

Minutes of the Exeter U3A Committee Meeting

2pm, 4 September 2023

Held in Rowe Hall, at The Mint

Welcome

Nella advised that there would be a presentation by the University Liaison Team prior to formally bringing the Committee to order for today's meeting. She welcomed Carol McCullough and Trudi Learmouth and thanked them for giving up their time to brief Committee members.

Carol McCullough and Trudi gave a short explanation of the history behind the university liaison group and the u3a. Originally the connection between the university and u3a was an informal arrangement started in 2013 whereby academic staff wanting contact with u3a members on a particular programme would individually arrange this. Eventually this arrangement became more formal and the liaison group now has an administrator and a system in place to organise such things as u3a members becoming involved in research projects, attending lectures, supporting students, conversation cafe. They plan the academic talks for the year ahead covering a wide range of subjects.

The university is keen to encourage connections between 'gown and town' and are supportive of the liaison group. u3a members have also shown interest, some attend talks, while others may only be interested in being part of a medical trial whilst others are assisting with support groups for students.

Dave is our contact between the u3a and the university liaison team.

Trudi also took the opportunity to mention that she had access to Paul Bristow who was an experienced feature writer. If the committee wanted to produce something for the newsletter he could be useful. Julie confirmed that the convenors had already been advised of his services.

Nella thanked Carol and Trudi for their presentation, at which point they left the room.

Nella brought the Committee to order and formally opened the meeting.

Present for the committee meeting:

Committee members:

Nella Price (chair), Bill Cross (secretary), Terry Ancell (membership secretary), Ann Harper (minutes secretary), Dave Parsons (Beacon and website administrator), Steph Ward (treasurer), Julie Crichton-Smith (co-groups coordinator, co-vice chair), Mike Arstall, Anne Barwell, M J Morgan, Annabel Nater, (co-groups coordinator)

1 Welcome

Nella welcomed all attendees.

2. Apologies

Steve Fabian, Ian Murray

Nella informed the committee that Anna Warne had tendered her resignation from the committee on 3rd September with immediate effect.

3. University Liaison Briefing

This point covered above as the briefing was held before the committee started.

4. Minutes of 3 July committee meeting

Two typos to be corrected; additional wording to be added to para 18, 'from March 2022' inserted after the word ... permission and before ... to ring fence.

Matters arising: Anne B now has the pink back pack. Bill C has looked into storage space costs; the committee agreed that £1400 a year would be too much.

Minutes proposed by Steph and seconded by MJ. Minutes approved by committee.

5. Regular reports

Finance (Steph): Steph's report had been sent to all committee members prior to this meeting, there were no comments on this report raised by committee members at the meeting. Steph added two points at the meeting:

1) The Mint has raised the annual rent by roughly £500 a year. Steph proposed that this was acceptable, agreed by the committee. Nella commented that she had not been successful in finding suitable alternative accommodation.

2) A couple of the classes (Mah Jong and Pickleball) would now be relatively expensive regarding PFV as they are held once a week rather than monthly and with relatively low numbers of people. Steph was of the opinion that this was currently acceptable given u3a funds being in good shape but needs to be discussed in the future.

Action

Bill: Rising costs of certain classes, PFV, on agenda for January 2024.

Membership (Terry): Terry had sent report to all on the committee before the meeting, updated with a new pie chart; no comments raised on this report by committee members Dave and Terry informed the group that the way we deal with deceased members on Beacon had been changed to avoid the possibility of sending them emails. Deceased members remain on the Records (for Gift Aid purposes) but do not show up normally.

Action

Julie: to remind convenors to inform Terry if they hear or know about a member's death.

Groups (Julie): Julie had sent out a report on groups before the meeting; there were no comments on this report raised by committee members.

Speakers (Steve) No report available from Steve; he has been away.

6. Contingencies planning

The working party meeting between Bill, Steph and Dave went ahead and planning on cloud storage is currently in the development stage.

Dave confirmed that generic emails for all completed. A conversation was had on the necessity for committee members with no specific role to use a generic email.

