

Online Council meeting 2.35pm, Saturday January 22, 2022 - minutes

Jess Metheringham chaired the meeting.

1. Apologies/Attendance

Apologies: Catherine Bearder (for late arrival), Stephen Carter, Ian Driver, Tom Pratt, Sean Shore, Mike Young

Present: Catherine Bearder (arrived later), Marcus Cain (apologies for having to leave slightly before the end), Helen Close, Rachel Collinson, John Franglen, Stephen Gosling, Stuart Hill, Peter Hirst, Jess Metheringham, Vicky Seddon, Jacob Webb, Luke Williams

UD Staff in Attendance: Tom Brake, Shaun Roberts and Grace Barnett

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the Council meeting on the 4th September 2021 were approved nem con as a true record.

The minutes of the MB meetings held on 6/10/2021 and 1/12/2021 were noted.

3. Matters arising

None noted

4. Dates of next meetings

The next Council meeting is on the 26th March. It will be in person (ideally with online access and dedicated technology) and held outside London. **Action. JM to decide where.** Birmingham, Manchester and Doncaster were suggested. Helen Close has a contact for a facility in Manchester.

Informal Council meetings will also be held, beginning March and half way through May. It was suggested that these could also be purely social in nature to help build a bond between members. **Action. JM to confirm dates.**

5. Finance

Management accounts covering Q1 to Q3 (April 21 to December 21)

TB set out UD's financial position. The management accounts which cover the first nine months of 21/22 confirm that UD, which at the beginning of the financial year was expected at this stage to be facing a deficit of £22k, has a £2k surplus. This is largely down to the successful online fundraising campaign being run by the team.

TB explained that the staff costs were slightly higher than budgeted for as Alice Jeffrey was recruited some way into the financial year and wasn't budgeted for at the beginning of the financial year. She is now employed on a fixed term contract with the expectation that she will become a permanent member of staff (subject to the prevailing financial situation) at the end of her contract.

TB explained that the only significant difference on the Balance Sheet was that the loan from UD to Rodell (the Rodell Property Loan of £66k) no longer appears as an Asset. This means the Balance Sheet now gives a more accurate picture of UD's financial position as UD does not expect this loan to be paid back in at least the next couple of years (if at all).

3 year budget forecast

TB compared the current budget V10 with the budget from the beginning of the financial year V7.

Major differences between the two relate to grants and online fundraising. In V7, only £7.5k of grants were secured. By V10, £76k of grants were secured. In V7 only £58k was expected to be raised from online and other fundraising. In V10 over £100k should now be raised by the end of the financial year.

UD is currently forecasting in V10 a surplus of just under £20k by year end. V7 of the budget predicted a deficit of £27k.

6. Updates from Chair and Staff

Chair's report

JM drew attention to her Chair's report highlighting the successful changes to UD's constitution at the AGM, increased fundraising, partnership activities and improved press coverage.

☰ Chair's Report for 22 January 2022

Head of Campaigns and Digital

In his report on campaigning SR outlined the work being undertaken on the Elections Bill campaign where Unlock Democracy is a lead organisation. The bill will soon be arriving in the House of Lords and the coalition's focus is on winning over crossbench and Conservative peers to inflict defeats on the Government. The coalition is also holding a rally in Parliament Square on 5th February and TB is speaking at that.

UD continues to be a support organisation in the coalition of organisations campaigning against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - where we have been successful in defeating the Government in the Lords. Some of those defeats cannot be reversed by the Government, meaning some of the most draconian measures in the bill have been removed, but the bill remains a threat to democracy. The focus now is on working to prevent the House of Commons from reversing the Lords' defeats.

SR highlighted the two campaigns that we are working on

- Powering Up project - which aims to build a consensus amongst the democracy sector around a democratic reform package and persuade political parties to adopt it in their next manifesto. SR reported that we have completed the first wave of research which focused on people's concerns about democracy.
- The new Constitution builder project - the idea here is to build an online tool which increases awareness of what a written constitution can deliver for our democracy. The tool will enable users to build their own constitution and will be part of a website that has a lot more information about written constitutions.

SR also reported that we expect supporter numbers to surpass 30,000 in the coming week - up from 18,658 in March 2021, a 60% increase in just under a year.

JW suggested it would be beneficial if the constitution builder website could link effectively with the school curriculum. **Action. SR**

Membership and Database Officer

In her report on the membership drive GB outlined the results of the Autumn 2021 membership drive. A total of 370 new members were recruited through email appeals over the course of three months. The appeal included a "special offer" £1 joining rate, but final results show the average fee paid by new members is £2.40/month.

