

FORUM MEETING

MINUTES

Wednesday 13th September 2017

12:00 – 13:30

PRESENT: Chris Amy, Mark Attrill, Mel Barnes, Chris Biles, Danielle Burgess, Chris Crawford, Don Haver, Ruth Hollingshead, Roy Perry, Miriam Tong (Chair), Liz Tuckwell, Helen Tunley-Smith

Minute Taker: Chris Cane

APOLOGIES: Terry Pearson, Alan Trevaskis

1 Welcome & Introductions

Miriam Tong (MMT) welcomed everyone to the second user forum and read apologies.

MMT introduced Laura Jasper, the new Centre Administrator.

2 Guarantor Members

MMT stated that, having looked back at the Society's Articles of Association, alongside more recent years' minutes of Trustees' meetings, the history of the Society's Guarantor Membership was complex. It is believed that Guarantor Members were originally intended as the Trustees of the charity who, if the charity folded, bore financial responsibility for the Society's debts, albeit limited to £1.00. At some point in the past, those other than Trustees have been given the opportunity to apply to become Guarantor Members. Without the time / opportunity to review all of the minutes of every Trustee meeting since the establishment of the charity, MMT is unable to identify an exact record. Whilst Guarantor Members are not involved in strategic planning and detailed management discussions and do not take responsibility for decision making at other Meetings of Trustees, they are invited to attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting. However, this appears to be a somewhat anomalous position as Trustees, and only Trustees, carry the legal responsibility for the charity's governance and compliance. In 2015 the Trustees sought legal clarification on the subject of Guarantor Members. In June 2015 the Trustees decided that, henceforth, only Trustees would be approved as new Guarantor Members. This policy was in place for a couple of years, but last year the decision was, it is believed, inadvertently overlooked and there was a further drive to invite more Guarantor Member applications. Following the User Forum Meeting held in June 2017, and the evident confusion regarding Guarantor Membership, MMT requested the Trustees again review the question. Guarantor Membership was discussed again at the August 2017 Meeting of Trustees. Following discussion, the Board agree to uphold the 2015 decision, i.e. that, in future, only Trustees be approved as new Guarantor Members. The current situation isn't entirely satisfactory as all those who are currently

Guarantor Members will remain as such, even though legal responsibility for governance & legal compliance rests entirely with the Trustees alone. Over many years to come, there will be a gradual reduction in the number of Guarantor Members as people resign or die. MMT identified that there is, however, the facility to create other types of memberships within the Society's Articles of Association. MMT proposes raising the question of creating and promoting the category of ordinary Membership of the Society to be discussed by Trustees. Whilst this type of Membership would not confer any voting rights, it might afford the opportunity for service users to feel a closer relationship with the charity. It is not proposed that there should be a Membership fee. MMT would like the Trustees to consider such a proposal and then involve service users in further discussion at a subsequent forum.

Roy Perry (RP) asked who owned Millbrooke House.

MMT advised it was owned by the Society and charity as a company limited by guarantee.

On the subject of Guarantor Membership Mel Barnes (MB) felt this needed to be looked at legally, particularly in the context of appointing/approving Trustees.

MMT said that legal opinion was sought in 2015. Unfortunately the complexity of the current situation might only be fully understood by trawling through historic minutes of the Society and the question of cost and time for this had to be considered as it was recognised that the current Guarantor Members voting rights would remain.

Chris Crawford (CC) asked about the process of appointing a trustee.

MMT outlined the process of Trustees periodically reviewing and identifying skills/experience required and available then making approaches to individuals who might supply those skills/experience required. Prospective Trustees were then informally interviewed/met with Trustees during the private Meeting of Trustees (at which only current Trustees attend) that takes place immediately prior each Trustee Meeting. MMT identified that it is written within the Articles of Association that trustees offer themselves up for retirement at the AGM after three years.

MMT informed the group that two new trustees had recently been appointed, Laura Gardiner and Jacqueline Gazzard.

