



Members' Forum Notes

18 July 2018

Millbrooke House

Millbrooke House,
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PRESENT:

Ian Capon, Chris Amy, Mel Barnes, Chris Biles, Ruth Hollingshead, Nigel Pearce, Dawn Perry, Roy Perry, Miriam Tong (CEO & Chair), Liz Tuckwell, Helen Tunley-Smith

NOTE TAKER:

Chris Cane

APOLOGIES:

Danielle Burgess

1 Welcome & Introductions

The CEO welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked members to introduce themselves. Members were asked if they would like the minutes read through. The minutes were approved.

2 Sight for Wight Future Plans Update

To allow ample time for questions received it was suggested and agreed that Agenda Item 3 (questions from members) be taken first and updates and future plans be covered as far as time allows.



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

3 Responses to any Advance Questions Submitted by Members

LT - Salary overpayment - *Please can you tell us the true facts about the salary overpayment as we have had various rumours to the effect that the member of staff concerned was dismissed. If the accidental overpayment was discovered in January last year and a perfectly reasonable offer was made to her that her salary would be frozen for three years, it seems strange that she left suddenly without anybody hearing about it, then surely you have every right to take her to the small claims court. We find it hard to find there is so much secrecy over this matter and that surely it should have been a straight forward decision to reclaim the money that was given to help the visually impaired members.*

CEO Response – MMT was pleased to have news that it was now possible to share and read a prepared statement that will also be made available on our website, published in the *Talking News* and the August edition of the quarterly newsletter.

'As reported at the March 2018 AGM, the Trustees agreed to review in May their previous decision regarding the historic accidental overpayment of a former employee. At the May 2018 meeting of Trustees, the decision was made that further legal advice was required and this was sought.

Whilst a full report and advice is currently awaited from the local solicitors approached, preliminary advice was that it might be possible to make a claim for some of the accidental overpayment. However, because of an Employment Tribunal Claim being pursued by the former employee for constructive dismissal, unpaid wages and for accrued but untaken holiday,

the legal advice of our HR advisors was that the Society should not actively pursue such action whilst the Employment Tribunal claim was ongoing. Prior to the commencement of the Employment Tribunal process, the Claimant had sought redress through ACAS, seeking a payment of £3,800 to settle her claims. The Society declined entering into such a settlement as it did not support the claims made.

The Employment Tribunal hearing took place in Southampton on 11th & 12th June 2018 and the judgement of the Employment Tribunal Judge was received by the Society on 13th July 2018. All of the Claimant's spurious claims have been dismissed and the Society has been completely vindicated. Details of the Employment Tribunal can now be shared as all Employment Tribunal Judgements are published online in the public domain: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions>

Preparation for the Employment Tribunal created a significant workload and the Trustees, myself and the staff team are delighted that all claims made were dismissed, meaning that time, effort and energy can once again be entirely devoted to taking the charity forward for the benefit of islanders affected by sight loss

As the Employment Tribunal process has now been concluded, during the forthcoming August 2018 meeting, the Trustees will review their initial decision not to seek repayment of the salary overpayment. By this time, the full report and legal advice regarding the possibility of seeking repayment is expected.

Following the August meeting of Trustees it is hoped that a decision can be reached in the best interest of the charity that will draw a line under the regrettable matter of the salary overpayment.'

The CEO also expressed thanks to Paul Rutherford, Chairman, and Chris Cane, Marketing, Communications & Fundraising Manager, for their support at the Employment Tribunal as they were both witnesses; a good team effort.

LT – Correspondence – *Please can you explain why I, or other people, have not received replies to various emails or letters especially when they have been acknowledged and forwarded to other staff members.*

CEO Response – It was agreed that an acknowledgement along the following lines would be sent to all future correspondence.

Thank you for your correspondence received today dated It has now been forwarded to the relevant member of staff for consideration. Whilst every endeavour will be made to respond within a reasonable time to any urgent query or one that is personal to you, please remember that the majority of employees are part-time, so an immediate response may not be possible.

As we are a small team, and to make most cost effective use of our time for the benefit of all islanders affected by sight loss, any questions raised in correspondence that are of general interest to Members, or which are non-urgent, will be addressed at the next quarterly Members' Forum Meeting. We always request any questions be submitted in advance of the Forum Meetings to ensure that there is time to gather any necessary information

to give a full answer, however, there is usually the opportunity to raise some further questions, observations or comments on the day, time permitting.