A more detailed report of the final results is also available to read.

The response to this membership drive suggests that this approach to member recruitment is working well, so we will continue to push for membership growth in this way in the coming months.

Questions were raised about the cost of membership and the diversity of UD members.

Action. GB to do further work on establishing the cost of acquiring and maintaining members.

Action. TB to circulate the work that has been done to date on addressing the lack of diversity in UD's membership.

Director's report

TB drew attention to his Director's report.

He mentioned a couple of items not previously mentioned, including the next event with Gopal Subramaniam (ex-Indian Supreme Court) and George Peretz QC which is on the 31st January at 6pm. There is also a fringe meeting on achieving PR at the online Lib Dem spring conference. This is a cross party event with Laura Parker (Labour PR campaigner), Alistair Carmichael MP and Willie Rennie MSP. This is at 1pm on the 13th March.

A submission is planned to the Committee on Standards re the MPs Code of Conduct.

Action TB

TB also drew attention to the dashboard which shows good progress (although December is always a quieter month for fundraising purposes because of the Christmas break).

A copy of his report was provided to Council members and also of December's dashboard.

7. Elections in June

Election Timetable

During the discussion about the election timetable the following were raised; the need to chase election candidates for their artwork, key dates should be highlighted to members and candidates frequently and as early as possible, confirmation was sought (and given) that election candidates self-nominate, the possibility of bringing forward the opening date for nominations and the need for a hustings.

Action. GB to confirm whether it is possible to bring forward the opening of nominations (so they don't coincide with the last week of the Council election campaigns) and to action the other relevant points.

SH asked that existing Council members who are not standing again should make their position known at the next Council meeting. **Action. Council members.**

Action. GB to prepare an exit questionnaire for Council members who are not standing again.

Induction pack

The following induction pack (which contains a role description) is a work in progress

Action. TB to ensure Chair, Vice-Chair (Rodell and Policy) job descriptions are added.

Eligibility criteria

It was confirmed that UD would NOT carry out independent checks on candidates' eligibility. They will self-certify.

TB explained that it was not the intention to use the eligibility criteria in a blanket way to stop candidates who might have fallen foul of anti-protest legislation or other questionable legislation from standing for Council.

There was an extended discussion about whether the Returning Officer should be able to decide whether to apply a waiver to a candidate who has failed one or more of the eligibility criteria. Different views were expressed.

Action. It was agreed that JM, SG and TB should discuss how the waiver is dealt with and bring forward to the next Council meeting a form of words that explains how the waiver will operate. A discussion may also take place at the next Management Board meeting.

Subject to confirmation of the way the waiver is handled, the Eligibility Criteria were approved.

TB pointed out that the Eligibility Criteria (the section which shadows the Charity Trustee requirements) will also apply to UD's Director and Director of Finance.

HC asked about the following (which it is proposed would debar someone from standing as a Council member): have an IVA, debt relief order and/or a bankruptcy order or have made an arrangement with creditors. TB confirmed that he had been advised by Simon Howard that these debar someone from being a company director and therefore from being a Council member. However, if people have successfully exited from bankruptcy, an IVA, debt relief order or an arrangement with creditors they can stand for Council.

Eligibility Criteria for Council Election Candidates - Proposal

Returning officer

Action: It was agreed nem con that TB should confirm whether Phil Starr is willing to be the Returning Officer for the election (providing Phil is not standing himself)

8. Discussion re 2 policy motions

SR set out his plans for taking forward these motions.

Building on 2021 AGM motions

9. Review of the risk assessment paper

TB spoke briefly about the paper.

Action. Any Council member with a query/suggestions etc. about the paper should email TB.

Action. JM to ensure the paper is on the next Management Board agenda.

To note. Council agreed that UD should have a risk management approach as outlined in the paper (although the detail is yet to be discussed)

PH asked whether UD has a whistleblowing policy. TB confirmed that the risk assessment proposal has, as one element of addressing financial risk, the need to draw up a whistleblowing policy, so this will be addressed as part of the management of risk.

Action: TB to ensure a whistle-blowing policy is implemented.

Risk management strategy - proposal

10. AOB

Action. SG to send details of an artworker who works on democracy artwork to JM.

Action. TB to ensure the spreadsheet being forwarded to him again by SG feeds into the constitution builder project.

The Council meeting finished at 5.05 pm