

Unlock Democracy Council Meeting
5th Floor 9 Kings Street London EC2V 8EA
22nd September 2017
MINUTES

Present: Sepi Golzari-Munro, James Grindrod, Peter Hirst, Debbie Chay, Vicky Seddon, Andrew Blick, Phil Starr, Stephen Carter, Rachel Collinson, Danny Zinkus Sutton, Stuart Weir, Lisa French, Ian Driver (phone)

Apologies: Jack Maizels, Jenny Cronin, Andrew Manning

In attendance: Alexandra Runswick, Sarah Clarke, Tim Rouse

1. Minutes and Matters Arising

There were no comments on the Management Board minutes, and there were no matters arising.

The minutes from the previous Council meeting were approved.

2. Political discussion

Council had a broad discussion around how the election has impacted on the political landscape. The focal point was how the election, as well as the ongoing high profile nature of Brexit, is an opportunity to make the case for a written constitution. There was further discussion around electoral reform, and the dynamics of the hung Parliament.

3. Finance

Alexandra Runswick updated Council on the new Repeal Bill Coordinator post and funding, flagging that there have been no other major changes to announce.

Council discussed membership income, Rodell income, consultancy costs, monitoring, and the costs of social media promotion. There was also a discussion around lower figures for membership and communications (cancellation of media monitoring), lower figures for admin costs, and committed giving, and comparison with similar organisations.

The budget was approved.

Council members expressed concern that currently there is no Direct Debit option on Unlock Democracy's website. Alexandra Runswick confirmed that the staff team were very keen to do this but there were some administrative challenges that needed to be addressed, including changing our current direct debit provider and staff capacity. This was flagged as an urgent matter to be reviewed at both Management Board and Council.

Actions:

Arti Vyas to produce a one page report on current level of Unlock Democracy's reserves for the next meeting

Management Board to discuss Direct Debit provision at the meeting on 12th October.

Council to discuss Direct Debit provision at the meeting in six months

4. Director's Report

Alexandra Runswick introduced a discussion on her written report. Unlock Democracy is in a good place to build upon core issues. The appointment of Jane Thomas as Repeal Bill coordinator was welcomed. Coordination of the Repeal Bill was raised as a good opportunity to position Unlock Democracy as a leading voice within the sector.

Council discussed fundraising, and the issue with nudge amounts included in the March 2017 fundraising mailing.

Sepi Golzari Munro welcomed Unlock Democracy's recent media coverage, noting Alexandra Runswick's interview with politics.co.uk as a particular highlight.

Peter Hirst questioned whether more engagement figures could be included in the report, such as Facebook likes and Twitter followers. Rachel Collinson responded that tailored metrics have been developed for Unlock Democracy as part of the Transformational Index and these are the most informative measures to focus on. Other measures are too easy to game.

5. Repeal Bill Work

Alexandra Runswick introduced a discussion on Unlock Democracy's work on the Repeal Bill. The Repeal Bill Alliance will be working across different parts of civil society (health, environment, etc.) to coordinate a response, rather than responding to individual powers. Alexandra told Council of the enormous amount of work this will require, and the focussed approach being pursued.

Danny Zinkus Sutton asked about the potential of the bill to lead to a constitutional crisis. Alexandra Runswick replied that there is potential; there are likely to be legal cases challenging the government, as well as a political challenge from the devolved governments about the impact of Brexit on the devolution settlements. She added that the House of Lords could play a very important role in this process, both as the chamber that has more experience of scrutinising delegated powers and because the government does not have a majority or control the timetable in the way that it does in the House of Commons. However the House of Lords may take a more conservative approach as they will be reluctant to cause a crisis and bring the House's existence into question.

Stuart Weir highlighted that civil society includes a wide variety of voices, some good and others not so. He questioned how likely it is that parliamentarians will be convinced to change their structures, and whether Unlock Democracy has developed proposals. Alexandra Runswick replied that a joint ask is being developed.