The dates for the forums are announced in advance via our newsletter, website and information board at Millbrooke House. If you are unable to attend any Forum Meeting in person, you will find a record of questions raised and answers provided in the notes of the meetings that are usually published on our website in the week following the meeting.

Thank you again for your correspondence.

CC commented that, unfortunately despite being on our 'contacts list' correspondence from some Members is automatically directed into the 'junk mail' folder, for reasons still unknown, despite investigation.

LT – Swimming Group – *Why has the swimming group been cancelled on 7th August at least a month prior to that date as surely other arrangements could have been made or people could have been given the opportunity to make their own way to the pool.*

Why does the society make special arrangements for the Thursday social group when the minibus is not available but not try and do so for the swimming group which is the activity that more members attend than any of the others?

We were surprised and disappointed when a friend of ours wanted to come swimming on 12th June but we were told he could not attend, even if he drove to Ryde, without giving his health details and address plus next of kin. P and his wife have been to the pool with us a few times in the past and he is one of the fittest people I know.

When my sister came to the Island with her local primary school from Kent they hired the pool for an hour one evening and the lifeguards didn't require any details despite the fact they had to rescue two boys from the deep end and another had a nose bleed in the pool. We are responsible adults who wouldn't suggest bringing someone who couldn't swim or would be a liability. In fact as P is a competent swimmer he could have acted as escort on the minibus as every fortnight we travel without a sighted person apart from the driver, we couldn't be witnesses if there was an accident or drive the vehicle if the driver was taken ill. We are happy to take this risk as we enjoy swimming but feel there are double standards here.

CEO Response – As there were no volunteer minibus drivers available, the decision was taken to cancel the evening pool hire as taxi pick-up arrangements outside office hours are unsatisfactory and there would have been insufficient sighted escort cover at the pool, as the minibus driver also covers this role. Sight for Wight is responsible for all participants when we hire the pool. Legislation and our insurers require full risk assessments be carried out for all activities. Our pool use risk assessment identifies that we provide adequate sighted escorts for activities and have contact details and other relevant information for all participants. Our insurers do not require that we always have a sighted escort on the minibus, however, this is clearly preferable which is why we endeavour to provide one. If we don't have sufficient volunteers to provide the support identified in our risk assessments, then unfortunately that activity cannot take place. We rely heavily on volunteers who generously give up their time to support activities. With regret it had to be reported that fewer drivers are comfortable volunteering for the Tuesday swimming group as several had been put off because of their

perception that the group generally had very few positive comments to make about the Society. Volunteers loyal to the Society tire of the perceived negativity expressed and feel disinclined to support a group if it is felt that their personal efforts, or those of the Society, are under-appreciated. IC identified that this had been a concern that had been raised in previous years and he wished to speak strongly in support of the work of the society and volunteers. Both LT and HTS were keen to express their huge appreciation of volunteers and their enjoyment of the swimming activity. Members of the swimming group identified that on long journeys together their group talked amongst themselves but did not knowingly or intentionally direct criticism at volunteers. To the suggestion that volunteers should speak up if they don't like what is being said, MMT identified that generally people prefer to avoid conflict and some volunteers would lack the confidence to speak out if several members were strongly expressing their shared view. NP suggested that, when training new volunteers, they be reminded that members can't always see body language so might not pick up that a volunteer is uncomfortable with comments being made. MMT agreed that this was an important observation and would be covered in volunteer training.

There was consensus amongst those present that the contributions of volunteers were much appreciated. It was recognised that activities valued by members could not take place without the support of volunteers.

MMT confirmed that the staff and volunteer team were always committed to doing their best for members, however, occasionally things might not run as hoped or expected, however this forum affords the opportunity for concerns to be raised and addressed. A relevant article in the next newsletter will be put together.

MMT also identified that the Member Services Manager is currently working on producing club membership packs for each regular activity group. These will confirm arrangements, 'ground rules' etc. and would include reference to the expectation that staff and volunteers should be treated with courtesy and respect. A first draft version could be shared at the next Members Forum for comment.

LT – Annual Summer Fair - As yet we have not heard the date for the annual summer fair, has this been discontinued?

CEO Response – The Summer Fair and Autumn Fair have been discontinued due to the huge amount of work entailed for very little positive outcome in terms of either financial return or raising awareness of the work of the Society. As identified at the AGM, our fundraising and outreach programme this year includes targeting more established island events with large audiences. However, we are planning a Christmas Fair in collaboration with Community Action at the Riverside Centre in Newport on 8th December. Members identified Riverside is not easy to reach on foot. MMT suggested we explore the possibility of arranging a sighted guide walking escort to and from the bus station at pre-arranged times and this was felt to be a good idea.

