimum membership subscription of the organisation shall be £12 annually, £3 quarterly and £1 monthly. The annual rebate to Local Groups shall be £7.20 or 30% of the gross subscription paid over the course of the year, whichever is the lower. The annual rebate to Devolved Organisations shall be £2.40 or 10% of the gross subscription paid over the course of the year, whichever is the lower.

The amendment was carried nem con

The substantive motion was passed nem con

5. Plenary 1: Can you put that in writing please?

Debbie Chay ran a plenary session exploring 3 potential political scenarios, the issues that would need to be considered and which parts of UK constitutional law applied.

The AGM was adjourned for lunch

6. Director's Report & Questions

Alex Runswick thanked everyone for attending. She spoke about the opportunities and challenges presented by Brexit, the need to hold power to account and engage with groups who see scrutiny of the changes they want to see as a threat rather than good government. She said that organisations like UD that care about our democratic culture as well as the formal institutions of our democracy are more important than ever and our supporters are vital to that. Alex then spoke to her report.

Mike Roberts and John Trafford asked questions about coordination with other groups and whether there really was cause for concern about the Great Repeal Bill respectively. There was some input from other members on this issue.

Alex answered that all European Law would be incorporated into UK law but this was a holding measure, there will be some regulations that people want to repeal or amend. She highlighted the need to scrutinise who makes these decisions, the proposal is to do this through statutory instruments. Alex explained our emphasis is on the process of Brexit, and we would not make a judgement as to whether or not it should go ahead. She also answered questions about coordination saying it created issues for our cross-party stance but we would try and coordinate on issues where we converge.

Tony Greville suggested we need to have pre-legislative scrutiny and other scrutiny measures on the Great Repeal Bill. Alex agreed. Sepi Golzari-Munro highlighted that it has been argued that 1/3rd of EU legislation cannot be transposed into UK law.

Alex Runswick spoke about the Private Member's Bill on lobbying transparency we have been working on. Alex brought the date of committee stage to the attention of the meeting and spoke about resistance to the proposals from Andrew Lansley.

7. Plenary session: 'Democracy is your community' with Sam Coates (Campaigns and Digital Officer) and Tim Rouse (Membership and Database Office)

8. Constitutional Amendments

Danny Zinkus Sutton reminded the meeting that a two thirds majority was necessary to carry a constitutional amendment.

8.1 Setting Membership Rates

Proposer: Lisa French

Secunder: Tom Pratt

This meeting resolves:

To amend the first sentence of section 3.1.2 of the Unlock Democracy constitution to read: The membership subscription shall be set by the Annual General Meeting, which shall last until changed by a subsequent Annual General Meeting.

Lisa French and Tom Pratt spoke to the motion, no one spoke against

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	21	0	0
Proxies	18	1	0
Total	39	1	0

The motion was very largely carried

8.2 Joint Membership

Proposer: Lisa French

Seconder: Tom Pratt

This meeting resolves:

- 1. To amend the second sentence of section 3.1.2 of the Unlock Democracy constitution to read: The Annual General Meeting may set a specific membership subscription for benefit claimants, unwaged individuals and individuals on a fixed income, and may also set a joint membership subscription for two people at the same address.*
- 2. To set the joint membership subscription rate at £30. The associated rebate to 24 local groups shall be £9 and the rebate to Devolved Organisations shall be 25 £3*

Lisa French and Tom Pratt spoke to the Motion. There was a short discussion and Alex Runswick clarified that to qualify for joint membership members must live at the same address but there was no requirement about the type of relationship joint members must have. She also confirmed that under joint membership both members would have full membership rights.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	22	0	1
Proxies	18	0	3
Total	40	0	4

The motion was very largely carried

9. Debates and votes on policy motions.

9.1 The Brexit Process

Proposer: Stephen Carter

Secunder: Sepi Golzari-Munro

This meeting resolves:

1. To campaign for the fullest possible democratic engagement and control around the Brexit process and associated constitutional changes, including full parliamentary debate and other checks and balances against unilateral executive action or undue influence from private lobbyists.

Stephen Carter and Sepi Golzari-Munro both spoke to the motion.

Amendment 1

Proposer: Peter Hirst

Secunder: John Cochrane

Insert after “checks and balances” (line 17) the following:

”, including the possibility of a further referendum on the terms of Brexit”

The clause would then read:

1. To campaign for the fullest possible democratic engagement and control around the Brexit process and associated constitutional changes, including full parliamentary debate and other checks and balances, including the possibility of a further referendum on the terms of Brexit, against unilateral executive action or undue influence from private lobbyists.

Danny Zinkus-Sutton declared that proxy votes would not be valid should this amendment pass

Peter Hirst spoke to the motion. John Cochrane said he had seconded the motion as he believed it was an issue the organisation needed to consider . Lisa French and John Strafford argued against the motion on the basis that it was unnecessary and would alienate UD supporters who supported Brexit. There was subsequent debate with a mixture of members speaking for and against.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	4	15	3

The amendment failed

As the amendment did not pass proxy votes for the substantive motion were declared valid.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	21	0	1
Proxies	18	1	2
Total	39	1	3

The motion is was largely carried

9.2 Referendums in UK

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Seconder: Debbie Chay

Our experience this year demonstrates the unsatisfactory nature of our current way of doing things, with lack of clarity about the implications of the vote, poor information and much misinformation, and no requirement of a substantial majority before a hugely significant decision is taken.

