



MINUTES OF THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 10.00AM ON TUESDAY 16 MARCH 2010
AT ELLIOT HALL, HARROW ARTS CENTRE, HARROW

Present: Georgina Butcher (Chairman), Gabi Otvos (Premises Officer), Joyce Davis and Cynthia Gershon (Joint Hon. Treasurers), Jeannette Cobb and Barbara Kloss (Joint Care Officers), Gwen Wright (Newsletter Editor and Publicity Officer) Gerald Rickayzen (Speakers Secretary), Sheilah Lowe (Enquiries Officer) Anne Gerrard (Honorary Secretary) Sonia Sheldon (Group Leader Administrator) and approximately 250 members of Harrow U3A.

Apologies were received from the following members: Jackie Jacobs, Peter Sinclair, Paul Baron, Ray and Maureen Lubert, Pat and Roy Rae, Maria Landau, Jean Jones, Jack Prince, Peter Laule and Pamela Thomas.

The Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual General Meeting held on 31 April 2009 were accepted unanimously. There were no matters arising.

Chairman's Report: Georgina Butcher presented her Annual Report as follows:

Welcome to the 18th AGM. Building work is now well under way and it is hoped it will be completed by April.

Peter Sinclair who has been one of the backbones of Harrow U3A has now decided the time has come to give up the management of the website and it will now be in the hands of Mike Allen. We also wish Peter a speedy recovery.

Due to the popularity of Current Affairs we are opening a fourth group on May 11th for new members and others who would like to attend. Each group is independent and once you have registered you have made a commitment to that group. As with all groups if you intend to be absent for any length of time, i.e. going into hospital or on holiday etc., please let your group leader know. If you are absent for any length of time without letting your leader know, then your place will be given to someone on the waiting list. If you wish to return again contact your leader to ask if there is a place, do not just turn up and assume you can get in.

Group leaders must keep a contact list of their members so they can be contacted in an emergency. In bad weather check with your leader whether the class is going to take place. The email register is not an individual message service; it is for items of interest to all members.

As you know Pat and Roy Rae have now given up Tours and Visits and we now have a new team, helping George and Mary Vulkan.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank P&R for all the hard work they have put in over many years to make the group so successful and enjoyable.

Pauline Spence is also giving up the Poetry Group at the end of the summer after nineteen years. Again our grateful thanks.

Another big thank you to one of our founder members Daphne Lang who is handing over the reins of her group.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a special thank you to all our Group Leaders many who have put in years of service, which is why we have been so successful.

Now is the time for some of you newer members to come forward and offer your help. We are totally dependant on Volunteers and leading a group or serving on the Committee is a very rewarding experience.

I would like to say a special Thank You to the retiring members of the Committee, Joyce Davis, Cynthia Gershon and especially to Tony Richardson, who due to ill health cannot be here today, for the tremendous amount of work he has put in over the past three years. We all wish him a speedy recovery.

Although we have no plans to increase the main membership this year, in view of the rise in the capitation fee to TAT we will be increasing the concessionary fee from £5 to £6 in September.

PCDL Personal and Community Development Learning has now had a name change. It is now Harrow Informal Adult Learning Partnership (IAL) among its terms of reference is to encourage and support learning activities organised by learners for themselves including learning clubs.

To embrace new ways of learning including the use of information technology and broadcasting.

This arises from the Learning Revolution White paper and Transformation Fund, One of the developments has been self-organised learning groups and clubs, The U3A model has been very influential in government thinking on this way of delivering informal adult learning,

U3A is now becoming a role model for the future of IAL in fact U3A has pioneered the way for self help life long learning and we should be very proud of ourselves. We have proved that we can still teach government something.

From August 2011 the current plans are that a Lead Accountable Body (LAB) will develop a local plan for ally types of informal adult learning and manage all the funds for informal adult learning going into the area.

I made it very clear we do not want any funding and are quite capable of looking after ourselves. Government bodies would love to get their hands on U3a but we are not for sale to anyone.

LAB will however look into how the availability of free or low cost learning spaces, particularly for self-organised groups can be increased.

I think U3A can be very proud of itself, we have proved life does not stop when you stop working and we are prepared to continue to learn and embrace new technology, and we can still teach the younger generation a thing or two and they are starting to listen.

