

Leicester City of Sanctuary AGM 2021
10.30am 16th October 2021 / St. Martin's House

Minutes

1. Introductions and Apologies

Attendees

Pete Hobson, Shali Bullough, Alex Jakeman, Jenny Dnes, Jenny Westmoreland, Mick Walker, Sonia Bullough, Chris Bollough, Sheila Bonajee, John Lassells, Margaret Bonney, Eileen McKellican, Eric Nkundumubano, Joel Chitsa, Jim Matthews, Phil (Surname), Helen Everett

Apologies

Hagar Al-Katheri, Danny Myers, Golden Ngwenya, Phil Hardy, Sadiq Ahamed

2. Minutes of the 2020 AGM

The minutes from the 2020 AGM were accepted with the following amendments: -

- Second Bullet Point in section 3 within the *After Covid-19* section, Maggie notes that the shopping vouchers were not from Tesco.
- Comment adding that the Lottery had continued to be flexible throughout the Covid period in terms of funding.

3. Annual Report on Activities for 2020-21

Shali Bullough took the meeting through the highlights of activities for the period and noted that while Covid has completely changed what we do, our mission to welcome asylum seekers in and around Leicester and to help them rebuild their lives, develop their skills and feel like a part of the community had remained the same.

- LCoS spent last winter operating from the Chapel Garden whenever we could around lockdowns, giving away essential supplies where we were able to.
- Returned to the Bridge once restrictions lifted, where we adapted to running a number of different activities for small groups, as running a full room of 80 was not feasible due to the continued presence of the Covid virus
- We're pleased to report that many of our old regular service users have now got their Leave to Remain and have taken steps towards either employment or training.
- LCoS has seen some staff changes too - We have lost Shabana but have added Chloe and Anna to the team, who bring skills in Casework and ESOL respectively.
- We've been focusing on asylum seekers who are new to Leicester as well as those housed in the two hotels, who are typically young men with fairly basic English skills.

- Thanks to Phil & Carol who run two of the English classes at the Bridge - one basic and practical class, and another more advanced one!
- Focussed on health and wellbeing with the help of Leicester City in the Community, and have been getting groups and men and women to the outdoor multigym just next to the Bridge for exercise each week
- Families are a priority for us - we spent the summer organising family trips to Abbey Park and Maggie has been running a toddler group.
- Our volunteer Nicola distributes large amounts of household goods such as toiletries and clothes monthly!
- Special thanks to the local community who remained very supportive and engaged. The Unitarians stepped in and provided much needed outdoor space for us, and we've received about 5 car loads of toiletries from local schools and a church!
- Another special round of thanks to our committed team of volunteers who have given so much support doing all sorts of different jobs from running classes on Zoom to organising the football every week for 30+ young men. Thanks Phil! We wouldn't be able to run LCoS without all of you guys.
- A quote from one of our service users: *"LCoS is all about humanity - they don't mind about your religion or what country you're from. They welcome everyone. I have mental health problems so 6 days of my week are hard. But that is different on the day I come to LCoS. They are like my family".*

Questions were asked as follows:

- Jenny Westmoreland: are we still accepting donated goods? Shali responded that we're unable to take too much now because of severe storage limitations, but if there are items for young children, then Baby Basics would be a good place to donate, or Open Hands.
- John Lassells - how do we cooperate with other groups in the city, such as City Retreat? Shali answered that the City Retreat is definitely on our radar and that they had donated items to us around Ramadan in the past. Pete noted that liaison generally across the voluntary sector could be difficult, but that the Leicester City MAF was chaired by LCoS and the city council was beginning to get more involved in this area
- Jenny Westmoreland: raised a concern that Kennedy House feels as though it's currently working in a bubble and are unable to get people vaccinated. Shali responded that it was impossible to message individual service users there without contact details and permission. Eric added that the best course of action was to ensure that everyone was registered with a GP and to take action on an individual by individual basis.
- Pete Hobson: asked Helen Everett how she felt, as an After 18 trustee, about the levels of liaison between LCoS and After 18. Helen felt it was a tricky question to answer as Trustees only meet every 3 months but Sheila Mosley as chair would know more about this.

