

Unlock Democracy Council Meeting
5th Floor 9 Kings Street London EC2V 8EA
14th April 2018
Minutes

Present: Jack Maizels (chairing), Danny Zinkus Sutton, Stephen Carter (remotely), Andrew Blick, Debbie Chay, Jenny Cronin, Peter Hirst, Vicky Seddon, Ian Driver (remotely)

Staff in Attendance: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Sam Coates, Sarah Clarke, Zahia Guidoum Castiblanque (Minutes)

1. Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

i) Apologies

Phil Starr, Lisa French, Sepi Golzari-Munro, Rachel Collinson, James Grindrod

ii) Council minutes for approval

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

iii) Matters Arising

Alex Runswick reported that she had hoped to be in a position to update Council on potential changes to the memorandums and articles of association. Although much of this work has been done the time requirements for calling an emergency general meeting made it impossible to do that in time for this meeting. As an update, Alex stressed that changes for Unlock Democracy were expected to be much more limited than proposed at the last meeting, as there was no need for a provision for taking decisions by majority by email.

Vicky asked about developments regarding the appointment of an apprentice. Alex confirmed that after exploring the option further it was found that this would not be a feasible option for the organisation.

Debbie Chay offered to assist Alex with the review.

Action: Alex to send the proposed changes to the mem and arts to Debbie

2. Finance

i) Budget

Alex briefed Council on the budget for the new financial year, the changes compared to last year's budget and the activities included in it. She reported that the income figures were more conservative than last year's budget, and that two grant applications have been submitted for funding the work of the Repeal Bill Alliance, the result won't be known until July. Alex drew Council's attention to certain lines highlighted in the budget which were new but listed as zero. This is because they are areas of expenditure the organisation needs in order to grow but that cannot yet be funded. There are included as a prompt for discussion. However, given that those would be activities that would raise the profile of the organisation, were included with the aim of fundraising for them during the year.

Peter Hirst expressed concerns regarding the decline on membership numbers. In response Alex stressed that, without disregarding the issue, it is not significant as it may look, as it is the result of a changing in the membership system, and those that are not members now are considered donors.

The budget was approved.

ii) Fundraising

Alex updated on the developments of the fundraising working group. She explained that the group had met just once due to time constraints of all parts involved, but that the work was ongoing. The group provided a forum to think more strategically about fundraising. There a number of ideas explored by the group, such as the use of personal stories, that the staff team were currently developing.

3. Rodell Update

Alex briefed Council on the latest news on Rodell. She explained that Rodell was finalising the new planning application for 37 Grays Inn Road. Additionally, Cynthia Street's second floor had been rented out.

4. Director's report

Alex spoke to her report, she highlighted key political developments, work on the EU Withdrawal Bill and the work of the Repeal Bill Alliance with building capacity of organisations of the devolved nations. Danny Zinkus Sutton asked about the preparations for the implementation of GDPR. Alex reminded Council that GDPR means that people on the mailing list have to give active content to keep receiving emails, 59% of the most active segment of Unlock Democracy's email list had done so at the time of the meeting. She invited questions.

Vicky Seddon asked for support for local groups regarding GDPR. Sam Coates agreed to brief local groups on this..

Action: Tim and Sam to brief local groups on GDPR compliance.

5. Local Democracy AGM motion

Sam Coates presented his paper outlining the proposed responses to the AGM motion on local democracy. He reported that some actions have already begun including exploring with activists what communication platform they would like to use. He also stated that was keen for local groups to help shape the written constitution campaign.

Jenny stressed how the motion was an answer to a big problem - the difficulties for survival of local groups. She briefed Council on some of the challenges she had found in running the group in Manchester.

The response to the motion was unanimously carried

The meeting was adjourned for lunch

6. What does more radical campaigning look like?

Sam Coates and Sarah Clarke presented their papers.

Sam outlined five stages of action, from less to more direct. The more conventional actions (petition, calling mp, attending surgeries...) would belong to the first stages. Mass protests or pickets would be part of the last stages - these actions would be used after the first stages have proven to be unsuccessful. He also outlined a case study of why a campaign may want to escalate its tactics and what that may look like.

Sarah explained the limitations of UD's current approach to communications and proposed two alternative approaches with a more adversarial tone. This was, she stated, to raise the organisation's profile, increase the potential to engage with supporters, attract new ones and create more media opportunities.

Both invited questions.

