Draft Minutes of 2023 Annual General Meeting

Saturday 18 November 2023
Held in person at 55 Broadway and online via Zoom video conferencing

Present:

Chair: Jessica Metheringham

Members in person - not all of these members were necessarily present for all of the meeting

Andy Manning, Michael Sinclair, Stephen Gosling, Ray Ward, Rebecca Warren, Antony Frost, Virginia Morck, Jane Reed, Peter Hirst, Michael Wells, Pamela Ritchie, Stuart Hill, Jacob Webb, Luke Williams, Marisha Ray, Catherine Bearder, Trevor Dickety

Members online - not all of these members were present for all of the meeting

Carole Shorney, Catherine Royce, Elizabeth Baker, Geoff Mills, Helen Grogan, Paul Gardner, Jenni Chan, Jane Robins, Jo Hughes, Pat Coleman, Paul Espley, Valerie Forrest, Hugh Dibley, Vicky Seddon, Graeme Watts, Peter Buckman, Sarah Page , Venetia Cane, Alan Luckcraft, Jane Wood, Cormac Manning, Geoffrey Woodcock, Mary Southcott (MS), Jennifer Boag, John Newham

Others attending in person Ali Gunn (United Response - co-opted onto UD's Council)

Staff members present

Grace Barnett, Tom Brake, Steve Gilmore, Alice Jeffrey and Shaun Roberts

Proxy voters

The following members voted by proxy:

Raj Tiwary, Keith Sharp

Apologies:

Keith Sharp, Stephen Carter, Tony Marsh

Simon Howard (staff)

The AGM opened at 13:00. There were 21 members present in person at the start of the meeting and 25 online , but attendance varied over the course of the meeting.

1. Approval of the AGM agenda

Jess set out the timetable for the agenda (item C in the AGM papers). This was put to a vote.

Proposal: To approve the agenda for the 2023 AGM (including timings for the motions).
Decision: Approved.

> In person
> For 21
> Against 0
> Abstain 0
>
> Online
> For 9
> Against 0
> Abstain 0
>
> Total
> For 30
> Against 0
> Abstain 0

The agenda for the meeting was approved.

1. Approval of the 2022 AGM Minutes
The Chair introduced the draft minutes of the 2022 AGM which were published in the AGM pack (item C). A link is provided below.

2022 AGM Draft Minutes.docx

No changes were proposed and they were deemed an accurate record of last year's AGM.

> **Proposal:** To approve the minutes of the 2022 AGM.

Decision: Approved without any changes.

In person
For 20
Against 1
Abstain 2

Online
For 8
Against 0
Abstain 3

Proxy
For 2
Against 0
Abstain 0

Total
For 30
Against 1
Abstain 5

The minutes were approved without any changes.

2. Approval of the Director's Report

Prior to the formal start of the AGM, written reports were provided by the Chair, and verbal reports were given by Alice Jeffrey - Campaigns office, Grace Barnett - Head of Membership and Database Officer, Shaun Roberts - Director of Campaigns and Digital, Steve Gilmore - Head of Media and Tom Brake - the Director.

Shaun also took members through a polling presentation.

A written Director's report was circulated to members prior to the AGM (item D in the AGM paper). A link to the report is provided below. A vote was taken to approve the report.

Proposal: To approve the Director's Report to the AGM.
Decision: Approved.

In person
For 23
Against 0
Abstain 0

Online
For 11
Against 0
Abstain 0

Proxy
For
Against
Abstain

Total
For 34
Against 0
Abstain 0

The Director's report was approved.

3. Council Report on 2022 Policy Motions

The Chair referred members to section E of the AGM pack which contained the Council's written responses to the two policy motions passed at the 2022 AGM (for ease of reference they are provided below).

2022 Policy Motions - Report Back

Luke Williams explained that at the 2022 AGM, members remitted back to the Council, for further consideration, two motions.

The first motion was Alicia Hull's. The original motion is set out below. In the absence of Peter Crouch (the original seconder) it was seconded by Virginia Monck.