- Margaret Edgington: observed a general keenness to help from the public clearly, but little clarity as to what was the best method to go about doing this. Pete answered that LCoS is an umbrella organisation which works to prevent groups from falling through the cracks with extended signposting. Shali added that the Afghan refugees are generally well catered for whilst they're in the hotels in terms of material goods and that they're also receiving English lessons - but what people want is permanent accommodation.
- Mick Walker: felt that the Service User demographic at LCoS has shifted in a healthy way. People who had received Leave to Remain had been able to move on and that the new faces that we see are of diverse nationalities.
- Jenny Dnes: praised the flexibility demonstrated by LCoS throughout the lockdown period and the ideas that we had developed throughout.

Pete Hobson invited the meeting to formally receive the report, which it was.

4. Financial Statement for the year ending 31st March 2021 and Independent Examiner's report

Jenny Dnes took the meeting through the 2020-21 Finance Report. The opening balance for the year was **£43,261.36**. We saw a total income of **£86,479.51** and a total expenditure of **£53,902.17**. LCoS ended the year with a total of **£70,337.82**.

Jenny noted that it had been a good year for one-off donations and that we had the beginning of the Lottery fund as well. Expenditure was lower than usual, due to food and travel costs being decreased. She closed the presentation by stating that we were in a good position, but needed to keep an eye out for new opportunities still.

Questions as follows

- Jenny Westmoreland asked what we were doing to distribute the funds we had in the bank as Ben Margolis had mentioned to her that we were the only organisation in the movement holding these sorts of levels. Shali explained that we had been giving money to the Red Cross to distribute to those facing immediate financial hardship and digital poverty. Pete added that as a charity we're doing more than we ever have before but that Trustees do keep a close eye on the levels of funding that we have. As with any charity employing staff, we have a reserves policy, which underpins our staffing levels, which is key to the way we currently work.
- Eric stated that while formal funding of LCoS from the Red Cross had ended, a Memorandum of Understanding had been issued to commit the two organisations to working together into the future. Pete thanked the Red Cross for all their help so far over the years and that LCoS was fortunate to have Eric as a trustee, who was able to have one foot in both organisations.

5. Appointment of Trustees

The following Trustees stood down at the end of the year: -

- Margaret Bonney
- Ajay Aggarwal
- Golden Ngwenya

No new trustees were proposed for appointment at this stage, but in line with LCoS policy a small Nominations committee (currently Pete, Shali, Maggie and Hagara) will be looking for new trustees and when suitable individuals had been identified, they would be presented to the trustees for cooption and then to membership at the next AGM.

Pete noted that After 18 are also currently looking for Trustees and we are looking to advertise and recruit jointly where possible.

6. Chair's Remarks

A remarkable year - as Report shows since pandemic hit us all in March 2020 we changed, adapted and kept going.

Last AGM was held online, a year ago - at that point we were all wondering what a coming 'second wave' of Covid-9 might mean. Pretty soon we found out - and so again we changed, adapted and kept going first on-line and via WhatsApp, then, in the spring slowly emerged into a new way of working.

Really grateful to The Chapel for giving us garden space to re-open in March, and back to The Bridge in July - but all with a difference.

No longer 'all covers' - unlikely to revert to that for some time, if ever: now planned activity by appointment, be it from first registering with us as a User through to English conversation, entry to education or employment. It's a further solution - some things maybe lost, others gained - but funders like it!

Will need to continue to evolve - now plan to review the Strategic Plan 2019-22 in the spring, and see what looks most used to the ache we occupy.

Later on we'll look at some numbers relating to the position in Leicester today, and Eric will tell us something of what the future might look like from a RC perspective, but one thing's for sure - the issue is staying with us, and our core values, vision and mission will be needed as much as ever.