Danny agreed with the proposal but raised concerns regarding risks that the organisation could incur if some supporter took actions in stage 4 & 5 too far.

Alex stated that Lisa French had emailed comments about the proposals. She expressed support for both papers but stated that Council (or at least the Co-Chairs) should have to give approval if actions on stage 5 were being proposed.

Alex agreed that given the chances for reputational damage for actions in stage 4 or 5 it was appropriate that any plans should be scrutinised. No campaign action would be taken in isolation, there would be a rationale for each stage and an assessment of possible risks. For the early stages it was entirely appropriate that she and the staff team made these decisions but agreed that for levels 4 and 5 decisions there should be additional scrutiny. Ideally this would be Council or Management Board but as a minimum it would involve the Co-Chairs. She supported Sarah's paper and stressed that personality and voice mattered greatly

in social media, giving evidence of how this had led to increased profile and media coverage.

Stephen strongly welcomed the papers and outlined the identity problems that different approaches could raise to the organisation, between being more similar to a think-tank or to a grassroots organisation.

Jack commented on the general feeling from Council regarding the risks, and stated that there should be a limit.

Alex proposed voting on a general principle to be open to a more radical campaigning strategies but campaign plans and risk assessments will have to be done for stages 4 and 5. Council or at least chairs would have to be briefed on the campaign actions for those stages.

No one objects, unanimously accepted

7. Written Constitution campaign planning

Sam Coates briefed the Council on the Written Constitution campaign planning that the staff had been undertaking. He explained that staff were part way through a five stage process designed by mobilisation lab.

He explained the different stages of the campaign planning process and highlighted some key issues that had emerged so far.

Debbie Chay explained how a training session she ran as Education Officer for C88 was used as the basis to the TV documentary series 'How to start your own country', that won a BAFTA. She stressed that a productive way of looking at the issue of a written constitution would be to look at the very basic things that affect people in their daily lives.

Jack added that perhaps changing the language from a 'written constitution' to a 'new constitution' would make the idea more positive and accessible to supporters.

Alex commented that UD should move to a more explicit concept of elements and values that Unlock Democracy would want for a constitution. That while it was important that the constitution should be created by a citizen led deliberative process, UD should not shy away from saying what it would want to see in a constitution.

Andrew Blick agreed with Alex and added that there are certain principles that could be argued to be included in a written constitution that clearly fit in UD's objectives as organisation, such as devolution.

Jack and Alex both expressed that it should be about principles and not specifics, but enough to be defended if a constitutional convention was to be called.

8. Register of interests

Alexandra Runswick briefed Council on her draft of a new conflict of interest policy that included a draft declaration. She explained that to date there had been an informal declaration of interests that council members had abided to. However, it would be useful to reorganise towards a formal model that would be updated yearly. This is particularly important when company law decisions are being taken as a member with a conflict of interest would be deemed ineligible to take part in the decision making process. She explained the approach she had taken in the policy and asked Council if they felt that the draft addressed the issue accordingly.

Vicky expressed some concerns about the wording of the draft regarding the capacity of being part of the discussions if having a conflict of interest.

Debbie said that she felt that was right for a member with a conflict of interest to be in any discussion, even if it had the potential of benefit them, but they should not be able to be part of the decision.

Peter Hirst asked if being a member of a political party should be included. Alex explained that an elected official or a candidate would have a conflict of interest but not being a member of a political party then stated that would this would be added it to the draft.

Alex proposed changing the wording to 'A council member may be asked to leave the room and may not be able to be part of the vote'.

The proposal was carried unanimously.

Action: Alex to change the wording and recirculate draft.

9. AOB and close

Vicky reminded Council members that a long-term member of the Council, Stuart Weir, had left. He was a co-founder of Charter 88 and has remained active in the organisation for 30 years. She felt that something should be done to honour his years of dedication and work on the project. She said that, for example, a honorary presidency or life membership could be appropriate.

Danny agreed with the idea, and asked her to pass his best wishes.

Andrew Blick suggested that before deciding a particular action it would be a good idea to contact him and ask him what he feels that is appropriate.

The Council agreed to find a way of honouring him and that Vicky would discuss ideas with him.

Jack reminded Council members that the elections are coming up and that anyone wishing to stand in the elections must be a member by Wednesday 18th of April. He added that if any Council member was not going to stand for re-election, they should consider telling Alex.

Danny used the opportunity of being the last meeting of the Council to thank everyone for their work, council and staff members.

The Council thanked their chairs.

The Meeting was closed.