MMT identified we currently have just two trustees with a visual impairment and is keen to see an increase in the number of trustees drawn from service users. For anyone who would like to consider the responsibilities entailed and put themselves forward there is a trustee induction pack available to explain the role and legal responsibilities. The current trustee number is nine and whilst there is no upper limit on the number of Trustees it would be good to increase the number, perhaps to twelve.

3 IWSB Client Consultation

This has been a fantastic opportunity for MMT to speak with service users across the Island. Responses are still coming and the more responses, the better to steer future direction. Currently there have been 120 responses which Chris Cane (CMC) has been inputting onto Survey Monkey. In advance of the trustees' strategic planning meeting MMT had collated 75 responses and was able to give an overview of the analysis. MMT said that a common theme from the survey was a transport problem.

MMT said that, once we have a fuller sample of surveys we will produce a finished version of results with a weighting score.

Liz Tuckwell (LT) felt it was a strange survey and too long.

MMT acknowledged that, identifying that, because no surveys had been undertaken in recent years, we were trying to cover a great many questions. It was expected that future surveys would be more focused and condensed.

4 Strategic Plans Update

MMT summarised some of the discussion around the agenda for the Trustees' Strategic Planning Day held in August. This had included a brief overview of various national and local strategies and programmes for the visually impaired, to ensure the Society is fitting in with these and to enable us to work effectively in collaboration with other organisations, whether statutory or voluntary.

Regarding a name change for the Society, sixty percent of service users in the survey were in favour, so a working party had subsequently been set up and made swift progress.

MMT was able to share that we have a graphic designer who has very kindly agreed to help. The eye logo will remain but will be softened to make it friendlier; the Island map shape would also remain. The two names offered through the survey (that are not already in use) to be considered are 'Wight Vision' and 'Sight for Wight'. The strapline proposed is 'your local sight loss charity'. Once the designs have been created they will be shared at the next forum meeting and more widely.

Future fundraising and income generation was discussed. MMT identified that there is a current gap between typical annual income and expenditure that has to be met by fundraising. In recent years IWSB has benefitted from some generous legacies, but these might reasonably be expected to dwindle as people live longer lives and need to pay for care in later life.

Liz Tuckwell asked what the current gap was.

MMT confirms the current gap between typical current income (from Dress for Less, our Investment Portfolio and contributions to overheads from IWSB Clubs & Activities) and typical current expenditure is circa £153,500 annually that needs to be generated by fundraising / gifts / legacies / grants.

Future fundraising initiatives will need to be broadened. MMT intends to work on grant applications from trusts and other funders based on service user needs. We might also consider Friends and Patrons schemes. It is also the aspiration of the Society to attend some bigger shows in the future, like the Isle of Wight Festival. Consideration is being given to purchasing UV sunglasses with the Society logo on the arm to sell as a means of imparting positive educational messages about protecting sight in addition to generally promoting the charity and its core objectives, whilst generating revenue.

LT asked about selling Millbrooke House.

MMT said the trustees had discussed this possibility and that whilst some strong feeling was expressed that IWSB should retain Millbrooke House as a base for now, but make

more effective use of it, there was recognition amongst the Trustees of the arguments in favour of considering re-locating / downsizing / sharing premises. The Trustees will continue to consider this matter. MMT identified that for such big decisions it was important for the Trustees to arrive at a consensus of opinion to enable the Society to move forward at a pace that everyone is comfortable with.

The Strategic Review also recognised the need for the HR Committee to start reviewing job descriptions as current ones do not reflect what the Society needs. Marketing, communication, fundraising or support for service users do not feature significantly on current ones. It is hoped that the review will be completed and implemented, with revised job descriptions by the end of the year.

5 Responses to any Advance Questions Submitted by Users

MEL BARNES

Service users who attend Owls & Handicraft do not understand the reasoning for the August closure of Millbrooke House to clubs and activities. MMT informed MB it was for practical and logistical reasons and she read out the minutes from the Board Meeting relating to the closure.

MB wondered why we didn't make the best use of free advertising. MMT agreed that our current level of marketing is inadequate and said this would be picked up with the restructure.

