

MAIDSTONE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 12th SEPTEMBER 2016 AT THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE, MAIDSTONE

PRESENT:

Trustees: Cllr Mr R Bird, Mr I Owen, Mr J Cobbett, Mrs W Tull, Mrs J Gibson, Cllr Mrs M Ring

Members: Mr A Turner, Mrs A Bridge, Ms E Bennett, Mrs G Ledger, Mrs G McKellow, Mrs H Hardy, Mrs I Muggeridge, Mrs J Woods, Lady J Buckley, Mrs L Bessant, Mr M Ford, Mr M Dickson, Mrs M McGiveron, Sir M Buckley, Mrs M Langley, Mr P Bolton, Mrs R Cox, Mr R Bennett, Mrs S Malhotra, Mrs P Cooper

Non-members: Mr J Clark, Mr P Hardy, Mr I Park, Miss D Woodroff, Mrs R Phillips, Mrs R Lovell, Mrs J Wollacott, Mr R Pellant, Mrs L Mason, Mr H Clark, Cllr Mr B Vizzard, Mr S Malhotra, Mr P Ledger, Mrs A Bobinska, Mr D Khadka, Mr B Manning, Mrs J Banister, Mr G Turner, Mrs C Judd, Miss S Russell, Miss S Ahern, Mrs C Gale, Mr P Gosling, Mrs T Weber, Miss S Smith, Mr C Lack, Mrs J Thomas, Mr C Leigh-Dunmore, Mr D Fowle, Mr P Julier, Mr K Scott

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from, Mr S Cook, Mrs S Hawkins, Mrs G Mulcahy, Ms S Pugh, Mrs J Beer, Sir D Steel, Mr M Jones, Mrs D Evans, Mr J Cross, Mr R Piercey, Mr J Wilkins, Mrs N Ranger, Cllr Mrs C Robertson, Mrs L Dalton, Mr P Woodward, Mrs A Monk, Mr T Jackson, Cllr Mrs V Springett, Mr J Stewart, Mr R Nash, Mr G Morrison, Mr W Cornall, Ms G Harvey, Ms A Breese, Mr R Tedman, Cllr Mrs W Hinder, Mrs E Scutt, Ms S Smith, Mrs C Renshaw, Cllr Mr J Perry, Ms Z Grzymala, Mrs S Hibbard, Mrs K Coleman, Mr J Pollitt, Mr C Turner, Mrs L Sayer, Mr C Barlow, Mr J Scarborough, Mrs C Smith, Mrs P Garrett, Mrs S Burdon, Mr S Jones, Mr P Taylor, Mrs J Curtis, Mrs L Mitchell, Mr M Sharples, Mr R Raymont, Mr C Bassant, Mr R Snook, Cllr Mr P Garten, Ms H Whately MP, Ms A Newey, Mr G Hunt, Ms H Grant MP, Mr M Hinton, Ms S Jones, Mrs A Pentecost, Ms M Shambrook, Mr P Taylor, Mr J Plunkett, Ms D Eaton, Mrs L Green, Mrs J Luker, Mrs C Bouwens, Mr I Wedgewood, Cllr Mr M Hemsley, Mrs C Underwood, Mrs J Smith, Mrs B Mitchell, Mrs A Horne, Mr D Randall, Mrs L Randall, Mrs B Lloyd, Cllr Mr P Carter, Mr M Blaber, Mr N Yandle, Mrs P Greenstock, Mr c Marshall, Mrs S Speller, Mr M Carney, Mrs S Brown, Ms L Savoury, Mrs S Middleton, Mrs P Dale, Mr C Collins, Cllr Mr D Pickett, Ms K Salisbury, MHA MacIntyre Hudson Accountants, EMD Law LLP Solicitors

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 22nd SEPTEMBER 2014

It was proposed by Mr I Park, seconded by Mr J Cobbett, and agreed that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 21st September 2015 be accepted as a true record and they were duly signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING – None

4. REPORT OF THE TRUSTEE BOARD

Cllr Mr R Bird commented on the comprehensive nature of our 2015/16 Annual Report and commended it to all those present at the Meeting.

5. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORT OF THE AUDITORS

A précis of the accounts is shown in the Annual Report and a full copy is available for anyone who would like one. Please let Mr Malhotra know if this is required.

It was recommended that we continue with our current accountants, Messrs Day, Smith & Hunter, as their rates are relatively modest and the work that they carry out is conducted to a high standard.

It was agreed that the Annual Accounts and Report of the Auditors be accepted.

6. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Those Members of the Charity who were present, voted unanimously to continue working with our current accountants, Messrs Day, Smith & Hunter and agreed that they be appointed as auditors for the coming year, remuneration to be fixed at the next Finance Committee meeting.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that in the short-term, our finances are subject to scrutiny from all sides and the Chair was asked whether we knew if this was likely to continue.

