

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

Minutes of 2018 Annual General Meeting

Unlock Democracy AGM 2018

Saturday 24 November 2018

NCVO, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9NL

Present:

Co-chairs: Jack Maizels, Danny Zinkus Sutton

Council: Andrew Blick, Stephen Carter, Debbie Chay, Rachel Collinson, John Ferguson, Peter Hirst, Vicky Seddon

Members: David Bracknell, Peter Briercliffe, Jenni Brooks, Lisette Ramsey Brooks, John Chadwick, Jennifer Chan, Rex Chatterjee, Martin Childs, Barbara Cleary, Trevor Dickety, Raymond George, Maurice Hamilton, Oliver Hill, Virginia Morck, Bruce Nixon, Mike Roberts, Caroline Strafford, John Strafford, Sandra Watts, Tim Williamson

Apologies: Ian Driver, Sepi Golzari-Munro, Malcolm MacIntyre-Read, Jessica Metheringham, Phil Starr

Staff in attendance: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Sam Coates, Sarah Clarke, Tim Rouse, Tessa van Rens

1. Approval of 2017 AGM minutes

Danny Zinkus Sutton introduced the minutes from the 2017 AGM.

Decision: The minutes were passed nem con.

2. Approval of Director's Report

Alexandra Runswick introduced the Director's report. She reminded the AGM that this report had been presented to meeting attendees in the morning by the staff team, prior to the AGM starting.

Decision: The Director's Report was approved nem con.

3. Council Report on 2017 Policy Motions

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

There was a discussion about the policy motion passed at the 2017 AGM. Vicky Seddon, who proposed the motion, told the meeting that while not as much progress had been made as would have been liked, this was understandable given the dominance of Brexit and the staff team's necessary focus on that and other urgent priorities.

Decision: The response from Council to the 2017 policy motion was approved nem con.

4. Finance items

4.1 Introduction and questions

Alexandra Runswick explained that only Unlock Democracy's accounts had been provided, rather than consolidated accounts for both Unlock Democracy. She explained that going forward the accounts for Unlock Democracy and Rodell were going to be reported individually, as there was not a legal requirement for them to be done jointly and Council had taken the view on the basis of discussions at previous AGMs that it would be more transparent to table separate accounts for the organisations. However, Rodell's accounts were available at the meeting should anyone want a copy or ask questions about them. She drew the meeting's attention to the paper L2. She explained that this paper contained corrections to the accounts in light of a new accounting rule relating to the allocation of support costs. However, this did not change the overall financial picture.

In summarising the financial position of Unlock Democracy, Alexandra told the meeting that the organisation was in a good and stable position, particularly having benefited from grant income in the last year. The headline is that Unlock Democracy has a surplus.

A discussion was had around whether the Unlock Democracy's AGM should be able to question Rodell's accounts. Alexandra Runswick responded that while the AGM can certainly ask questions about the Rodell accounts, she was unsure whether the meeting could vote on Rodell's accounts with legal effect.

4.2 Approval of accounts

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

The Chair asked the AGM to vote on the accounts, as amended by paper L2. A vote was held, which was proposed by Stephen Carter and seconded by John Chadwick.

Decision: The accounts were approved nem con.

4.3 Appointment of reporting accountants

Alexandra Runswick introduced the item, asking the AGM to consider that Unlock Democracy's current reporting accountants, Berley Chartered Accountants, be reappointed. The motion was proposed by Peter Hirst and seconded by Debbie Chay.

Decision: The motion was passed nem con.

5. Constitutional Amendments

5.1 Elections Rule Changes

Proposer: Rachel Collinson

Seconder: Peter Hirst

Following the 2018 Council Elections, the Returning Officer reported to Council on the process. This report recommended a full review of Unlock Democracy's internal election procedures, and identified several short-term changes which can be made to improve our internal democracy. The wider review will be conducted over the next year, with this constitutional amendment implementing the lesser changes.