1 - Democratic Reforms And Climate Change

Proposer: *Alicia Hull*
Seconder: *Peter Crouch*

This AGM notes:

At this time of economic collapse, social distress and gross inequality, the major threat to our survival is imminent catastrophic climate breakdown and species extinction.

The government is ignoring the issue. It has gone back on its promises. It is hastening disaster by promoting growth to increase carbon emissions. The one certainty is that climate change will not be addressed.

This issue is so urgent we cannot waste time hoping for a change in policy, nor wait for a general election, nor assume another party in power would act decisively enough in time.

Our current system of government is broken. Its top-down control, unrepresentative voting system, toxic party hostility, and hostile press mean we cannot install an effective government in time using conventional means.

This is the context for this motion.

This AGM believes:

Our only hope in this crisis is to appeal directly to the public – the other half of democratic government.

Campaigning needs to focus on informing the public and bringing them together to produce a People's Manifesto, using all the knowledge and values of civil society.

Priority issues for Unlock Democracy such as a written constitution, a proportional voting system and an inclusive democracy will be central to this manifesto and will ensure emergency action to combat climate breakdown and support people in the current economic collapse is prioritised.

In this work Unlock Democracy should cooperate with other groups which share our aims. This should include Diem25, (Democracy in Europe Movement) as they have been working on a People's Manifesto since 2016, have a New Green Deal for Europe and an established system for developing policies from the grass roots.

This AGM resolves:

That Unlock Democracy demands a National Government of Unity for one term to be directed by citizens' assemblies to tackle the current environmental, social and economic crises and restore real democratic government.

And that we work with others to produce the Manifesto.

1. **Democratic Reforms And Climate Change**

Discussions within the climate change working group established to work on the motion, and in Council, led to the drawing up of UD's climate change statement. This is now on UD's website:

[Climate Change Statement - Council](#)

The statement is reviewed annually.

An internal sustainability plan for UD and Rodell (UD's property management company) has also been drawn up.

The plan is reviewed annually.

Action TB: write a blog post on Unlock Democracy's response to climate change and publicise what we are doing on sustainability on social media.

The second motion was Marisha Ray's. The original motion is set out below. In the absence of Duncan Ponikwer (the original seconder) it was seconded by Jane Reed.

2 - Improving Unlock Democracy's diversity

Proposer: *Marisha Ray*

UNLOCK DEMOCRACY

Seconder: *Duncan Ponikwer*

Improving Unlock Democracy's Diversity

The AGM recognises that Unlock Democracy already campaigns for changes which will benefit many including members of visible minoritised communities and other under represented groups, nevertheless it is not an organisation with substantial visible diversity. This can be and often is taken as an unspoken sign of ethnocentricity by the under-represented.

The AGM recognises that:

1. Many people from under-represented groups and minoritised communities find a lack of visible diversity off putting and take this as a sign of a bad attitude and latent hostility towards people who are not White even when this is not or may not ever have been present at all.

2. Many people from all ethnic communities and backgrounds find the presence, active engagement of and dialogue with a diverse group an attractive feature of productive, fruitful and fast moving political movements and all organisations.

3. A lack of display of empathy, free flowing dialogue with and incorporation of thoughts from people from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities can be and often is taken as a sign of ethnocentricity.

4. Unlock Democracy already has among its teams all the skills necessary to address the possibility of an appearance of ethnocentricity.

5. Unlock Democracy is not yet deploying its resources in a way to best engage with minoritised communities and people who are not White and this can improve rapidly.

6. It is necessary to immediately address any current impression of ethnocentricity among people from diverse communities and under-represented groups who decline to become involved at present.

7. An appearance of ethnocentricity and the successful practice of inclusion do not fit comfortably together.

The AGM instructs the Council to rapidly investigate the following measures to improve diversity and better test inclusion:

1. Co-option of at least two experienced board members from a variety of organisations, who are from visible of minority ethnic communities, diaspora communities or international experts in diversity to each formal and informal body which are active in governance of Unlock Democracy

2. Reverse mentoring for all who participate in the governance of the organisation, one of the most effective methods of addressing a lack of diversity.

