

**Minutes of the Swindon U3A Annual General Meeting  
13 November 2023 at 2.15pm**

Linda Young declared the meeting quorate and formally opened the meeting, inviting the Chair to the stand.

**1. CHAIR'S WELCOME**

Gill Brain welcomed everyone to the meeting, and said she was delighted to see so many people in attendance. She ran through items on the agenda for the afternoon.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Pete and Brenda Dore, Nick Fuggle, Anita Basevi, Fay Fuggle, Julie Titcombe, Tim Scaife, Bob Adam, Alison Robinson, L Redvers, Terry Hulmes, David and Nicky Foakes, Sheila Wicks, Bob & Jose Adam, Virginia Griffin, Ken Stimson, Elizabeth Cranley, Jay Kay, Ruth Jennings, Jane Walsh, Anne Hembery, Mary Haley, Pamela Golding, James Bell, Jan Ackrill, Mohini and Nachu Achar, Julie Pullen, Bryan Neaves, Jane Reeves, Alex and Judith Cranswick, Sue Thomas, Colin Bell, M A Batten, Malathy Sitaram, Lesley Lambert, G Fry, Rosie Jarvis, Rose Clarke, Jane Toomer, Jane Cole, Jen Pope, Judith Randell-Sly, Jo Noblin, Sue York, Eleanor Snowden and Jane Flew.

**3. MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2022**

It was proposed by Shirley Upton, seconded by Jane Caudwell, and agreed by a clear majority of those present, that the minutes be agreed as a correct record. There were no votes against and 13 abstentions.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

The Committee did not need to raise any matters arising from the minutes, and nothing had been raised that needed to be brought to members' attention.

## 5. CHAIR'S REPORT

Gill Brain welcomed everyone to the AGM and thanked them for attending. She extended a particularly warm welcome to the new members who have joined us this year and said she hoped they were enjoying their Swindon u3a activities.

Gill explained that her report covered the 2022/23 academic year, although it was necessary to stray a little outside those limits sometimes, to understand better what was happening, and why, during that important year.

2022/23 was a year which could be described as a transitional year - away from the organisational model which had predominated pre-Covid, to the 'new' model which is the basic u3a model, used in most u3as, and characterises the original founding fathers' philosophy. This revised model will fulfil two major aims:

- It will create a firm, secure, financial future for the organisation;
- It has enabled us to set the subscription at a level which is affordable by virtually anyone who wishes to join – reflecting our fundamental philosophy of inclusivity.

During 2022/23 therefore, we made a partial move to the new model by continuing the system of certain groups paying 'supplements' towards their more expensive venues. We also offered more support to groups in trying to expand the menu of available venues, particularly cheaper venues, which were available in and around Swindon. Gill thanked all the members of the original Cost Working Group who painstakingly put together this transitional financial model which we used throughout 2022/23.

At the same time, we recognised that it was also the right time to update and underpin these financial changes by a change to our website. We recognise the enormous contribution made by Alex Cranswick, whose original website had underpinned the success and growth of Swindon u3a over many years, and thank him for his years of dedicated service. Our new IT/Website Manager, Dave Todd has devoted a great deal of time in researching alternative websites and a final decision was made to invest in 'Simple Membership'. This website is specifically designed for, and increasingly being adopted by, u3as nationally. This new Swindon u3a website went live in the summer of 2023 after a huge amount of work by Dave Todd, assisted by Vice-Chair Linda Young, during the previous 6 months. Gill hoped that everyone was now becoming more accustomed to using it.

All these changes to the systems and procedures we use are only important because in the long run they support the most important aspect of u3a – our activity groups. Following a sluggish restart to our activities in the previous year following Covid, 2022/23 saw a very positive return to normal. In September 2021 the number

of Groups was 118, by September 2022 it had risen to 131. Individual membership is also buoyant and in the last year there have been over 150 new members joining Swindon u3a and enjoying what we have to offer.

Communication is important, especially in a membership organisation like ours. The Committee used a number of strategies to better communicate with and listen to members.

