

Unlock Democracy Council Meeting
5th Floor 9 King Street London EC2V 8EA
19 January 2019 11 am- 3 pm

Present: Andrew Blick, Stephen Carter (phone), Ian Driver, Peter Hirst, Malcolm MacIntyre-Read, Jack Maizels (items 1-5), Andrew Manning (phone; item 6 only), Jessica Metheringham, Phil Starr, Danny Zinkus Sutton.

Staff: Sarah Clarke, Sam Coates, Tim Rouse, Alex Runswick (items 1-5)

Apologies: Victor Anderson, Debbie Chay, Rachel Collinson, John Ferguson, Vicky Seddon

1) Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

Apologies were received from Victor Anderson, Debbie Chay, Rachel Collinson, John Ferguson, and Vicky Seddon.

The minutes of the last council meeting were approved with the following amendments:

Jack Maizels to be added as present.

Typos previously identified in an email by Vicky Seddon to be corrected.[TR1]

Ian Driver asked about the 'entryism working group' mentioned in Management Board minutes. Alex Runswick explained that this was a proposed group that has not yet been established.

Minutes from the 2018 AGM were circulated for information. These are to be corrected to show apologies from Malcolm Macintyre-Read.

2) Finance

Alex Runswick introduced the final budget of the 2018-19 financial year. This version of the budget includes added costs anticipated for the governance review agreed at the last Council meeting, and removes income from high value donor fundraising, which is now anticipated in the 2019-20 financial year.

Phil Starr questioned the allocation of staff time to high-value donor fundraising. Alex explained that the focus of the current process was on seeking support from 'warm' targets, with potential income significantly outweighing time spent.

Peter Hirst encouraged a focus on legacy fundraising. Alex Runswick explained the need for approaching this properly with adequate resources but it was highlighted as a key area for future fundraising.

The budget was approved.

3) Rodell Update

Phil Starr introduced the Rodell update. He reported that as one tenant has exercised their break clause, one floor of Cynthia Street is currently empty but agents are confident about finding a tenant. However the longer it remains empty the worse the impact on cashflow. He added that as the Gray's Inn Road property now also empty, Rodell's cashflow is lowered. It is expected that a planning application for the property will be submitted in February, and that this should proceed relatively smoothly due to using the pre-approval process.

Phil Starr then briefed Council that Brexit and the possibility of an election threaten the London property market, which significantly affects our rental income and the profitability of redeveloping Gray's Inn Road. Rodell's health therefore depends on whether and how quickly a tenant comes forward for Cynthia Street.

Alex Runswick gave an update on UD's tenancy under the Hansard Society at King Street. She reported that the rent review with the Hansard society's landlords was ongoing, noting that this created a significant level of uncertainty about the level of back rent that would be due and that resources must be set aside pending the conclusion of the rent review.

4) Director's Report

Alex Runswick spoke on the tabled Director's Report. She highlighted that the policy work done around the meaningful vote before Christmas had been very worthwhile, allowing us to send a message of focusing on the bigger picture and not on the individual votes, which do not affect the fundamental balance of power between the government and the people. She explained that staff have begun a campaign planning process for the New Politics Rules campaign over the next five years, which takes into consideration the organisational resources and staff workload which will be involved.

Danny Zinkus Sutton asked whether MPs are approaching Unlock Democracy for insight and information more, or less. Sarah Clarke replied that it is

currently less, as our approach over the last two years has been to approach MPs with information about legislation such as the EU Withdrawal Act. As part of our five year campaign plan we will be addressing this by finding MPs to act as ambassadors for our cause.

Andrew Blick said that the Labour treasury team are worried about statutory instruments. Alex Runswick agreed to contact them and signposted work done by the Hansard Society and the Brexit Civil Society Alliance.

Jack Maizels asked why the response rate for the Q4 fundraising mailing was lower than in Q3, with the same number of donations. Tim Rouse explained that this was due to a methodological change.

Malcolm Macintyre-Read expressed approval of the 'three broad points' referred to in the report.