This meeting notes:

- That our current election rules do not say how long the nomination period should be in our Council elections;
- That allowing more time for the return of ballots by post would encourage maximum participation in elections;
- That permitting members to vote electronically would minimise costs and further increase participation;

This meeting resolves:

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

- To amend the first sentence of Appendix B, 2.1 to read "All members shall be notified of the opening of nominations at least 28 days in advance."
- To amend the first sentence of Appendix B, 2.5 to read: "Voting papers, a copy of the candidates' election statements, a method by which the member can submit their vote without cost, and notification of the close of poll shall be sent to all members within 21 days of the close of nominations, which will be 14 days after the opening of nominations."
- To amend Appendix B, 2.6 to read "The date for close of poll shall be set no less than 21 days after the voting papers have been sent to all members."

Rachel Collinson spoke to her proposed amendment. She explained the reason for the amendment arises from an anomaly that there is no specified nomination period in the rules. Rachel highlighted that it is good practice to have a specified period of time, so people know how long they have to make nominations. Greater clarity around election rules and nominations periods is beneficial for widening participation in Unlock Democracy elections. This was seconded by Peter Hirst.

A procedural point was made from the floor, requesting that in the future it is made clear what is being deleted, and if a proposal is being made to replace wording then it is made clear which wording and replaced with what.

Decision: The amendment was passed nem con.

6. Policy Motions

Danny Zinkus Sutton introduced the policy motions item. Two motions had been brought forward prior to the AGM, and Danny asked members to indicate if they would propose or second these motions.

6.1 Our preferred way to change the voting system

There was no proposer for the motion, **Our preferred way to change the voting system**. As a result, this motion fell.

6.2 Campaigning for a constituent assembly

Proposer: David Bracknell

Seconder: Tim Williamson

This meeting notes:

- 1. The political constitution of the United Kingdom is scattered across many historic acts and conventions, and is difficult to know for the average British voter. This is a risk to democracy.*
- 2. Britain currently faces many political disputes that are fundamentally constitutional in nature, such as the power of parliament to decide on trade agreements and military interventions.*
- 3. Britain also inherits many unresolved constitutional quandaries, such as the status of Northern Ireland, the status of British Overseas Territories and their citizens, the composition of the Upper House of Parliament, the legal establishment of the Church of England, and many others.*
- 4. Every electoral issue is ultimately a constitutional issue.*

This meeting believes:

- 1. That Unlock Democracy should become a single-issue NGO, exclusively committed to leading a popular campaign to establish a national constituent assembly for the creation of a British codified constitution.*
- 2. That Unlock Democracy should abandon all other campaigns besides that for a constituent assembly, and beside those referring to the constitutional laws that might be passed by such an assembly, if only to strengthen the point that it is constitutional change that is necessary.*
- 3. That Unlock Democracy should publicly promote any proposal for a British codified constitution that meets good democratic standards and publicly oppose any proposal that lacks democratic standards, while taking account of the views of NGOs like Freedom House, or the Economist's Democracy Index, and institutions like the Council of Europe, and the OECD, etc.*

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

This meeting resolves:

- 1. To use conventional popular campaign tactics, such as adopting easily recognisable symbols, colours, and mottos, joining demonstrations, speaking at public events, and contributing to print and broadcast news debates, to raise the greatest possible awareness of, and controversy for, the cause.*
- 2. To invest further in drives to increase the membership of Unlock Democracy, and to make membership expansion the secondary aim of every campaign and initiative.*
- 3. To consider renaming the organization to suit this singleness of purpose, to something like “Constitution”, or “Charter”, or “Covenant”, and asks the Council to present options to the next AGM.*

The motion was introduced by proposer by David Bracknell.

He clarified that “constituent assembly” is used in the context of this interchangeably with “constitutional convention”. He outlined to the meeting the benefits of such an approach, such as opportunities for publicity and establishing Unlock Democracy as a ‘talking head’ by highlighting constitutional links to topical issues. Tim Williamson seconded the motion, arguing in favour of the principle of a focussed approach to campaigning.

A point of order was raised. A request was made that motions not use abbreviations or acronyms to improve content accessibility.