Actions

All: to check Steph's contingency planning report particularly in reference to their own role; this contingency plan will ultimately be placed on the cloud.

All: to ensure that they only use the generic email in future.

Dave: to consider the practicalities of generic addresses for those without a specific role

7. Policy Review progress

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Bill): Bill confirmed that he had reviewed the policy and he felt that there should be two relatively small changes made:

1) Replace the final sentence in the last paragraph of the opening section with, "This will include ensuring equal access to groups and events. It will necessitate the committee, group convenors and members taking responsibility to ensure appropriate behaviour by all" and;

2) In the section of Practical Approaches, the reference at the end to ensure that "all new members are aware of policies and procedures in relation to EDI" should refer to "all new and existing members".

Steph pointed out that according to the EDI policy, the Accessibility Policy should be linked to it. The Accessibility Policy has not yet been reviewed. She also pointed out that we should have an accessibility officer (according to the policy). It was agreed that an accessibility officer should be appointed after the policy had been reviewed.

Action

Bill: to review the accessibility policy for the next meeting.

Bill: Accessibility policy and appointment of an officer on next Agenda.

Publicity and Engagement (Bill): Rose G confirmed to Bill that after the Respect Festival she had a number of people enthusiastic and willing to be involved in further events who would like to form an Outreach group that will focus on EDI.

Action

Bill: to confirm with Rose that the committee would like them to set up an Outreach group.

8. U3A Open Week, 16 - 24th September 2023

It was agreed that the committee did not have the time to properly manage a local event and, therefore, decided that it, unfortunately, would not happen this year.

9. Group Convenor's workshop (Julie)

Julie informed the committee that plans for the convenors work shop were going well. Shivaun has created a preliminary questionnaire to go to convenors asking what they want from the workshop and another questionnaire to go to members asking them what they would like from their convenors. The responses would be anonymous. These responses would be collected and analysed to inform how the workshop could ensure that it meets the attendees needs. Questionnaires are going out in the next couple of weeks and an analysis completed, hopefully, by the beginning of November..

The committee agreed that the questionnaires would be sent out to u3a members' email addresses via Beacon. For those members without email, they would be sent out by post.

Action

Steph: to organise the posting of questionnaires

Dave: to assist with the use of Beacon for the emails

10. Schoolreaders (Bill)

Bill confirmed that he had been in touch with Schoolreaders who informed him that if someone wanted to help at a school they should contact the school directly. Schoolreaders had not offered reassurance about how the safeguarding issue would be dealt with and so it was decided that the matter would not be pursued.

11. Approval of the new annual Mint Licence (Steph).

The licence was signed by Nella and Steph at the meeting.

12. Petition concerning Anne Widdecombe (Nella)

Nella received a letter on 11 August from a group of members objecting to AW's planned talk to the September monthly meeting . After consultation with individual committee members, she replied to say that the invitation would stand. Subsequently, a number of individual letters from the original petitioners were sent to committee members.

Nella raised her concerns over the content and tone of the petitioners' complaints about Anne Widdecombe's talk. She felt that the petitioners had overstepped the bounds of appropriate behaviour by, for instance, using convenors' email addresses to canvas for support and making what she felt were personal attacks on her.

The committee discussed what was the best thing to do regarding AW's talk but an unanimous decision could not be agreed on whether to continue or cancel. Feelings were strong on both sides. Nella asked for a vote on whether to continue or cancel AW. A majority were in favour of not cancelling.

Nella then resigned from the committee with immediate effect and left the meeting.

There was further discussion on how to proceed at which point Mike, also, resigned from the committee with immediate effect and left the meeting.

In the absence of a Chair, members agreed that whilst the committee remained quorate, given the resignations and closing time for the booking of the venue, the meeting should be closed and to meet again on Thursday 7th in Ann H's house in order to conclude item 12.

It was agreed that a brief email would be sent to the petitioners in the mean time to confirm that we would be getting back to them with a longer reply soon.

[Post meeting note: email sent to petitioners by Steph 4th September.]

Next meeting at 6.30pm, 7th September 2023, in Ann H's house