Danny Zinkus Sutton noted the ongoing building work at 9 King Street and asked how it was affecting staff. Alex Runswick replied that it is often annoying and unpredictable but they are willing to accommodate specific requests such as silence for recording a podcast at a specific time.

Peter Hirst asked whether anyone but the government could call a new referendum. Alex Runswick explained that there is no mechanism to call a referendum without government support.

Sarah Clarke spoke about a meeting with John Trickett's office to discuss Labour's plans for democratic and constitutional reform, which are ambitious. Our feedback, and the response from the sector, was that systemic change needs a written constitution and this was received well.

Alex Runswick outlined some of the possible Brexit scenarios and how they would affect UD's work.

Stephen Carter asked about ongoing parliamentary initiatives on Brexit and how UD could influence them. Alex Runswick responded that there are many different proposals, but they require cross-party support and aren't getting very far. There has been very little work done to build consensus within Parliament.

Andrew Blick commented that most scenarios require an extension to Article 50 which is contingent on EU acceptance. People have been sold a narrative that they can vote for something and politicians must deliver it – but EU has other mandates and limits. We can find out what 'the people' want but it may not be obtainable. Alex Runswick noted that EU Parliament elections are coming, which presents both a legal and practical challenge in terms of

electing MEPs, but also the potential to change the EU Parliament's negotiating personnel and position.

Jess Metheringham raised the question of what happens in the long term, reflecting that most long-term thinking has been economic, but there's a more interesting question about the effect on our politics, trust in democracy, and culture. Lots of people currently believe in unicorns. What concrete influences will arise from people's fuzzy feelings about Brexit, in various scenarios?

Phil Starr commented that as a campaigning organisation, our moments of strength are when the people in power screw up. Pointing out that the politicians have lost control is our moment to shine – for our campaigns, our messaging, our fundraising. Has that moment come? Will it get worse / more intense? Is our organisation in the best place for this – financially, staff, etc.? Can we take advantage? No deal could happen by accident, and some people want to see it. Hence an opportunity for us as campaigning organisation.

Jess Metheringham asked what plans UD has made for speaking out on Brexit. Alex Runswick clarified that the backbone is the policy set out before Christmas - that the details are less important than the overall need for systemic change.

Danny Zinkus Sutton reminded Council that this will be a fast-moving topic over the next few weeks. Staff will be liaising with chairs and if council want input then they should pay attention to emails as input may be required quickly.

5) Deliberative democracy initiatives

Alex Runswick introduced this item. She reported that deliberative democracy as a concept has been gaining traction in certain circles in recent months. While Unlock Democracy supports deliberative democracy, we are seeking to achieve a written constitution via a deliberative process, and to this end staff have been focusing on the arguments for codification, and campaigning on the end goal, rather than how we do it.

Alex presented a quick rundown of the sector, discussing various groupings and people who are or who could be influential, including:

- Deliberative Democracy Alliance
- Citizen's Assembly – left, mostly Labour
- The RSA - Matthew Taylor of the RSA did a speech suggesting that as a matter of course there should be three deliberative democracy exercises a year. They're now turning that into a campaign. They have influence within Westminster.

- Graham Allen – a late convert to deliberative democracy but hugely enthusiastic, who has taken it from slightly obscure to something that ‘will happen’. His initiative, with King’s College London, is for a ‘citizens convention on UK democracy’. Funded by JRCT for a year of scoping.

Across all initiatives, there’s a tension about what you use a deliberative process for. UD primarily wants it used to create a new constitution but there are those who don’t want it used for constitutional processes, or don’t want to start by using it for constitutional processes. For example, Matthew Taylor thinks that one of the reasons deliberative democracy has not taken off is the strong association with constitutional questions.

Jess Metheringham commented on the different terminology used to describe deliberative democracy initiatives and how confusing this can be. She asked if there was any work being done to improve this? Alex Runswick agreed that the terminology varies wildly, reflecting different approaches, the numbers of people involved and that essentially anyone can call it whatever they like. She agreed that this was a problem but did not see there being an easy solution.