Amendment to Motion on “ Campaigning for a Constituent Assembly “

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Seconder: Stephen Carter

In Section on “This meeting believes”

In 1. delete “become a single-issue NGO exclusively committed to leading” and insert “lead, as a central focus for its work,” in its place

In 2. Delete the whole paragraph and insert in its place:

- 2. Such a constituent assembly would address inter alia*

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

- a) introducing fair voting systems for national and local elections
- b) an elected second chamber
- c) decentralisation of powers to localities and nations
- d) how to reduce undue influence in our democracy (“dark powers”)

In Section on “This meeting resolves”

Delete para 3

Vicky Seddon spoke to her proposed amendment to the motion. She highlighted how much work has been done in previous years around Unlock Democracy’s name and brand, and a name change would undo this work. She suggested the motion would too significantly constrain Unlock Democracy’s ability to react to issues of the day. She highlighted the motion as amending the exclusive focus on a constituent assembly, as in the past Unlock Democracy has been very good at being mobile and responding to events.

Stephen Carter seconded the amendment. He told the AGM that Council has had an ongoing discussion about the need for focus and to make sure that the organisation is not going in too many different directions. Obtaining a written constitution via a constitutional convention is central to that focus. There is a need to balance focus with not adding undue constraint on the staff team and their ability to be responsive to key events of the day.

There was a broad discussion about the motion. Questions were raised as to how, if the motion were passed, it would be reconciled with the work Unlock Democracy’s staff team has been doing over the past year developing the ‘New Politics Rules’ campaign. Danny Zinkus Sutton commented that if the motion were passed the tactical flexibility of the staff team and Council would be reduced. Jack Maizels clarified that policy motions are advisory and Council considers them in the round.

A vote was held on the amendment:

	For	Against	Abstentions
--	-----	---------	-------------

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

Present	20	1	2
Proxy	0	0	0
Total	20	1	2

Decision: the amendment was carried.

The motion as amended reads:

This meeting notes:

- 1. The political constitution of the United Kingdom is scattered across many historic acts and conventions, and is difficult to know for the average British voter. This is a risk to democracy*
- 2. Britain currently faces many political disputes that are fundamentally constitutional in nature, such as the power of parliament to decide on trade agreements and military interventions*
- 3. Britain also inherits many unresolved constitutional quandaries, such as the status of Northern Ireland, the status of British Overseas Territories and their citizens, the composition of the Upper House of Parliament, the legal establishment of the Church of England, and many others*
- 4. Every electoral issue is ultimately a constitutional issue.*

This meeting believes:

- 1. That Unlock Democracy should lead, as a central focus for its work, a popular campaign to establish a national constituent assembly for the creation of a British codified constitution.*
- 2. Such a constituent assembly would address inter alia*
 - a) introducing fair voting systems for national and local elections*
 - b) an elected second chamber*
 - c) decentralisation of powers to localities and nations*

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

d) how to reduce undue influence in our democracy (“dark powers”)

- 3. That Unlock Democracy should publicly promote any proposal for a British codified constitution that meets good democratic standards and publicly oppose any proposal that lacks democratic standards, while taking account of the views of NGOs like Freedom House, or the Economist’s Democracy Index, and institutions like the Council of Europe, and the OECD, etc.*

This meeting resolves:

- 1. To use conventional popular campaign tactics, such as adopting easily recognisable symbols, colours, and mottos, joining demonstrations, speaking at public events, and contributing to print and broadcast news debates, to raise the greatest possible awareness of, and controversy for, the cause.*
- 2. To invest further in drives to increase the membership of Unlock Democracy, and to make membership expansion the secondary aim of every campaign and initiative.*

A wide-ranging discussion was had on the floor about the amended motion. There was praise for Unlock Democracy’s work in the previous year, and a discussion about the extent to which, or whether, the amended motion would limit any work Unlock Democracy currently does. Rachel Collinson spoke against the amended motion. She highlighted the work Unlock Democracy did to secure a lobbying register in Scotland, which would have been sidelined.

A vote was held on the amended motion:

	For	Against	Abstentions
Present	15	2	7
Proxy	0	0	0
Total	15	2	7

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

Proxy votes were not counted because the motion was amended

Decision: The motion was carried.

AGM concluded at 14:30