3. Training on implicit bias using free materials.

4. Awareness of the diversity of speakers, guests and all materials made available to members, supporters and followers.

5. Creation of a year round online book club or reading list with a structured, interactive, discursive element on the Unlock Democracy themes which are most likely to appeal to an ethnically diverse audience.

6. That correspondence to elected board members on inclusion, diversity and the comfort of people from under-represented, disadvantaged or groups conventionally excluded from politics, be initially acknowledged and responded to by an appropriate person in a substantive manner indicating a willingness to engage in dialogue in a reasonable time.

7. That the fast and flexible Equality Impact Assessment methodology be used with respect to all new campaigns and that it be developed within Unlock Democracy through its application to current campaigns.

8. Unlock Democracy has and has had offices in the London Boroughs of Islington, Hackney and Westminster and should engage with the local communities in these and other areas where no one ethnic community is a majority in order to test and develop campaigns which are relevant to all ethnic groups.

9. Ideas gathered from correspondents should be acknowledged when these are taken up should the correspondent so wish.

10. That the Council investigates small tweaks in present arrangements to improve diversity and give the organisation a still more welcoming feel.

11. That the Council recognises that expecting people from diverse communities to volunteer to undertake tasks that they dislike - in effect working for free - when they cannot afford to do so is frequently a behaviour which is construed as racism by the members of those communities.

Report Back

2. Improving Unlock Democracy's diversity

The action UD has taken following the reference back is set out here.

[AGM Unlock Democracy – Improving Diversity Policy Motion](#)

The diversity motion is reviewed annually.

TB explained that in relation to proposal 8 whilst this was rejected, TB has recently built a relationship with a sixth form school 100 metres from UD's offices.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that:

Action TB: identify ways to measure progress against the proposals in the Diversity Policy

4. Finance Items

4.1. Rodell

Stephen Gosling (SG) gave an update on the progress of the Rodell project.

On the 6th November 2023, the Rodell accounts were signed off by both the Rodell Board and Unlock Democracy's Council (as the shareholders of Rodell). The accounts follow.

[Rodell Properties full accounts.PDF](#)

A discussion about the report and Rodell ensued.

Following a question from Marisha Ray, SG confirmed Rodell is complying with all building regulations and planning considerations which should address concerns around the risk of flooding.

Action TB: ensure pictures of the Grays Inn Road development are regularly circulated.

4.2. Unlock Democracy Accounts

Members were referred to section N which contained a link to the accounts. The link is provided below.

[Unlock Democracy accounts 31.3.23.pdf](Unlock%20Democracy%20accounts%2031.3.23.pdf)

Tom Brake highlighted some aspects of Unlock Democracy's accounts.

A vote to approve the accounts was then proposed.

Proposal: To approve Unlock Democracy's accounts for 22/23.
Decision: Approved.

> In person
> For 23
> Against 0
> Abstain 0
>
> Online
> For 12
> Against 0
> Abstain 0
>
> Proxy
> For 1
> Against
> Abstain 1
>
> Total
> For 36
> Against 0
> Abstain 1

The accounts were approved.

Tom Brake then explained that Thorne Lancaster Parker, 4th Floor, Venture House, 27-29 Glasshouse Street London W1B 5DF will remain UD's reporting accountants.

Proposal: To note Thorne Lancaster Parker as Unlock Democracy's reporting accountants
Decision: Noted

5. Risk management statement

Jess talked through the risk management statement, section G of the AGM agenda pack. The report is available to Rodell and Council members here.

Risk management report 2023

The report highlighted a number of risks, including the risk of a GDPR breach and of a virus infecting our IT systems. Mitigations are in place,

The risk of Best for Britain (B4B) moving and UD needing to find office space is addressed by regular dialogue with B4B on progress with the planning applications on 55 Broadway and Rodell's budget showing extra costs being incurred in the future on more expensive alternative office space.

Following a question by Marisha Ray it was confirmed that whilst UD does not have a comprehensive crisis management strategy, there are areas (such as the loss of the campaigns database) that have been investigated. The risk management strategy is designed to avoid crises.

The report was approved by a show of hands.

6. Constitutional amendments

There was one constitutional amendment for the AGM to consider.