Council discussed the impact of the Repeal Bill work on other focal areas, including House of Lords reform. The Repeal Bill work is seen as an opportunity to develop networks in the sector and with parliamentarians.

6. Democratic Brexit

Sarah Clarke introduced the Engagement Strategy discussion paper. She set out how Unlock Democracy's Democratic Brexit work is an important project and a key framing for everything at the moment.

Council discussed the paper. Members suggested ways to make the Democratic Brexit report translate into more accessible material. Rachel Collinson highlighted craftivism as an option to look into, as it has a high impact on MPs.

Sepi Golzari Munro questioned how Unlock Democracy could counter arguments against a written constitution. Sarah Clarke responded that developing a clear case for a written constitution is a priority.

Danny Zinkus Sutton commented that our current contact management and relations tools should be assessed to see whether they are appropriate to do the job required, and Sarah Clarke should consider reporting back to Council or Management Board if resources are needed.

7. Unlock Teams

Alexandra Runswick introduced an update on the Unlock Teams. She told Council that focus groups have been run across the country to explore language about Brexit. The development of the 'Unlock Teams' model by Sam Coates and Patrick Olszowski has been based on the US model being adapted to the UK system, with a focus on local surgeries rather than town hall meetings. To date, a video series has been produced and recruitment for Unlock Teams has started with high-engagement supporters.

Council discussed the need to inform local groups of Unlock Team as a point of courtesy, but also to leave open the possibility of Unlock Teams growing into local groups and for there to be joint working where desired. Alexandra

Runswick said that given the teams are at an experimental stage there hasn't been thinking around how to grow Unlock Teams into local groups yet.

Council also discussed whether the limitation of groups to four people would result in activists being turned away from participating. Messaging is needed to capture the 'surplus' people and direct them to another Unlock Democracy activity.

Concerns were raised around Unlock Teams going rogue, and how to protect Unlock Democracy from reputational damage. Alexandra Runswick confirmed that there are clear guidelines in the materials about how to engage with MPs and the importance of remaining polite and courteous even in disagreement. Council agreed that scenario planning and risk evaluation was needed in the event of Unlock Teams going rogue and how Unlock Democracy would respond. Council also discussed whether risks could be mitigated by requiring Unlock Teams to sign up to a code of conduct or set of principles.

Action:

Sam Coates to put together a plan for informing local groups of Unlock Teams.

Sam Coates to undertake crisis and risk planning, and to map out 5 or 10 ways the Unlock Teams could go wrong and what action would be taken by Unlock Democracy.

8. Policy Review

Sarah Clarke introduced the Policy Review paper. She told Council this was a process-oriented review to take stock of Unlock Democracy's existing policy - documenting it in a way that we can refer to it easily, and which can be made accessible to MPs, journalists, and supporters. This will include reviewing all policy to make sure it is up to date and ties into Unlock Democracy's wider narrative about a written constitution, and producing up to date case studies, and producing policy documents in formats that are accessible to a wide range of audiences.

Sarah Clarke proposed the priority areas as being Democratic Brexit, a written constitution, party funding, and referendums. This would form an initial work program lasting around 9 months, with the opportunity for another set of priority areas to be identified beyond then.

Council had a wide ranging discussion about other priority areas, such as local government, and corruption. Council also discussed options for communicating policies, like lesson plans and the creation of a commonly used terms glossary. Council noted that this will be an ongoing discussion as the need for a greater and clearer body of policy develops.

Sepi Golzari Munro pointed to the gov.uk website as a potential model, with its clear and granular navigation.

Danny Zinkus Sutton asked whether we have the appropriate website functionality to be used as a policy resource.

Council approved the priority areas

9. Referendums Policy

Stephen Carter introduced his Referendums Policy paper. He outlined the central idea of the paper as being an attempt to square two concerns - highlighting problems with referendums, but also being careful not to take a side on Brexit, which can be how critique of referendums is taken in the current political climate. Unlock Democracy needs to be strong about the cases in which referendums are a good tool and what safeguards are needed. This can be done by focussing on the process around referendums, rather than the outcome of the Brexit referendum. Stephen flagged that there had also been input from Vicky Seddon.