Cllr Bird explained that as the vast majority of organizations are subject to similar investigation, it was difficult to predict however, he hoped that all our funders appreciated what an effective organization we are. With the help of a team of dedicated staff and volunteers, the Chief Executive, Mr Malhotra, is able to repeatedly re-invent our Charity and doing so, enables us to continually meet and in some case exceed the demands and requirements of current and future funders.

Discussions with the local authority are ongoing and it is hoped that when deciding on levels of funding, they will take in to consideration the work that we do and the potential that we have to offer.

8. HAND OVER TO HONORARY CHAIR, HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

The Chair of the Bureau's Trustee Board, Cllr Mr Rob Bird, handed over the Chair of the AGM to The Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Derek Butler.

Cllr Butler was born in Lewisham, South East London and moved to the Medway Towns in 1973 and then to Maidstone in 1984. He became a Borough Councillor in 2002 representing Boxley Ward, has served on many of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and has been the Chairman of the Audit Committee.

Cllr Butler is married to Mary and they have a daughter called Georgina. Cllr Butler retired from working at The Court Service at Bromley Magistrates Court in 2014, having previously worked at The City of London Magistrates Court.

His main career, however, began with working in Medical Services and the Treasurers Department of the National Coal Board which became British Coal.

Cllr Butler likes hill walking, cycling, going to the gym, tennis, table tennis and more recently bowls.

9. PROPOSED RE-ELECTION OF TRUSTEES

Cllr Mr R Bird and in absentia Mrs S Hawkins stood for re-election to the Bureau Trustee Board. Mr Malhotra said that both had been nominated for re-election in accordance with the Bureau's Memorandum and Articles of Association. Both had been Trustees for a number of years and carried out their duties impeccably.

Both were re-elected unanimously.

10. PRESENTATION OF TRUSTEE BOARD MEMBERS

There being no further written nominations, in accordance with the Bureau's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trustee Board Elected Members for the year 2016/17 are: Cllr Mr R Bird, Mrs S Hawkins, Mr J Cobbett, Mrs W Tull, Mr I Owen, Mr S Cook and Mrs J Gibson with Cllr Mrs M Ring (co-opted).

Also in accordance with the Bureau's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Staff representatives on the Trustee Board are as follows: Mrs S Smith (Paid Staff), Mrs H Hardy (Voluntary Staff) and Mr S Malhotra (Bureau Chief Executive and Company Secretary).

11. PRESENTATION OF BUREAU CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr Mr R Bird reported that the number of people presenting with complicated issues that need our help is increasing. Some require just a simple piece of advice whilst others have more complex queries involving such things as unscrupulous landlords, difficult employees or plain old fashioned bad luck.

However, no matter what issue(s) the client presents with, Citizens Advice Maidstone is here to address them all and we should be extremely proud of all those staff, both paid and volunteer, who contribute to delivering that promise.

At this point, the assembled throng registered their appreciation of the efforts and achievements of Citizens Advice Maidstone by a spontaneous round of applause.

In summation, Cllr Bird thanked his fellow members of the Trustee Board for their continued support and acknowledged the accomplishments of his predecessor as Chair, Sir Michael Buckley.

12. PRESENTATION OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

This is Mr Malhotra's 19th Annual General Meeting as Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Maidstone. His first, back in 1998, took place just three months after he joined the Bureau and was, to say the least, nerve-racking.

In those days, funding was considerably more straight-forward and our relationship with Maidstone Borough Council was as amicable as the one that we currently enjoy.

Today, Citizens Advice Maidstone is the by far the busiest Bureau in Kent although we are still unable to help as many people as we would like.

As a result, in an effort to reach all corners of our Borough, we now operate according to a complex business model involving a number of external funders. This allows us to offer a holistic service throughout the region, although in order to attract the necessary financial backing, we are required to re-invent ourselves on a regular basis.

We have been successful in obtaining external revenue from a number of sources including the John Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust, Maidstone Multiple Sclerosis Society, Kent County Council, Morrisons and Santander. We used to also receive money for the provision of specialist housing advice from Maidstone Borough Council, who were one of only five councils throughout the country to make such a provision, sadly for the past two years, this funding has been withdrawn.

Our Service is delivered from two venues, our offices in Bower Terrace and the Maidstone Gateway. However, the Gateway will shortly close for refurbishment and not re-open until the spring of 2017. In the meantime, we will take up temporary residence in a shop front in

the Mall shopping centre (opposite Kikiland Playcentre) that can accommodate just two advisors who will operate on an 'appointment only' basis.

On the whole, clients presenting with simple queries are a thing of the past and the issues that our advisors are now faced with on a daily basis are both complex and wide-ranging.

Those who seek assistance from us are some of the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society and since the economic downturn in 2008, long-term funding has become more and more scarce. Consequently, Mr Malhotra requested that those present help spread the word by discussing the issues raised with their co-workers and external contacts. Alternatively, they can contact him to arrange a visit to the Bureau in order for them to see for themselves the kind of work we do and the impact that it has on local residents.