DB – Volunteer support for Bowls – (With apologies, the full text of DB's question was not available at the meeting, but LT was aware of the question seeking volunteer support.) DB requested volunteer support to the Bowls group.

CEO Response – DB would be invited to meet with the Members Services Manager to discuss the activities of this group and how Sight for Wight can work more closely with them to promote and support the activity.

LT – What news is there of new activities, in particular a holiday

CEO Response – MMT confirmed we are still working through the requests identified in last year's questionnaire, where a popular suggestion was a holiday to be arranged for members. MMT referenced the difficulties experienced last summer when a semi-independent arrangement took place with only one volunteer available as an escort. Following that holiday a recommendation was made by the CEO that was fully endorsed by the Trustees that the Society would only become involved in holiday planning if they took total responsibility, including full risk assessments and the provision of sufficient sighted escort guides. This would necessitate ensuring that all volunteer escort expenses for travel, accommodation and some subsistence were covered to ensure that sufficient volunteers could support the holiday. However, in needing to cover these additional expenses, there would be an inevitable increase in costs to Members that might make the holiday too expensive for participants, unless a grant could be found to cover some costs. A question was asked if legacy money already given might not be used for this purpose. MMT identified that legacy donations during the past year had not been significant and the current liquid reserves of the society extended to some 9-12 months running costs, so it was not deemed an appropriate use of funds at present.

RP - Two points about the Talking Newspaper

Would it not be polite to thank the IW County Press for them giving permission to reproduce from the newspaper?

I know that the expression 'Talking Newspaper' is commonly used but it is a bit cumbersome. Since the message contains society news, scaffolding and BBC extracts, perhaps 'Audio News' is more appropriate.

CEO Response – At the meeting, any historic agreement with the County Press was unknown, as this service was established more than forty years ago. However it was agreed that an acknowledgement would be appropriate.

Changing the title Talking News to Audio News is something we can consider following discussion with the Audio Library Team volunteers, some of whom were involved in establishing the service more than forty years ago.

4 Open Forum – further observations, comments & questions from those present

CA asked about Sight for Wight's increasing use of the term 'member' rather than 'service user'

CEO Response – MMT felt 'member' was a friendlier term than 'client' or 'service user' and perhaps also helped identify that the support and activities Sight for Wight now provides are entirely voluntary services. The contract for delivering statutory service provision was changed by the IoW Council to dual sensory loss and has been with Action on Hearing Loss

for the past three years – so the term ‘client’ or ‘service user’ might be more appropriate in that context where a clear contract existed.

However, it was agreed that the term ‘Member’ might give the impression that a fee was payable to join Sight for Wight or to receive support or participate in activities. We will review our publications and website to make clear that ‘Membership’ of Sight for Wight is free to those affected by sight loss.

CA - Talking News – CA identified there seemed a lot of repetition of contact details and regular events. Wider discussion also identified that many people do not make use of the Scaffolding News section.

CEO Response - It was suggested that a representative of the Audio Library volunteer team and CC might get together to review these details.

Sensory Support Services – Statutory Provision

In response to a comment that referenced the Statutory Service provision, MMT identified that she had recently attended a meeting with Kathy Glover, Commissioning Officer from Isle of Wight Council who wishes to consult with users to review service provision prior to commencing the re-tendering process. The current contract is due for renewal in 2019.

Sight for Wight will support IoW Council in encouraging Members to provide feedback to help influence and shape future statutory service provision for those with sensory loss. Kathy Glover is drafting a questionnaire that Sight for Wight will bring to the attention of Members through the website, Talking News and quarterly newsletter.

Representatives of IoW Council are also invited to attend the next low vision drop-in day at Millbrooke House scheduled for 19 September, 10.00am – 3.00pm so Members can give their feedback in person.

MMT confirmed that Sight for Wight will not be tendering for this dual sensory loss contract. We currently work well alongside Action on Hearing Loss, plus other sight loss charities and agencies, providing support and services to benefit those affected by sight loss, that are not fully covered by statutory provision. With increasing pressures on all local government funding, such voluntary support becomes increasingly needed. Moreover, our legal Constitution would not, in its present form, allow us to deliver dual sensory loss services as we were founded as an independent charity to deliver support solely for islanders affected by sight loss.