- To explain the workings of the new financial system and its interface with the new website, several Group Organiser meetings were held in Autumn 2022 and Summer 2023.
- The monthly Newsletter which disseminates and shares monthly information continued throughout the year. The Committee made regular reports including in the 'Chair's Hello,' to explain what was happening and why. Gill encouraged all members to read the Newsletter – it helps us all to feel part of the wider organisation.
- Six Focus Groups were held during the year to listen to members and gather feedback. We took account of this feedback in our planning.
- To ensure good support for Group Organisers, we added to the Group Co-ordinator role, a network of 3 extra Group Buddies each with a specific support for categories of group activities.
- We also introduced our new Welcome Booklet, designed by our Membership Secretary Jill Kelly, to ensure new members understand Swindon u3a and what it can offer them.
- Jill has continued to organise a special face to face welcome meeting for New Members each year and a Volunteers Meeting to not only thank but also explain about the importance of volunteering in an organisation like u3a.
- During the year we also ventured into social media by creating 2 Facebook Groups- a public one to tell people about us and a private one so that we can talk to each other and share information. This latter is increasingly popular and now has 184 members and Gill urged everyone to join and take part.

For those of you still wondering what the Committee does – throughout the year there is a constant stream of 'Business as Usual' activities including:

- Regular publicity in local magazines and newspapers, attendance at local events with our u3a stall, creations and distribution of publicity leaflets and posters. The role of Publicity Officer has been vacant since 2022 but a wonderful team of volunteers have helped to keep up a steady publicity campaign throughout 2022/23;
- Regular management of venues and search for new, cheaper venues for our groups by our Trustee, Chris Ockwell;
- Management of the web-site with a complex amount of important data by Dave Todd;

- Running of the Office by our Office Manager, Sylvia Alexander, and her office team of volunteer staff. A special training day was held to familiarise the Office with the financial and membership changes.
- The management of our finances by our Treasurer and a helpful team of volunteers; currently we have a vacancy and Philip O'Brien has stood in to lead us through our accounts.
- Keeping up to date with national issues via links with the national Third Age Trust by the Chair and our Secretary, Monica King.
- Organisation of special events for all members, such as our monthly Speakers' meetings under Sue Cook and her team; drinks and biscuits to the ready with Monica Brian and her tea gang; and Summer and Christmas parties by your Chair (who does like a good party!). In the summer we had a quiz, Poetry Trail, and Maypole Dancing. Last year's Christmas party with music by the North Swindon Big Band and singing led by our very own Singing Group was successful and a similar event will be held this year.

Gill thanked all those Group Organisers and volunteers who have helped with all the above events and activities in the past very busy year. There was not time to name everyone here but their contribution is vital and we couldn't run our successful u3a without them.

In conclusion, Gill thanked all Committee members who work so hard to keep the show on the road in an ever increasingly complex environment. During the year we have said goodbye to several Committee members, Alex Cranswick, Gordon Wilson, Andrew Hancox and Sue Carvey, and the Committee is operating with a number of Trustee vacancies. We urgently need members to come forward and help with Committee roles and so Gill ended with a heartfelt plea to members to offer a few hours of voluntary help a month to help us. It doesn't need to be onerous but u3a is a member-led and member-run organisation. There are no paid managers and we rely entirely on some members being generous enough to give a few extra hours a month to enable us to remain not just successful and popular but just to exist.

As we move into the 2023/24 year all signs are that we are increasingly strong, popular, and ready for what the future may hold. Gill thanked everyone for their support.

## **6. Treasurer's Report and Approval of Accounts for 2021/22**

Philip O'Brien, who has temporarily assumed the role of Treasurer following the post becoming vacant, thanked the previous Treasurer, Andrew Hancox, for his work in preparing the accounts for 2022/23.

Before going through the slides he had prepared, Philip drew attention to 3 points:

- The 2022/23 accounts cover a period of 13 months to the end of August, with the accounting year end having been adjusted to align with the academic year.
- The accounts are prepared, as in previous years, on a cash basis. In other words, the income represents the actual cash received in the period, irrespective of which year it relates to, and the expenditure represents the cash paid out in the period, again irrespective of the period it relates to.
- The draft which was shared with you has been independently reviewed by Monahans, a local firm of accountants.

