

MAIDSTONE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 21st SEPTEMBER 2015 AT THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE, MAIDSTONE

PRESENT:

Trustees: Sir Michael Buckley, Mr I Owen, Mr J Cobbett, Mrs W Tull, Mr Simon Cook, Cllr Mr Rob Bird, Mrs S Hawkins, Mrs J Gibson

Members: Mr A Turner, Mr C Collins, Ms D Griffith, Mrs E Scutt, Ms E Bennett, Mrs H Hardy, Mr I Wedgewood, Mrs J Woods, Lady J Buckley, Mr M Cresswell, Mr M Ford, Mr M Dickson, Mrs P Cooper, Mrs R Cox, Mr R Bennett, Mrs S Malhotra

Non-members: Mr P Hardy, Mr R Pellant, Mrs C Judd, Miss S Russell, Cllr Mr P Carter, Mrs L Bessant, Mr C Barlow, Mrs T Weber, Mrs B Mitchell, Mr G Turner, Mrs J Woollacott, Mr P Julier, Mr J Fowler, Mr D Bruce, Mrs L Mason, Miss S Smith, Mrs J Banister, Miss G Alexandru, Mr N Pyman, Mrs M McFarlane, Mr J Clark, Miss D Woodroff, Mr M Jons, Cllr Mr D Butler, Mr I Park, Mrs C Gale, Mrs R Lovell, Miss S Ahern, Mr S Malhotra, Mr M Fitzgerald, Mr R Nash, Mr R Ash, Mrs A Bobinska, Mr C Turner, Mr P Gosling, Mr V Stamford, Mr M Hart, Cllr Ms A Hogg

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs M Ring, Mrs K D'Souza, Mr M D'Souza, Mr S. Thompson, Ms B Clark, Mr C Blundell, Mrs C McBride, Mr J Wilkins, Mr R Piercey, Mrs S Hibbard, Mrs S Rudd, Mrs S Ashby, Mr J Stewart, Mrs A Horne, Mrs L Dalton, Mrs L Green, Mrs M McGiveron, Ms G Ledger, Mrs M Nissen, Ms C Mills, Mr N Bussey, Mr M Carney, Mr D Ensinger, Mrs S Attridge, Ms B Hodson, Mr A Cromwell, District Judge Sullivan, Ms A Brookman, Mr G Singh, Cllr Mr T Sams, Cllr Mrs F Gooch, Cllr Mrs C Robertson, Ms D Hudd, Mr J Cross, Mrs S Chalker, Mrs A Broom, Mrs H Grant MP, Mr M Jones, Mr P Woodward, Mrs J Smith, Mr R Raymont, Mrs K Osborn, Mrs K Coleman, Mr P Greenstock, Mr S Jones, Mrs L Ritchie, Mrs P Wright, Mr J Clemens, Mrs N Rainger, Ms J Brogan, Mr M Blaber, Mrs P Garrett, Ms J Sage, Ms Z Grzymala, Mrs C McCullough, Mrs S Brown, Ms K Strouts, Mrs J Beer, Mr B Curtis, Mrs L Sayer, Ms E Rantzen

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

It was proposed by Mr M Fitzgerald, seconded by Mrs W Tull, and agreed that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 22nd September 2014 be accepted as a true record and they were duly signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING – None

4. REPORT OF THE TRUSTEE BOARD

It was proposed by Mr I Owen, seconded by Cllr Mr R Bird, and agreed that the report of the Trustee Board be accepted.

5. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORT OF THE AUDITORS

A précis of the accounts is shown in the Annual Report and a full copy of the accounts is available for anyone who would like a copy. Please let Mr Malhotra know if this is required. It was proposed by Mrs M McFarlane, seconded by Mr I Wedgewood, and agreed that the Annual Accounts and Report of the Auditors be accepted.

6. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

It was proposed by Mr J Cobbett, seconded by Mrs S Hawkins, and agreed that Day Smith and Hunter be appointed as auditors for the following year, remuneration to be fixed at the next Finance Committee meeting.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

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

The Chair of the Bureau's Trustee Board, Sir Michael Buckley, handed over the Chair of the AGM to The Deputy 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. He 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 The National Coal Board which became British Coal, working in Medical Services and the Treasurers Department.