It is not all doom and gloom however and the Bureau has many friends, as evidenced by this evening's assembled throng and we continue to seek funding whenever and wherever we can – we will never turn anyone away.

In summation, Mr Malhotra thanked the Mayor, Trustees, Volunteers and paid Staff for their support over the previous year. Heart-felt thanks were also extended to Maidstone Borough Council, whose unwavering support allows Bureau management to look to the future with a modicum of confidence.

Finally, a special tribute was paid to Lady Judy Buckley for all the time and hard work that she continues to invest in ensuring that the Citizens Advice Maidstone website is accurate, up-to-date and relevant.

Here's to another 20 years!

13. INTRODUCTION OF AND PRESENTATION BY GUEST SPEAKER

The Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Derek Butler, introduced Mr Dennis Fowle, President and Editor-In-Chief of the Downs Mail stable of newspapers.

Mr Fowle is the founder of the Downs Mail, which started life as an eight-page newspaper known as the Bearsted Mail in April 1997 and has served as both its Editor-in-Chief and Chairman and is now its President.

In September 1998, in an attempt to reflect its wider audience, the paper was rebranded as the Downs Mail and in the same month the privately-owned publishing company, Mail Publications Ltd was set up. By the end of that year, the paper was regularly running to 32 or 36 pages and classified advertising was really taking off, affording local traders a local medium to reach the local public.

By 1999, the Downs Mail was regularly running to 48 pages and contained all the features of a traditional local newspaper eg. deep local news coverage, sport, obituaries, a crime page, a church page and a letters page, all thanks in no small part to an ever increasing revenue stream received from advertising.

Growth continued in to the new millennium and by the autumn of 2000, a second edition of the Downs Mail was produced covering the whole of the Weald of Kent situated in the Borough of Maidstone.

By early 2001 the Downs Mail launched its first website, which helped to support a highly successful campaign for a pedestrian bridge to be built over the A249 at Detling after the death of eight-year-old Jade Hobbs and her grandmother as they crossed the road to buy sweets in the village.

By late spring of 2002, a third edition of the newspaper, covering the urban area of Maidstone, was launched. The Downs Mail now covered practically every private and business address in the Borough of Maidstone with a total of 63,000 copies, reaching more addresses by far than any other newspaper in the Borough.

That same year, Mr Fowle was awarded Kent campaigning journalist of the year for the Jade Bridge campaign and the newspaper won Maidstone Neighbourhood Watch's annual award for its contribution to the fight against crime in the area.

Between 2003 and 2005, the Downs Mail continued to grow in both size and strength and in 2006, Maidstone Borough Council selected the paper to include 'Borough Update', its bi-monthly eight-page newsletter.

At the end of 2008, Mr Fowle, retired from full-time duties after a career of almost 60 years in journalism and at that year's Kent Journalist of the Year awards, he was honoured for his 'Lifetime Achievement.'

Mr Fowle's daughter Claire Procter, who launched the newspaper with him back in 1997, became the new Chairman and in September 2009, under her leadership, the first Malling edition of the Downs Mail was distributed and was well received by readers and advertisers alike.

Subsequently, the Downs Mail has both developed and succeeded throughout the economic downturn and continues to produce copy that is well received and widely read, resulting in maximum exposure and positive responses from and for advertisers.

In 2011, all editions of the paper were made available to read online and the new web site was launched in the summer of 2013.

14. VOTE OF THANKS

Mrs L Mason thanked Mr Fowle for his presentation and both he and the Mayor were presented with a small token of the Bureau's appreciation for contributing to our AGM.

15. CLOSING REMARKS BY HONORARY CHAIR

The Mayor, Cllr Derek Butler, pointed out that this was the 76th Annual General Meeting of Citizens Advice Maidstone and that one can only imagine what those first few meetings during the height of World War Two must have been like.

He concluded by thanking everyone for an enjoyable and informative evening.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.15PM.

TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mrs J Gibson was elected to chair this short meeting.

There was one nomination for the position of Chair – Cllr Mr Rob Bird. No further nominations were received and, proposed by Mr John Cobbett and seconded by Mrs Wendy Tull, it was unanimously agreed by the Board to elect Cllr Bird.

There was one nomination for the position of Vice-Chair – Mrs Sharon Hawkins. No further nominations were received and, proposed by Cllr Mr Rob Bird and seconded by Mr Ivor Owen, it was unanimously agreed by the Board to elect Mrs Hawkins.

There was one nomination for the position of Hon. Treasurer – Mr John Cobbett. No further nominations were received and, nominated by Mrs Wendy Tull and seconded by Cllr Mr Rob Bird, it was unanimously agreed by the Board to elect Mr Cobbett.

There was one nomination for the position of Company Secretary – Mr Bonny Malhotra. No further nominations were received and it was unanimously agreed by the Board to elect Mr Malhotra.