The income and expenditure is split across two columns. The “restricted” column reflects amounts which are collected by Swindon u3a for specific matters and paid back out again, for example supplements and monies for trips; this should balance out to zero over time, so the excess of income over expenditure in this column reflects monies during the period which hadn’t been paid out by the end of the period. The figures in the “unrestricted” column, the accounts record an excess of income over expenditure of just over £10,000.

In respect of our 2022/23 income, the largest element was unsurprisingly membership fees. It includes a reasonable element of 2023/24 membership fee income, as a result of extending the accounting year to the end of August. There was also a significant amount of gift aid income from HMRC, driven by the fact that we did a bit of a catch-up; this actually represents the income for in relation to three years.

In respect of the 2022/23 expenditure the largest amount was spent on the cost of venues for the many groups which we operate. The next largest items are the fees levied by the Third Age Trust, which for 2022/23 were £4.00 per member, and the cost of the Gorse Hill office. There was also an element of capital expenditure, that is to say items of equipment such as a card reader and a projector.

The reported £10,000 excess of income over expenditure was significantly influenced by items that may be regarded as exceptional, including the membership income for more than one year and the three years of gift aid monies. If we were to strip out everything that could be regarded as exceptional, we would probably get a broadly break-even position for the 2022/23 year in isolation.

As regards the financial position of Swindon u3a at the end of August 2023, the total cash in the three bank accounts was a little over £100,000. That included £22,000 in the CAF2 account, which is used for trip monies and happened to be unusually high at that point due to monies collected for the subsequently cancelled Glasgow trip. The £30,000 deposited with Shawbrook Bank is held as a reserve in accordance with Charity Commission guidance. The main CAF1 account balance was

approaching its high point in the annual cycle following receipt of membership fees during August.

Linda Young advised that no questions had been formally submitted but asked if there were points of clarification required, prior to voting on the accounts.

Teresa Stroud, representing members who are not website users, raised the issue of inclusivity. She pointed out the problems facing members who did not or could not use the website and explained how she had been able to help one such member. There are around 40 members in this category and with the cessation of supplying hard copies of the Newsletter she considered that they were being disadvantaged.

Linda Young replied that the Committee was aware of this issue and measures were being taken to address it.

Ken Ivie asked whether the new system of collection of subscriptions had increased u3a income compared to the previous year.

Linda Young replied that the money collected under the new system covered all subscription and group activity costs, as the old model did last year, but she did not have a comparative figure for last year to hand. She said she would provide the information to Ken.

### **ACTION POINT: LINDA YOUNG**

Linda reminded members that general questions should be raised under Any Other Business at the end of the meeting and asked if there were any specific points of clarification required on the accounts.

Barend van der Sanden asked 3 questions.

Q1. Why are there £1,000 of bank charges in the accounts?

Philip O'Brien replied that these were mainly bank transaction fees.

Q2. Referring to the pie chart, was "other" under payments shown as capital expenditure?

Philip O'Brien replied that as the accounts had been signed off by our accountants for this year it was too late to make such a change.

Q3. What was the minimum balance throughout the year?

Philip O'Brien replied that the travel account fluctuated but always covered costs, and the reserves account was static at £30,000. In respect of the current account the highest balance was at the beginning of the year when membership subscriptions

were collected and the lowest balance was in July once all the venue hire costs had been paid out. He did not have the exact figures but could confirm that even in July there had been a healthy balance.

Gill Brain thanked Philip O'Brien for his excellent and very clear presentation.

It was proposed by Glenys Bettley, seconded by Sheila Duller, and agreed by a clear majority that the Annual Accounts for 2022/23 be approved. There were no votes against and 2 abstentions.

## **7. Resolutions**

Linda Young advised that no resolutions had been submitted by members but that the committee were bringing one to the AGM meeting. We continue to need Trustees to serve on our Management Committee. Under our current constitution Trustees can serve for 3 years and should then step down for at least a year. Some of our Trustees have offered to continue past their 3-year tenure in order to help with the smooth running of Swindon u3a. To facilitate this a change to the Constitution is proposed which will allow Trustees to serve up to 2 terms of 3 years before needing to step down. Third Age Trust, our umbrella organisation, has approved this change subject to the agreement of our membership.