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

9. PROPOSED RE-ELECTION OF TRUSTEES

Mr J Cobbett and Mrs W Tull 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.

Mr Simon Cook and Mrs J Gibson stood for election to the Trustee Board in accordance with the Bureau's Memorandum and Articles of Association. Both had previously served as co-opted members and both were 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 2015/16 are:

Mrs S Hawkins (Vice-Chair), Mr J Cobbett (Hon. Treasurer), Mrs W Tull, Mr I Owen, Cllr Mr R Bird, Mr S Cook and Mrs J Gibson and 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 M McFarlane (Paid Staff), Mrs H Hardy (Voluntary Staff) and Mr S Malhotra (Bureau Chief Executive and Company Secretary).

11. PRESENTATION OF BUREAU CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Sir M Buckley reported that during 2014-15, which had been a much calmer year than the previous two, we saw c.7,300 clients and dealt with approximately 25,000 client contacts. Whilst this represented a fall in the number of clients seen, there was a marked increase in the complexity of the problems raised by clients; and to effectively cope with this the Bureau has had to become in some respects an entirely different organization.

The Bureau was founded at the height of World War 2 on 1st April 1940, when, in many ways, the world was a simpler place. However, one thing that remains as true today as it was back then is the commitment and professionalism of Bureau staff.

Last year was a better year financially for the Bureau and Sir Michael thanked all the funders who have contributed monetarily to our Service, and especially Maidstone Borough Council, the Advice Services Transition Fund, and the J Paul Getty Memorial Trust. It was also very encouraging that the Bureau had been awarded including the Pension Wise contract for the whole of Kent and Medway. This would contribute substantially to the Bureau's finances in the current year.

Finally, as Sir Michael is stepping down, this will be his last report as Chair of our Trustee Board and he expressed his heartfelt thanks to all his fellow Trustees, volunteers and paid staff for all the professionalism and dedication that they have shown during his tenure.

Mr M Fitzgerald expressed thanks to Sir Michael for the diligence that he has shown whilst carrying out his duties as Chair of the Bureau's Trustee Board.

12. PRESENTATION OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Mr S Malhotra thanked the Deputy Mayor, Trustees, Volunteers and paid Staff for their support over the previous year. He also thanked Maidstone Borough Council, whose unwavering support allows Bureau management to confidently bid for other streams of funding.

When the Bureau was originally founded, it had just three members of staff and was situated within Maidstone Social Services. Today, we have approximately 100 employees both paid and voluntary.

Mr Malhotra joined Maidstone Citizens Advice in 1998 and at the time there were very few male Bureau Managers. Today there are approximately 350 Bureaux countrywide and the workforce demographic more accurately reflects the community that it serves.

As previously mentioned, our work has become more complex and as a result our volunteers have had to be trained to an increasingly high standard. The mainstay of our work continues to be through face-to-face and telephone contact with our clients but there is a growing demand nowadays for digital communication.

Over the last year, we have continued to provide our core service at both Bower Terrace and the Maidstone Gateway. This has been supplemented by funding for assistance to victims of domestic abuse, as well as monies from the Maidstone and District branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

As result of revenue received from the Big Lottery's Advice Services Transition Fund, we have been able to set up the Maidstone Advice Services Partnership, which as the name suggests is a Partnership of charities based in the Borough of Maidstone, with the express aim of improving access for local residents to advice and help on a wide variety of issues. The Partnership also possesses a training function, through which a large number of Partner's front-line workers have been upskilled by Bureau Specialists who have adapted their working practices and as a result have become highly effective trainers.

During the course of the year, Citizens Advice has forwarded to Bureaux a number of consultation documents, each of which required a comprehensive and detailed response from Trustees as well as paid and voluntary staff and Mr Malhotra thanked everyone who had contributed to the process.

A great deal of hard work has also been invested in the securing and delivery of the Pension Wise contract and we are currently one of the highest performing Delivery Centres in the country.