The Examined Accounts and Accountant's Report having been previously circulated, Joyce Davis (Hon. Treasurer) gave the following report.

First I would like to thank co-treasurer Cynthia Gershon, who although not being in the best of health recently, has nevertheless been a tower of strength.

You have before you this year's accounts which I am sure are self explanatory. I consider that employing an accountant is money well spent. Equipment and software have been purchased to facilitate Group Leaders' and committee members' work which has resulted in a slight loss over the year but we are in a good financial position and I see no reason why subscriptions should be increased in the foreseeable future, as we are not a profit making organisation. Up to date the membership is now about 1,400. As Cynthia and I step down after our three year term of office, I offer my assistance to Cecil Cherns who is taking over as Honorary Treasurer. Up to the date of 28th February 2010 our current account stood at £28,780, and as at 30th September 2009 the treasury account stood at £45,587.

There was a question from Roy Filer about the increase in the costs of stationery. Sheilah Lowe explained that there has been a large rise in the cost of stationery and postage and she and the membership secretaries deal with a great number of enquiries. Edith Littler commented that the improved newsletter would account for some of the costs. Ivan Benjamin asked why the insurance costs have risen, and queried why in his view that there was no report from the accountant. Joyce Davis replied that the insurance costs were partly because we had purchased more equipment and that the accountant was fully versed in the needs for accounts for a charity. It was pointed out that the short version had been distributed but the full version was available for any member to see.

There was a question about the meaning of "restricted funds" this was explained as funds that were designated for specific purposes, which does not apply to our funds.

A member made a suggestion that the newsletter could be downloaded from the internet to save costs. Georgina Butcher replied that we would like to do this but it is not a popular choice among the members. Jo Harris expressed thanks for the hard work that was represented by the figures shown in the accounts. Glenys Tuersley enquired if the affiliation fees to GLF had been paid as they were not listed. Joyce Davis confirmed that they had, details had to be condensed for convenience.

Barbara Bearman suggested that newsletters could be distributed personally, and that stationery could be purchased wholesale. Georgina Butcher responded that it was important for Tours and Visits that every member receives their copy at the same time. Joyce Davis explained that the practicalities of bulk buying were too difficult, storage is a problem.

A member raised the issue of having adverts in the newsletter to raise cash. Gwen Wright responded that it is our policy not to use adverts as it reduces space for our own content and also makes it more difficult to access. She emphasised that the printer we use gives us a very good rate and the cost of envelopes is most reasonable.

Roger Brown enquired what percentage of the membership fill out the gift aid form. Joyce Davis replied that Pat Rae deals with it and that it is not practical or sensitive to pursue members who do not fill it in.

Aime Levy asked what the coach hire referred to and it was explained that this is for concert outing and is paid for by the Tours and Visits section.

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Jean Kenton and seconded by Toni Waxman and accepted unanimously.

Election of new committee members: There were no contested seats. The following members were elected to fill the vacant posts on the committee:

Vice Chairman – Ronald Channing

Study Group Coordinator – Susan Woolf

Treasurer – Cecil Cherns

The following members were re-elected for the coming year:

Chairman – Georgina Butcher; Anne Gerrard – Hon. Secretary; Gwen Wright – Publicity Officer; Joint Membership Secretaries - Pat and Roy Rae ; Premises Officer – Gabi Otvos.

Gerald Rickayzen was reappointed as Speakers Secretary. Sheilah Lowe was reappointed as Enquiries Officer and Jeannette Cobb and Barbara Kloss were reappointed as Joint Care Officers, Sonia Sheldon was appointed as Group Leaders Administrator.

The acceptance of these elections was proposed by Leslie Walther, seconded by Jack Kushner and passed unanimously.

Appointing an External Accounts Examiner for the Financial Year

It was proposed that Grant Harrod be reappointed for the coming year.

This was proposed by Joyce Davis, seconded by Cynthia Gershon and passed unanimously.

Address by Dot Gibson of the Greater London Region of National Pensioners Convention.