MB's third question was regarding the newsletter and he wanted to know why volunteers who join or leave aren't named. MMT agreed that it was good to mention names, provided individual permission had been sought from those concerned.

MB's fourth question was regarding the scaffolding news which is put into areas with one area being known as 'The Bay' which should really just be Sandown Bay. MMT said this could be refined for future news.

DON HAVER

No questions.

CHRIS CRAWFORD

Wanted to know why the IWSB was looking for a name change as she feels to have Isle of Wight Society for the Blind in the title is important for the history of the Society.

Ruth Hollingshead (RH) said that a lot of thought had gone into a name change and the IWSB wouldn't be lost but people are put off because of the word, 'blind'. Perhaps in the strapline the date established '1895' could be incorporated.

MMT said the legal name of Isle of Wight Society for the Blind would remain.

DANIELLE BURGESS

No questions.

MARK ATTRILL

Where does the money go for the clubs and activities; for example the Owls?
MMT said it contributes to the Society's general overheads such as staff, building and insurance costs.

The Owls group also doesn't seem to go out enough.

MMT acknowledged this point and agreed that we would like to do more and hopes the client questionnaire will help drive us forward so that we can offer activities that people have suggested in the survey. MMT hoped that for any new activities a lead service user would emerge as a volunteer to act as the liaison for the group and take over the weekly or monthly organisation and completion of registers etc. so there was greater opportunity for service users to take active control.

CHRIS AMY

Identified her experience in relation to Wessex Cancer Trust who were felt to be effective at fundraising and communication with educational messages and suggested we might follow their example when considering our proposed sunglasses promotion.

Danielle Burgess (DB) said it would be good to make children in schools aware of what a white cane is for.

RH said she was going to Arretton Primary School shortly to do a school assembly.

DB said she wouldn't mind getting involved with something like that.

MMT thought it would be good for the Society to develop a standard training pack that might include a PowerPoint, visual aids and sight condition specs that young people would find interesting. MMT extended a general invitation to any confident volunteers who would be interested in talking to groups to contact her as she would be interested in developing ambassadors to take on this role.

CHRIS BILES

No questions

HELEN TUNLEY-SMITH

Commented that within the staff 'the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing'.

MMT identified that the staff team generally work well and closely together, with weekly Team Meetings, so asked for a specific example. An example of two team members contacting checking arrangements for an activity was cited.

MMT commented that, following the completion of the current HR review, job roles should become clearer, but identified that, with three of the team being part-time staff, there might be occasions when contact with service users was duplicated, until such time that we are able to introduce a more sophisticated software database to track all communications with service users.

RUTH HOLLINGSHEAD

No questions

ROY PERRY

Wanted to know if the Owls only met on Wednesdays as on Friday he is going to Sandown Airport to look at Spitfires and thought this might appeal to the Owls group.

MMT felt that additional meetings could take place but, of course, would have to be organised well in advance to allow for the provision of additional supporting volunteers and transport arrangements to be made. MMT asked if there were any events coming up to let us know.

RP identified that the Talking News is now available on the website but RP didn't think it had been widely publicised.

CMC said that it had been publicised but perhaps it could be given a further boost and appreciated RP's comments.

Any Other Business

MMT said that she was looking forward to the next Newsletter, to be sent out in October, as there were three very good contributions from service users. This was hoped to represent a general shift in more content being supplied by service users. A general invitation was extended to service users to become regular contributors.

MMT asked those present if, in addition to any of the regular Christmas gatherings organised by some specific activity groups, there would be any interest in a mulled wine and mince pie gathering at Millbrooke House open to all service users.

CA observed that the children from St Thomas of Canterbury school used to come in and sing.

MMT thanked everyone for coming along.

Date Of Next User Forum

Wednesday 10th January 2018 @ 12.00pm – 1:30pm

It was identified in our original terms of reference that, to encourage widest attendance, time and date of meetings should be varied. Following brief discussion, it is proposed the summer 2018 user forum be held on a different weekday as a twilight session.