Partnership Working

Following on from comments on partnership working, MMT read out a recent press release sent to the County Press, but as yet unpublished, detailing the collaboration with national charity *Guide Dogs* to deliver their *My Guide* programme on the Island. For people to just learn a little more about the scheme there is a drop-in day at Millbrooke House on Wednesday 25th July between 10.00am and 12.00noon and then three dates for interested volunteers to be able to complete the one-day training programme before they can be paired with a Member seeking support.

Please see link to full press release here:

Website re-presentation & increasing use of technology

Arising from discussion around increasing use of technology and the availability of much useful information, documents and links from our website the CEO identified work had commenced on a review and re-presentation to make the website easier to navigate and more attractive. This led to a brief discussion of various software packages used by Members and the difficulties found with some in accessing certain types of file. The accessibility features of Windows 10 were rated highly by one Member. It was recognised this is a much bigger topic of discussion and that it would be an effective use of time to start the October Members' Forum early, have a short lunch break and then continue, for those interested, with a technology discussion. Sight for Wight will also invite the Digital Inclusion Officer from Age UK, who supported our last Members' Low Vision Drop-in Day and was found to be very helpful.

Strollers Walking Group

It was identified that some recent strolls for the *Strollers* walking group had been more challenging than usual, with surfaces being more difficult to navigate. A suggestion was made that it might be useful for someone with sight loss to 'test out' future walks first. MB replied that he had been doing these walks for years and always does the walk himself in advance as part of the preparation and risk assessment process, but agreed to factor this in when planning future walks. MB was thanked by the CEO and other walkers present, some of whom also enjoy the more challenging *Striders* walking group, for his dedication in preparing so thoroughly and for the care he demonstrates in supporting walkers. MB diligently records the route and terrain for each walk in the risk assessment and the need for walkers to wear sturdy shoes is also covered. It was noted that all this

information is not read when the walks are advertised on the Talking News, so this could be addressed in future.

Confidential Post

Volunteers have recently been sent red emergency contact / medical information forms to be completed to ensure records remain current. Concern was expressed about who opened the post and might see such information. Assurance was given that post is not opened by volunteers but is dealt with by the Duty Manager, usually the Member Services Manager and in her absence the Marketing Communications and Fundraising Manager. All staff team members have undergone training in data protection.

Office Changes & Need for Intercom

It was reported that the Member Services Manager is now situated on the first floor rather than in the general reception area, so that she could take and make confidential phone calls to members. We are still working out the practicalities of this. An intercom system will be introduced to improve safety and security of all in the building.

River Medina Trip Risk Assessment

MB had noted the forthcoming outing on the River Medina and asked if sufficient consideration had been given to boarding the vessel, as a similar trip undertaken some nine years ago had been found challenging for some. MB was thanked for raising this. It was confirmed that the Member Services Manager would be going in person to check the ease of boarding / condition of tides on the day / time of the planned visit as part of the risk

assessment process and any necessary adjustments to plans would be made.

Ryde Pier Access to Catamaran

IC mentioned the Ryde Pierhead drop which makes things difficult at times when boarding the catamaran. As the relative ease or difficulty of boarding is dictated by the height of the tide at any time, MMT suggested that tide tables be consulted prior to taking the catamaran as a very low tide would cause a steep downward gradient of the boarding ramp and a very high tide the reverse.

Pads / Nappy Disposal at Millbrooke House

IC raised the importance of ensuring that the clinical waste bin in the accessible toilet was capable of holding bulkier incontinence pads / nappies not just sanitary products. A check of the accessible toilet will be made. IC will be asked to 'review' our accessible toilet facility as it also features an audio description facility – we commonly call it the *Talking Toilet*.

Supper Club Contributions for Newsletter

Sadly there was insufficient interest in the shared cooking / dining Supper Club proposal recently put to Members, so an alternative proposal to satisfy Members' interest in food and drink is to have a Supper Club feature in each quarterly newsletter where Members can submit tried and tested recipes or top tips or favourite gadgets in the kitchen. If anyone would like to submit an article then please contact Chris Cane, via email: admin@iwsb.org.uk

5 Any Other Business

There being no other business the meeting closed at 14.00

6 Date & Time of Next Meeting:

Monday 15th October 2018

11:00 – 12:30

Millbrooke House

Please bring your 2019 diaries as we will agree dates for next year

There will be a 30 minute break for lunch followed by

13.00 – 15.00 Technology Discussion