End with thanks to the people who make this possible:

- fellow trustees, especially to those stepping down this year: Ajay, Margaret, Golden. Also Jenny, both as vice chair and keeping a close eye on finance
- key volunteers, working at every level, some week in week out, others less frequently but equally importantly

- wonderful and growing staff team that enables us to deliver so much more, and more effectively: Alex back of house; new coordinators Chloe and Anna;
- and of course Shali as coordinator, now doing the Clore Social Leadership course (6 months): a tribute to her and to us.

Challenges lie ahead. Reminder of our Vision, Mission and Values.

Our VISION - that all people fleeing violence and persecution are provided with sanctuary and are given opportunities to thrive

Our MISSION - to welcome asylum seekers and refugees in and around Leicester, and support them to rebuild their lives, develop their skills and feel part of the community

Our VALUES - Welcome, Empathy, Empowerment, Education and Cooperation.

7. Any Members' issues

Mick noted that the Drop In gave us an informal method of getting into contact with people who wanted to work with us and provided links to other organisations - so many that it could occasionally feel overwhelming. He reflected on the fact that liaising in this manner takes time and capacity and it would be a challenge in the future - and that we need to be realistic as to how much we can do with other organisations.

Shali added to this that we were of course still trying to deal with other groups and were looking to see if we could get a Near Neighbours grant to facilitate this. Pete questions as to whether the future of LCoS would be as some sort of networking group - and that Kat Gibson does this sort of work very effectively at the Diocese.

Jenny Dnes stated that from a higher level perspective, it feels as though there is a lot of support for Asylum Seekers and that we needed to work out how we could help people help - and that that perhaps we needed to look at ourselves more as a conduit for this. Pete agreed that there must be a way to tap this sort of generosity. Mick stated that continued support for the Right to Work would be critical.

John Lassells added as well that during his time working with TREC during the lockdown he had seen how much people wanted to help - not just in the city but also the county.

To conclude the meeting, Pete showed a series of Slides containing information about the hotels holding Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the city, provided by trustee Cllr Danny Myers

Non-Afghan Hotels – general asylum seekers, who are very likely to stay in Leicester if they are granted leave to remain.

Afghan Emergency scheme Hotels for those who arrived up to 31 August - paid for by the Home Office with Leicester City Council providing the wrap around support from October 4th.
Scheme ACRS - Those at risk from regime, i.e. journalists, political opponent but not those employed by the UK army. Both sets are to be settled into homes across the UK; this process has been a source of stress

Permanent Settlement in Leicester

- At least 60 people/10 households from the Afghan scheme will permanently settle in Leicester
- There are many more local authorities offering housing for Afghan families than is the case for the mainstream system.

Pete then invited Eric to share his perceptions of the situation and challenges facing Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK.

- The Home Office has committed to supporting homeless asylum seekers, although really they have been forced and shamed into it.
- Many people are being asked to vacate accommodation and are now facing homelessness and destitution. The Red Cross has been trying to assist them in appealing - and if this is successful an independent judge will adjudicate. Some success has been seen here but often the judge will rule them non-eligible.
- Afghan asylum seekers can now put in a fresh claim due to the change in circumstance in their home country, and NEST will be crucial here - and more people will be needed there as the argument of continued accommodation from the perspective of public health is starting to disappear.
- The Red Cross will continue to work with Leicester City of Sanctuary and assess who is accessing our Emergency Fund.
- New hotels are being opened and one located on the A46 are struggling with local services due to the remote location; there is little that can be done outside of signposting them to what local services exist.
- Asylum Seekers in hotels have often been in them for quite some time and need to be helped to understand that they just need to wait.

Jenny Westmoreland asked whether there was any chance of the Hosting Scheme making a return. Eric answered that there isn't much capacity to manage something like this, especially as the people need to be carefully selected as to be properly equipped to support an Asylum Seeker long term. There is also a national scheme for this.