Gill Rowe proposed, Ann Granger seconded, and it was unanimously agreed, that the Swindon u3a Constitution be amended to allow Trustees to serve up to 2 terms of 3 years without a break before stepping down.

## **8. Election of the Trustees**

Before moving on to the election of Trustees Gill Brain once again thanked the members of the Committee who served in 2022/23 and are not standing this year - Alex Cranswick, Gordon Wilson, Andrew Hancox and Sue Carvey. She also thanked those who have volunteered to stand for 2022/23.

Committee nominations were uncontested and so it was moved by Ruth Slade seconded by Dave Hewitt, and agreed unanimously that the following Trustees be elected:

- Chair: Gill Brain
- Vice Chair: Sonia Menadue
- Treasurer: (Vacancy)
- Secretary: Monica King

- Office: Sylvia Alexander
- Membership Liaison: Jill Kelly
- Accommodation: Chris Ockwell
- IT: Dave Todd
- Groups Coordinator: Sharon Finch
- Special Projects: Linda Young

## **9. Any Other Business**

Linda Young asked the members if there were further questions.

Charles Linfield commented that paying subscriptions was not straightforward since we no longer take cash or cheques. Several members had met with problems when they tried to pay via the PayPal link. As those members who are in Groups with venue costs will have to pay 3 times during the year, can it be sorted out before the next payment for Term 2.

Linda Young replied that the trustees want to keep the payment process simple. Payment by cheque had been discontinued because it was costing us too much per transaction. Cash payments created problems for our office staff. Inevitably there were a few teething problems with the new system but we are very hopeful that it will be much better for January 2024.

Ken Ivie referred to problems that have arisen since the closure of the Swindon branch of HSBC. Travel Group members tend to pay in cash and the Post Office will not accept large sums of cash. He had ended up having to travel to Devizes to deposit money into the bank recently.

Linda Young replied that she understood that the Swindon branch of HSBC was closed for refurbishment and Swindon u3a had not been informed in advance. One option was to pay into our account at the Post Office. She agreed that a solution needed to be found but understood that the Swindon branch of HSBC will be re-opening next month. Bonnie Milloy commented that it was possible to pay cash into the Post Office at West Swindon and Linda Young said that this would be looked into.

Pat Copestake asked how we intend to cope without a Treasurer.



Linda Young replied that unfortunately nobody had come forward to fill this role to date and we are continuing to seek one. However, we have a recently strengthened Finance Team and 2 new people are joining to take on the Deputy Treasurer tasks, so the essential work can be covered in the short term. Once a new Treasurer has been identified they will be co-opted as a Trustee by the Management Committee.

Gill Brain pointed out that there are 4 key Trustee roles that must be filled under Charity Commission and Third Age Trust rules. They are Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and General Secretary. Ultimately if any of those roles cannot be filled then Swindon u3a would have to close.

Bill Mead said that using PayPal can be problematic and asked whether we could go back to our old system of payment.

Linda Young replied that it is still possible to pay by other means such as bank transfer or credit/debit card. We prefer members to use PayPal because it goes directly into our system without the need for reconciliation. This saves our office staff a great deal of work. She pointed out that, although members are asked to join PayPal when making a payment, it is not necessary to do so as you can proceed as a guest. We will endeavour to make this clearer for the next round of payments.

#### **ACTION POINT: LINDA YOUNG TO REVIEW PAYMENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR JANUARY 2024 PAYMENTS**

Barend van der Sanden asked if we could provide details of what is involved in the Treasurer's role.

Linda Young said she would give the details to Barend outside of the meeting.

There being no further issues raised, Gill Brain again stressed how much work has been undertaken by the Trustees in supporting Swindon u3a. The more volunteers we have to share the load the easier and smoother it becomes for all. She asked all members to consider volunteering a few hours of their time to help.

The meeting closed at 3.20pm and members were invited to enjoy some refreshments.