Mr Malhotra likened the Bureau to a machine, in which each department corresponds to a vital cog in that machine and without which, the entire mechanism would grind to a shuddering halt.

Mr Malhotra was absent for medical reasons from the Bureau for a large proportion of 2014 and he praised all those involved in maintaining the smooth running of the Service whilst he was away.

We continue to meet our client's expectations and respond to their ever more complex needs as well as the changes impressed upon us by Citizens Advice and partner organizations. It is also necessary for us to continue to work within the constraints of our funding schemes and although the future is not yet written, the versatility of our Service will allow us to work smarter as well as harder.

In summation, Mr Malhotra thanked funders, Trustees, paid and voluntary staff and in particular Sir Michael Buckley for all his support in helping to secure and deliver new streams of funding and by extension, develop our Service.

13. INTRODUCTION OF AND PRESENTATION BY GUEST SPEAKER

The Deputy-Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Derek Butler, introduced Cllr Mr Paul Carter CBE, Leader of Kent County Council.

Cllr Carter became Leader of Kent County Council in October 2005. From his election to the County Council in 1997 until he assumed the leadership, Cllr Carter held responsibility for the Education portfolio overseeing the education of 240,000 children in 600 schools and a further 32,000 3 & 4 year olds in early years. He was and remains especially committed to transforming education and oversaw the introduction of an exciting 14-16 vocational education programme in Kent. He has also fought hard to retain special schools to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs are given the support and help they need to reach their full potential.

Cllr Carter believes passionately that public services should at all times put the customer (residents) first, be as free as possible from bureaucracy, delivering quality and excellent value for money. In September 2008, Cllr Carter was elected Chairman of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) which has since been replaced with a new organisation, South East England Councils (SEEC), set up to champion quality of life in the South East. SEEC represents all 74 Councils in the region and Cllr Carter has been elected as its first Chairman. SEEC will work closely with the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) to deliver a new Single Regional Strategy.

Outside local government, Cllr Carter still runs a number of land based businesses in property, construction and retail businesses in central London. Historically, developing large residential developments, Cllr Carter was a founding partner of Gander PLC the first property company on AIM (Alternative Investment Market). His retail businesses have all been construction related; builders' merchants, architectural ironmongery and decorators' merchants. He is married with three grown up children and regularly competes in many aspects of motor sport, particularly in pre-war sports car racing, rallying and trialing.

Cllr Carter thanked Citizens Advice Maidstone for inviting him to speak at their 75th Annual General Meeting and paid tribute to the work that they do for the residents of the borough of Maidstone.

His presentation was wide-ranging and touched on a number of newsworthy topics including proposed levels of immigration as a result of the current refugee crisis in the Middle East and the potential consequences of the local government funding cuts.

As a passionate advocate of social welfare reform, Cllr Carter is on a mission to instigate a health and social care revolution within Kent. As access to funding becomes harder and budgets get tighter, the need to help and support the voluntary and not-for-profit sector becomes even greater and the social value that such organizations can demonstrate needs to be taken in to consideration during any bidding process.

Finally, Cllr Carter reminded those present that each elected Kent County Council Councillor has a budget of £20,000 available for local agencies as they endeavour to help and support the residents of the County and he felt sure that with such backing, the Bureau would continue to go from strength to strength.

14. VOTE OF THANKS

Mrs M McFarlane thanked Cllr Carter for his presentation and the positive nature of his message and both Cllr Carter and the Deputy-Mayor were presented with a small token of the Bureau's appreciation for contributing to our AGM.

15. CLOSING REMARKS BY HONORARY CHAIR

The Deputy-Mayor, Cllr Derek Butler, recognized that there are new challenges ahead but was confident that the Bureau will continue to meet them and as a result, prosper. He also emphasized the strong and long lasting link between the Bureau and Maidstone Borough Council and expressed his wish that it continues for at least another 75 years!

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.10PM.

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 Rob Bird. No further nominations were received and, proposed by Mr John Cobbett and seconded by Mr Simon Cook, 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 Mr John Cobbett 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 Mr Rob Bird and seconded by Mrs Sharon Hawkins, 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.