Referendums need to be used rarely, cautiously and where there is good preparation, and clarity about consequent outcomes.

For a referendum to genuinely reflect the settled will of the people, there needs to be:

- a political consensus that the issue should be put to the electorate, rather than 10 decided through our representative democracy structures*
- sufficient safeguards in any proposed referendum against making major changes to the constitution without overwhelming support. Both turnouts and majority thresholds should be included*
- clarity about just what the next steps will be in terms of putting the outcome (if successful) into practice*
- a well-informed and balanced debate with misinformation and prejudices properly challenged*

Such requirements should be incorporated into a written constitution.

Vicky Seddon and Debbie Chay spoke to the motion

Amendment 1

Proposer: Peter Hirst

Secunder: TBC

Delete from line 9 the word “political” The clause would then read:

- a consensus that the issue should be put to the electorate, rather than decided through our representative democracy structures

Danny declared that proxy votes would still be counted should this amendment be passed. There was no seconder so the amendment fell.

Martin Childs, John Strafford and Caroline Strafford spoke against the motion. Peter Hirst spoke in favour.

Mike Tims proposed the meeting noted that ‘the 2016 EU referendum failed on these terms’ and this be included in the minutes. Danny Zinkus Sutton suggested a vote but the room did not support this.

There was a discussion about how these criteria could be measured. John Franglen and Alexandra Runswick spoke on the downfalls of thresholds. Vicky Seddon said her aim was to find general principles that ensured a referendum reflected the will of the people and members had not argued against the principles.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	17	3	3
Proxies	19	2	0
Total	36	5	3

The motion was largely carried

9.3 Truth in Referendums

The original proposer and seconder of this motion were not present. Danny Zinkus Sutton asked the meeting if anyone present would like to propose and second the motion.

Proposer: Stephen Carter

Secunder: Tony Greville

This meeting resolves:

- 1. To campaign for a supervisory body (such as the Electoral Commission) to be granted powers to intervene when misleading information is presented by campaigners and stop*

further dissemination

2. To campaign for an increase in the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to enable them to investigate and sanction MPs involved in significant misrepresentation of facts in a public context.

Stephen Carter and Tony Greville spoke to the motion. There was a short discussion on how this could be implemented.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	13	5	4
Proxies	21	0	0
Total	34	5	4

The motion was largely passed.

9.4 Review of Parliamentary Boundaries

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Seconder: Jenny Cronin

The current proposals from the Boundary Commission, to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600, and which are now out for consultation, are flawed. The Commission has had to work to the Government approach to the process, despite advising against some of its elements. Problems arise because:

- the move to individual voter registration has not been introduced in a manner that ensures full registration
- the proposals are based on number of registered voters, rather than on the size of the population that is eligible to vote. Communities of high mobility (e.g. areas with lots of rental properties, often city centres, or student areas) show the lowest registration rates, and hence under these proposals will be under-represented
- the figures used in these proposals are those voters registered by December 2015, but, largely due to the EU referendum, there have been many more registrations since then. Why not use the most up to date figures?
- community boundaries (whether natural communities, ward boundaries, local authority boundaries) should be honoured, but in seeking to equalise the size of constituencies, the + or – 5% that has been used is too tight to enable those natural community boundaries to be respected; other suggestions are for 7.5% or 10%

No doubt many of these points will be made in the consultation process that ends on 5th

December, but to prevent such a flawed set of proposals becoming the basis for the general election expected in 2020, there is a need for a significant campaign to expose the unfortunate biases which will occur if they are agreed. To prevent our democracy being further undermined, Unlock Democracy will support that campaign.

Vicky Seddon and Jenny Cronin spoke to the motion. John Cochrane asked what the motion was resolving and this was clarified. A number of members spoke for and against. Caroline Strafford said opposing equalizing boundaries was anti-democratic. Other members answered that they were not against the principle but the way in which the boundary changes were being implemented.

	For	Against	Abstention
Present	18	1	2
Proxies	20	0	1
Total	38	1	3

The motion was largely passed.

The AGM was concluded at 5.00pm

Names of attendees and Proxy Votes

Attendees:

Stephen Carter
Deborah Chay
Martin Childs
Jenny Cronin
Lisa French
Sepi Golzari-Munro
Tony Greville
M W Hamilton
Simon Hewin
Peter Hirst
Klina Jordan
Mark Layton
Jack Maizels
Virginia Morck
Beryl Pankhurst
Mike J Roberts
Vicky Seddon
Caroline Strafford
John Strafford
Mike Timms
Adrian R Williams
Alison M Williams
Danny Zinkus
John Franglen
John Chadwick
John Cochrane
Tom Pratt
Raymond George

Proxy votes:

JR Davis
Alex Poteliakhoff
K W Richardson
B J Fearnley
G F Willett
D C Pinder
Victor Cadaxa
Chris Jefferies
Andrew Watters
Eric John Fuller
A A Lacey
Roger Calvert
Andy Graydon
M R Willetts
Thomas Duggan
C R Oliver
Terence Carter
James Dalglish
Kate Allen
Robert W Chaplin
Ian McKeer