Andrew Blick reported on the Citizens Convention on UK Democracy 2020-2021 which he is involved with. The Convention would include discussing how to secure constitutional change, rather than writing a constitution per se. UD could therefore lobby for a written constitution to be an outcome rather than a precondition. He added that any of these initiatives take time and money to set up. The Convention has funding for its first year.

It is essential that deliberative processes are consensual and genuinely cross party. While the Labour Party calling for a convention is obviously to be welcomed there are dangers if it becomes perceived as a Labour initiative.

He emphasised the importance of learning lessons from previous initiatives e.g. Iceland, Ireland, specifically the need to secure political buy-in so politicians can’t ignore the outcome of the process. It is also important to be aware that process may not end up focusing on areas expected, or have the expected consequences. Deliberative processes mean giving away power and this applies as much to campaigners as to politicians.

Danny Zinkus Sutton summed up the discussion by saying that UD is not responsible for bringing deliberative processes to prominence – our job is to make the case for a written constitution. Alex Runswick agreed, adding that

deliberative democracy successes help our campaign, too, serving as examples.

6) Written constitution campaign launch and next steps

Sam Coates introduced this item with a recap of the campaign and the steps so far.

He outlined the next steps in the campaign:

- In depth conversations with supporters to gain intelligence and convince active supporters to meet with MPs.
- Sam and Sarah working on a strategy for liaising with key targets in Parliament, finding the future parliamentary spokespeople for the campaign.

Action: Sarah agreed to share the list of MPs being approached.

Sam commented that this is a critical moment, with public awareness that leadership is failing and the political system is falling apart. Can we rise to it? What are the barriers to us doing things about it? What do we need to put in place to grow the organisation and our campaigning reach?

There was a very wide ranging discussion about the kind of campaign activities and stunts that might be useful as well as lessons that can be learnt from Charter 88 and other more recent campaigns. Comments included:

Danny Zinkus Sutton: We're campaigning on a secondary solution to people's primary problems. Written constitution seen as a distraction from Brexit and other issues (now and after Brexit). We're a long way behind in making the case that a written constitution will solve people's problems, compared to parallels within Scotland. Post-Brexit there will be a crowded legislative agenda, and a desire for achievements. If you're a young person coming of age into a political system that's been consumed by Brexit for years, how do we reach out to them?

Jess Metheringham: A Constitution is seen as elitist idea, for academics not ordinary people. The last round of constitutional reform was unfinished, providing argument against continuing it. Our campaign is pointing out the problem but by definition can't offer the solution, because of need for democratic input.

Phil Starr: To build up the organisation and our campaign momentum, we need a controlled anger. Look at Leave's 'Take Back Control'. We can say

that Parliament has lost control through Brexit, highlight that the system is not set up for that. We need to create the shared vision and common cause, and this could be a way of doing it. We need that kind of campaign and messaging to hang everything off.

Stephen Carter: What are the issues that people feel angry about and how can we harness that? Channel resentment against the political class into reforming the whole thing.

Andrew Blick: Whatever we are doing, we need to be clear about why we're doing it. Getting members is all well and good, but we ultimately need to influence parliamentarians – pressure people, and support those who are sympathetic.

Tim Rouse emphasised that UD needs more resources. We also need ambassadors to promote our work if our campaigns are going to step up a level. Stunts and social media campaigns don't go very far without adequate resources and people on the ground to support it.

Sam Coates agreed to consider the ideas discussed and circulate a list of possible stunts and actions and email Council for further discussion.

7) Politics in 2019

This item was held over due to time constraints.

8) Any other business

Phil Starr and Jess Metheringham raised the fact that they were not receiving all council-related emails. Jess will try using a different email address.

Danny Zinkus Sutton informed the Council that Sepi Golzari-Munro has submitted her resignation from Council and as a Director of Unlock Democracy. Council expressed its regret at the news and moved a motions of thanks to Sepi for her service.

Malcolm Macintyre-Read requested that staff provide name cards at Council meetings.
The meeting closed.