1 - The quorum for Council meetings

Proposer: Luke Williams
Seconder: Stuart Hill

The amendment would read: *"The quorum for Council meetings shall be half of the voting membership of the Council (rounded up if the number of Council members is an odd number)."*

We propose that this is added after sub-section 4.1.8 of the constitution, and will constitute a new subsection – 4.1.9.

LK explained that the amendment was being proposed because there is no quorum for Council meetings in the constitution currently.

20 minutes was allocated for this debate.

A vote was then taken on whether to approve the amendment (which required a 2/3rds majority).

Proposal: To approve the constitutional amendment
Decision: Approved.

In person
For 21
Against 0
Abstain 0

Online
For 13
Against 0
Abstain 0

Proxy
For 1
Against 0
Abstain 1

Total
For 35
Against 0
Abstain 1

The amendment was passed.

6. Policy Motions

The Chair introduced the two policy motions items (item J in the AGM pack). No amendments had been tabled with the required 48 hours notice to be automatically considered at the AGM.

1 - Electoral Reform as a primary objective

Proposer: Stephen Gosling
Seconder: Catherine Bearder

This AGM notes that the forthcoming General Election will be the first in decades where we might hope for reform of our political system instead of just another party see-saw.

Unlock Democracy believes that to ensure we're not diverted by the many facets of democratic reform and our inadequate, illegitimate constitutional settlement we should redouble our efforts to collaborate with other organisations in an effort to bring about Electoral Reform as our specific primary objective; not as a silver bullet that solves everything but as the single greatest opportunity to "level up" power.

This AGM calls for us to maintain that focus from now until when the GE, and any resulting Electoral Reform negotiations, are complete.

SG set out his reasons for bringing forward the motion.

PH proposed an amendment to the motion.

His amendment was to add (PR) after Electoral Reform eg ....*we should redouble our efforts to collaborate with other organisations in an effort to bring about Electoral Reform (PR) as our specific primary objective*

TB set out UD's team desire to place greater emphasis on campaigning (in coalition with other organisations) for PR in the run-up to the General Election and in the immediate aftermath if there is a hung parliament or a small government majority. He explained that this would not mean dropping other campaign strands as UD is aware that wider reforms are needed (as MS underlined) . The PR campaign would be both public and party/parliamentary facing. He also explained that UD would not campaign for Electoral Reform if it involved abolishing elections!

The amendment was put to a vote.

Proposal: To approve the amendment to the motion.
Decision: Defeated.

In person
For 2
Against 17
Abstain 1

Online
For 6
Against 6
Abstain 0

Proxy
For
Against
Abstain

Total
For 8
Against 23
Abstain 1

The amendment was defeated. A vote on the unamended (original) motion was then held.

Proposal: To approve the motion
Decision: Approved.

In person
For 19
Against 0
Abstain 1

Online
For 16
Against 0
Abstain 0

Proxy
For 2
Against 0
Abstain 0

Total
For 37
Against 0
Abstain 1

The unamended motion on Electoral Reform as a primary objective was carried.

2 - Campaigning for an Office for Accountability

Proposer: Peter Buckman

Seconder: Vicky Seddon

This AGM is concerned that there is no mechanism to ensure politicians abide by the pledges they make to get elected.

One of Unlock Democracy's principal aims is to hold politicians to account.

This AGM therefore suggests that Unlock Democracy develops the idea of an independent regulator to be called the Office for Accountability, with a view to campaigning for its implementation.

Peter Buckman set out his reasons for proposing the setting up of an Office of Accountability.

In the debate that followed questions were raised about whether working on this project would divert attention from other projects, who would appoint the independent regulator, what constitutes a pledge, whether manifestos could be legally binding. Speakers spoke both for and against the motion.

The motion on the Office of Accountability was put.

Proposal: To approve the motion
Decision: Defeated.

In person
For 9
Against 7
Abstain 3

Online
For 2
Against 7
Abstain 2

Proxy
For 1
Against 0
Abstain 1

Total
For 12
Against 14
Abstain 6

7. Appreciation
After some closing remarks from the Chair, including appreciation for all who had a hand in organising the AGM, the meeting closed.

AGM concluded at 16:35