Dot explained that NCP is biggest campaigning organisation for pensioners. There are 17 regions and a biannual conference is held. She is the general secretary having been the secretary for London. There are many affiliated societies from a wide range of sectors. She made the point that as we face the run up to the general election people need to decide how they will vote. The NCP has a manifesto and has a democratic parliament of 2,000 pensioners who advise on issues during a three day event. They do approach all candidates to ask for responses on the issues raised. She pointed out that there are many other groups running campaigns, particularly the BMA against the privatisation of the health service and the Royal College of Nursing also have a campaign. The large number of local campaigns exist to address the feeling that candidates do not represent the local people.

2008 was the centenary year of the state pension. Events were held to commemorate it and to attempt to raise its value. Historically it took ten years to get the state pension set up and now the UK's pension is the lowest in Europe.

The unions developed a split off with private, trade and occupational pensions. At the moment the state pension is 60% of pensioners' income. The government has been working to reduce this to 40%. NPC is holding a march and rally in 2010 in defence of the public sector, she stated that government figures are 2.5 million pensioners and 2.9 million children are in poverty, society is very unequal. Dot asked for support for this event.

Bill Garvey admired the intentions of NPC but pointed out that pensioners are only 28% of the population so cannot have much influence. He felt that the results of lobbies are ignored when parties get into power. He felt that we need representation in parliament; if proportional representation was instigated we would get representation.

Dot replied that she did not feel that it was possible to have a pensioners' party but that we can do something about it.

Edith Littler commented that she did not feel the previous attitude was helpful and that we should join the march.

Jo Harris stated that she and Bill are Harrow U3A representatives in the NPC and that she supported the need for pressure groups.

Hermann Hirschberger agreed with Bill; felt that we need practical actions in democracy. He asked if NPC trains people for parliament.

Dot responded saying that NPC is not a political party but it has got support in parliament, members who speak up for its aims. It would support any independent pensioner candidate who was prepared to stand.

Fred Mitzman congratulated the NPC and asked who funds it.

Dot explained the funds come from affiliation fees only. She pointed out the aim for pensions is £165 to bring it above the poverty level and it should be linked to the retail price index.

Michael Kenton pointed out that it is not too expensive to put up a candidate and each U3A group could do this. Dot explained the current cost is £1,000.

Stuart Kinchuck requested a return to reality; he felt the country could not afford such a high pension. He said that Europeans pay a much higher national insurance to get higher pensions.

Any other Business:

Gwen Wright stated that she will be attending a Post Office event when views on access to information will be gathered. This applies to call centres and websites. She asked if any members have opinions that they contact her so she can pass them on.

She reminded the meeting that next year will be our anniversary and asked for any suggestions; contributions or memories are sent to her.

Toni Waxman made an appeal for sensibly sized envelopes to be sent for replies to Tours and Visits bookings. Self sealing D3 would be most useful. She also announced that there are still seats available for theatre performances.

Ivan Benjamin asked why it had been considered unnecessary to send a representative to the National Conference from such a large group. Georgina Butcher replied that there had not been anyone available on that date. He also asked why an external examiner had been set up for the accounts when we have an internal one. Joyce Davis replied that we do not have an internal examiner; the arrangement was changed last year.

Nicholas Tash raised the question of the Greenhill Room used for Current Affairs 1. He said that they had been promised better premises but they were still there and with no curtains which would be a particular problem in the coming summer. Georgina Butcher explained that there is a new service manager at HAC and asked that Gabi Otvos speak to her about it. Gabi explained that the original plan had been for the group to use the Hatch End Suite but it was discovered the acoustics were unsuitable. He has asked for curtains for the Greenhill Room but understands that it is likely to be demolished in the fullness of time which would preclude money being spent on it. He will continue to search for a better room.

Gerald Rickayzen announced the forthcoming speakers meeting.

Glenys Tuersley endorsed Ivan Benjamin's concerns about the accounts presentation. She suggested that we contact National Office for advice. As Chairman of the GLF she explained that because of growth, matters will be organised on a regional basis. The host for the next meeting will be London, it will be held on 24th June. It will be subsidised by TAT and lunch will be provided. There are 30 groups in the Greater London Area and she would like 200 representatives of ordinary members to get the benefit. The new Chairman will speak at the meeting.

Jack Kushner announced that there were some tickets available for the visit to Freemasons Hall.

Edith Littler felt that it behoved the members to thank the committee for all their hard work. Georgina Butcher thanked all the members for attending and looked forward to seeing them next year on either of the last two Tuesdays in March.

The meeting closed at 11.50am.