

Minutes of 2019 Annual General Meeting

Unlock Democracy AGM 2019

Saturday 23 November 2019

NCVO, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9NL

Present:

Co-chair: Jack Maizels

Members: Stephen Carter, John Franglen, Vicky Seddon, Jessica Metheringham, Phil Starr, Rachel Collinson, Debbie Chay, Mike Trace, Bruce Nixon, Chris Toms, David Briggs, Jack Hamilton, Janet Bowstead, Jennifer Chan, John Chadwick, John Godwin, John Grangetown, John Newham, Mike Roberts, Stephen Gosling, Trevor Dickey.

Apologies: Ian Driver, Andrew Blick, Danny Zinkus Sutton

Staff: Alexandra Runswick (Director), Tim Rouse, Sam Coates, Matthew Hull, Sarah Clarke, Trudie Kee

1. Approval of the 2018 AGM Minutes

Jack Maizels introduced the minutes from the 2018 AGM.

Decision: The minutes were passed nem con.

2. Approval of the Director's Report

The director and staff team had reported earlier in the day on the work of Unlock Democracy in the last year. Jack Maizels also drew members' attention to the written report available.

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

3. Council Report on 2018 Policy Motions

Jack Maizels explained the process and content of 2018 policy motions. No questions were raised from members.

Decision: The response from Council to the 2018 policy motion was approved nem con.

4. Finance Items

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4.1. Introduction & Questions

Alexandra Runswick apologised for the lack of statutory accounts and explained that staff sickness had delayed the process. She reassured members that the process was almost done and that basic figures were available. She asked the AGM to delegate the approval of accounts to Council who would meet in December.

Action: Alexandra Runswick committed to emailing the accounts to members when they have been completed.

She took the AGM through the end of year management accounts explaining with the caveat that these figures would change in the audit process. She reported that there has been a significant build up of reserves in order to invest.

A number of questions were fielded about the audit and a discussion was had on grants. Alexandra Runswick assured the AGM that the auditors are satisfied and gave details of funding bodies currently funding projects at Unlock Democracy.

Vicky Seddon asked if the Rodell accounts had been audited. Alexandra Runswick replied that they had gone through audit, but she had not seen them, as did Phil Starr.

There was a clarification on the position of Rodell and of the next steps.

4.2. Approval of accounts

The Chair asked the AGM to vote on delegating the approval of accounts to Council.

Decision: The vote to delegate the approval of accounts was 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.

Decision: The item was approved nem con.

5. Election Items

5.1. Constituencies for Council elections

Section 4.2.1 & 4.2.2 of the Constitution require that the constituency and geographical areas for the 2020 Council election must be set at the preceding AGM.

The following was proposed:

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There shall be one constituency for the 2020 Council election, with 16 members to be elected from that constituency. All who have been members for 30 working days before the election shall be eligible to vote.

There shall be four geographical areas: East; West; North; London and South-East.

An explanation was provided that the geographical areas operated as a quota system to retain an element of regional spread in Council elections.

Decision: The motion was approved nem con.

6. Constitutional Amendments

6.1. Emergency Motion: Co-option to Council

Proposer: Stephen Carter

Seconder: Rachel Collinson

This meeting resolves:

1. To add at the end of section 4.1.7 of the Constitution the sentences “*Council may also co-opt other members of the Organisation to serve in a non-voting capacity if it so wishes. Approval of such members requires a two-thirds majority and does not automatically carry over from one Council term to the next.*”

The clause would then read in its entirety:

4.1.7. *The Council may appoint an Honorary President and one or more Honorary Vice Presidents. Honorary Officers must agree with the Purpose and objectives of the Organisation, although they are not required to be members. Their term of office will run from when they have been appointed to the election of a new Council. Council may also co-opt other members of the Organisation to serve in a non-voting capacity if it so wishes. Approval of such members requires a two-thirds majority and does not automatically carry over from one Council term to the next.*

Stephen Carter spoke to his proposed amendment and explained that although Council has been doing some good work, it is always useful to be able to bring in people to increase the range of skills and perspectives present. He explained that this already happens under the Management Board as non voting members.

A debate was had on the proposal with arguments made for the amendment in terms of skill-sharing and flexibility and against the amendment with a suggestion that members have a say in the co-opting.

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Stephen Carter replied that it's about learning from organisations and individuals with more experience in skills needed. He proposed that members could suggest people that they thought would have expertise to lend and assured the AGM that the purpose of the motion was to make Council more effective.

A vote was held for the amendment:

	For	Against	Abstentions
Present*	17	1	1
Proxy	0	0	0
Total	17	1	1

**Although there are not the required 20 votes for quoracy the AGM was quorate at the beginning of the meeting as required by the constitution*

Decision: the amendment was carried.

7. Policy Motions

Jack Maizels introduced the policy motions item.

There was no proposer for the motion, **Addressing the issues with Citizen's Assemblies**. As a result, this motion fell.

7.1. Local Government Policy

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Second: Phil Starr

- 1. Under the current administration, the centralisation of powers, away from local communities and into the hands of national government, has continued. The tactics adopted to deliver this have been both structural and fiscal.*
- 2. Local government which has borne the brunt of austerity cuts and is legally obliged to implement them, has, as a consequence, been deemed (falsely) to be responsible for the resulting loss of quality in public services.*
- 3. This issue has not been given the attention it needs, by either politicians, political parties, or the media, resulting in a lack of public awareness of the significance of the issue.*
- 4. Yet the consequences for people's lives are immense.*
- 5. As part of an agreed, new constitutional settlement, we need:*
 - a. The status of local governance arrangements to be constitutionally recognised with a two thirds threshold in Parliament needed to alter*

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- them, and a requirement to consult and take account of local community views before embarking on any such proposals*
- b. equitable fiscal distribution structures that:
 - i. Guarantee fiscal independence for local authorities.*
 - ii. Distribute monies with reference to “need”**
 - c. An end to local “deals” whereby local governance representatives agree to implement government policies as the price they have to pay to gain (supposed) “powers”.*
 - d. Local communities to have powers to introduce both fair voting systems for local elections, and constitutional frameworks that are locally judged to best suit their needs*

Unlock Democracy resolves to seek to give this issue greater prominence in the debate around constitutional changes, and to argue for the importance of these four points.

The motion was introduced by the proposer Vicky Seddon. She stated that she didn't want this to be seen to override Unlock Democracy's main priorities but wanted to bring attention to local government and how austerity has affected constituencies.

Phil Starr seconded this motion and commented on the importance of campaigning on local democracy. He suggested that recruitment at a local level would be beneficial for Unlock Democracy.

There was discussion around clarifications on Part 5 of the policy motion. Jessica Metherringham spoke against the wording of the motion but in favour of the spirit of the motion. She was concerned that the specific wording used could have unintended consequences.

Rachel Collinson proposed to re-word Part 5 to reflect better that we believe in the principle of subsidiarity and that local councils need accountability, local autonomy.

Jack Maizels reminded members that substantial rewrites cannot be done verbally but suggested that, if passed, the motion can be interpreted by Council in line with the debate at the AGM.

Vicky Seddon responded to clarify the wording of the motion, that this is about a new constitutional settlement and not existing settlement.

A vote was held for the policy motion:

	For	Against	Abstentions
Present	14	0	4

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Proxy	0	0	0
Total	14	0	4

Decision: The motion was carried

Jack Maizels thanked everyone for attending and for their support of Unlock Democracy. There was a formal vote of thanks to Alexandra Runswick for her long service at Unlock Democracy.

AGM concluded at 14:30