Alexandra Runswick asked Council to consider the strategic issues around whether or not we want a Referendums Act. Council had a wide-ranging discussion around the strategic direction that a Referendums Act would take Unlock Democracy, and the pros and cons of a Referendums Act. It was discussed whether this would act as a staging post for getting a written constitution, or whether it would instead solidify the status quo and make it

harder to achieve the long term goal of a written constitution. It was agreed that there was a need for discussion about referendums being in the context of a popularly derived constitution.

Other issues raised by Council were the role of the Electoral Commission and how it could be empowered to effectively oversee referendums; whether Unlock Democracy would actively campaign for a Referendum Acts

Stephen Carter raised a difficulty around putting the policy on hold, and the need for an answer to the question about what our position is on referendums. Stephen asked for clarification on Unlock Democracy's position in the interim.

Alexandra Runswick acknowledged that no firm view had been agreed on by Council in regards to Unlock Democracy's position on referendums. Alexandra outlined her interpretation of the discussion as Council empowering her to respond to questions on the referendum. Should a question on referendums arise, Unlock Democracy's holding position is around asking questions about the purpose of the referendum, thresholds, public education campaigns etc rather than putting forward a specific model. She acknowledged this as being only an interim position.

Council agreed that should Unlock Democracy be engaged on the issue of referendums, the above position would be acceptable for the time being. It was also agreed that a position on referendums was needed that is specifically set within the context of constitutional reform and a written constitution.

Council agreed on the holding position put forward by Alexandra Runswick.

Action:

Danny Zinkus Sutton, Jack Maizels, Phil Starr, and Stephen Carter to identify how the constitutional discussion around forming a new referendums policy is managed, and how / when Council should revisit Unlock Democracy's position on referendums.

10. AGM and anniversary

i) Amendments necessary following the Returning Officer's report

Alexandra Runswick introduced the paper, and asked Council to agree on the amendments recommended by the Returning Officer and decide who will move the amendments. There was a discussion around the provision of gender and ethnicity definitions.

The paper from the Returning Officer was approved and she was thanked for her hard work.

Action:

Rachel Collinson, Peter Hirst and Vicky Seddon to organise moving the amendments.

ii) Plans for the 2017 AGM

Alexandra Runswick asked Council for input into what this year's AGM should entail. She also commented that this year also marks Unlock Democracy's 10th anniversary.

Council discussed the structure of the AGM. Ideas put forward included a short administrative section to fulfil constitutional requirements, followed by other sessions. Renaming the AGM was discussed, such as a 'Members' Day' or a 'Carnival of Democracy'. Business matters could be dealt with quickly with space created for policy discussions, training, or a talk from a senior politician, as examples. There could also be a session on the Unlock Teams, and training on how to organise locally.

Council discussed how to avoid the event becoming just an opportunity for people to let off steam about Brexit. The importance of attracting a diverse range of people to the AGM was raised. Rachel Collinson suggested speaking to members of minority communities to get a steer on what would attract them to the AGM. Tim Rouse highlighted some opportunities for activities around the AGM to bring more people into the fold.

11. Rodell update

Danny Zinkus Sutton updated Council on a recent meeting by the Rodell board. The refurbishment of Cynthia Street is complete and is in the process of being marketed, with feedback from tenants being positive. Attention is now being turned more fully to Gray's Inn Road. Decisions taken by Rodell at the Board Meeting on quoracy and director rules need to be agreed at the AGM.

Action:

*Alexandra Runswick to circulate the Rodell's Board Meeting paper
Council to agree who will table amendments at the AGM*

12. AOB and Close

Sepi Golzari Munro commented that Hope for the Future is also doing American style organising work in the UK, and she will raise this with Sam Coates.

Meeting closed 16:30

Date of the next meeting: Saturday 28 October