



North Western Reform Synagogue

Minutes of 84th Annual General Meeting, held
Sunday 7 May 2017 at 10.15am.

Present: Peter Backman (President), Noeleen Cohen (Chair), Russell Baum, Lanny Silverstone, Robert Weiner, John Cohen, David Brown, Mark Harris, Tracy Harris, Ruth Weiner, Fran Moscow, Caronne Graham, Juliette Overlander, Michael Overlander, Jon Epstein, Gary Lipman, Gillian van Gelder, Andrew Gellert, Irit Burkeman, Margaret Harris, Paul Harris, Rosalind Black, Howard Bogod, Helen Bloom, Nick Morris, Peter Levy, Colette Levy, Alan Brudney, Sue Haskel, Cyril Savage, Edward Gold, Jeremy Baum, Nicola Feuchtwanger, Ruth Smilg, Anne Towse, Ellen Gilbert, Annabelle Daiches, Richard Fraiman, Michael Simon, Miriam Grabiner, Clare Lubin, Tony Littman, Rabbi Mark Goldsmith, Adam Martin

Apologies: Rabbi Josh Levy, Nikki Van de Zyl, Gordon Smith, Judy Smith, Janine Clements, Gloria Abramoff, David Finlay, Alan Perry, Naomi Perry, Cheryl Brodie, Mark Ebner, Gill Epstein

1. Welcome by Peter Backman (President):

Peter Backman welcomed members to the AGM.

2. Noeleen Cohen (Chair) presented her report to the meeting.

3. Approval of minutes of the 83rd Annual General Meeting held on 15 May 2016:

- a. Jon Epstein noted that there were some sections of the minutes which contained square brackets. He was concerned about this. He was assured that the square brackets would be removed from the final draft.

A resolution to approve the minutes was proposed by Jon Epstein and seconded by Fran Moscow.

The minutes of the 83rd AGM were approved unanimously.

4. Approval of minutes of Annual Budget General Meeting (ABGM) held on 18 December 2016:

The President apologized for the fact that the minutes had not been circulated in good time before the AGM and therefore the minutes would be approved at the ABGM in December.

5. To Adopt the Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2016

Russell Baum explained that the Honorary Treasurer Mark Ebner was unable to attend the meeting and had asked Russell to present the report. Russell explained that the figures had been presented slightly differently from previous years, which reflected the policies of new reporting guidelines.

Russell Baum [Vice Chair] reported that:

- The net excess of expenditure over income was £160,000 of which approximately £66,000 represented amortization and depreciation. The deficit was also offset by approximately £65,000 of gains on investments.
- Expenditure was down by around £65,000, compared to budgeted expenditure.

- While membership numbers were up, subscription income had reduced by approximately £53,000. There has been a reduction in higher rate tax-payers by about 20. This was being investigated
- There had also been a decision not to pursue about £20,000 of pledged income that had not been received, because it was felt that it would be more appropriate to have discussions with prospective donors about the building project.
- There was a prior year adjustment of approximately £24,000.
- The presentation of the accounts was more relevant now because it enabled expenditure to be seen by reference to activities.
- A three-year review of our investment advisers had been undertaken. A decision had been taken to engage Investec.
- The deficit has grown, although this did take into account depreciation, which was not part of a cash deficit.
- There was substantial work that would need to be undertaken within the redevelopment budget, which included £1m of refurbishment works. This would reduce future repair and renewal costs. It was expected that the new building, which would be built in 2019 would provide new facilities which enhance members experience. This in turn is expected to increase income and membership.
- A view has been taken that it is appropriate to use some of the synagogues unrestricted savings for the works. There is approximately £400,000 available from unrestricted funds.
- Russell was asked about the reserves policy. The Charities Commission recommends retaining a sum equal to 3-6 months of expenditure, which would equal about £250,000-£500,000. The intention is to retain approximately £400,000. The largest element of expenditure and the hardest to reduce is payroll. If we needed to make cuts then activities would be cut back as necessary. If it is necessary to fund-raise for activities independently of fund raising for the building then we will do so. It was becoming clear that some people would want to donate for ongoing programming rather than the building.
- Russell was asked about the recovery of higher rate tax recovery. This represented about £55,000 of income.
- Russell was asked whether the Kindergarten is intended to be cost neutral. He explained that the Kindergarten is full and is in profit at present. The accounts showed some building and facility costs allocated to the Kindergarten but these are not actually charged to the Kindergarten.
- Jon Epstein referred to section 10 of the Trustees Report which referred to the Youth and Education Committee. Noeleen explained that while the committee had not met during the past year there had been a great deal of work done by the team working with families directly to ascertain needs and to get a deeper insight into the requirements of the children. Jon Epstein made the point that the Trustees Report was technically incorrect. Noeleen said that it would be amended going forward.

The President called for a vote to approve the Financial Statements and the Trustees Report. *The motion was proposed by David Brown and seconded by Howard Bogod.* The meeting approved the motion with no votes against and two abstentions

6. **To appoint Messrs Nyman Libson Paul as Auditors to Alyth for the year 2016:**

The President called for a vote to approve the proposal to appoint Nyman Libson Paul as auditors for the year 2016. The motion was proposed by Robert Weiner and seconded by Jon Epstein.

The vote to appoint the auditors was approved by the meeting unanimously.

7. Community Report

- 7.1 Rabbi Mark gave a presentation about community engagement. He quoted from Deuteronomy 31: 12-13 "Gather the people – men, women, and children, and the strangers in your cities – to hear and learn to revere the Eternal One, your God, and observe faithfully all the principles of this Torah. And let their children, who do not yet know it hear, that they too may learn to revere the Eternal One, your God". He suggested that this is reflected in the constitution of Alyth: "The North Western Reform Synagogue (the 'Synagogue') is a Congregation of men, women and children professing the Jewish Religion, whose purpose is the development of Reform Judaism in the spheres of public worship, and religious, educational, cultural, social and charitable activities".

Rabbi Mark explained that on average about 173 new members join the synagogue each year.

He explained that the Rabbinic Partnership and the professional team had identified a range of new members who represented different strands of membership. They reflected the diversity of the membership in terms of age, family circumstances, location and degree of location. These new members were asked a range of questions, the answers to which were given in anonymized form. These questions asked why they had joined Alyth; how their first few months had been; what they hoped would happen with their experience of Alyth and how committed members and staff could help.

- 7.2 The following comments were made and questions raised:
- 7.2.1 Juliette Overlander noted that all five members want to be committed. Rabbi Mark said that it was often heard that people want to be part of the community. The members, especially committed members such as those here today could certainly help in this. The initial meeting was usually with Lynette. The aim was at least for the Rabbis to speak to new members but the engagement needed to be broader than the Rabbis. Very successful new members' suppers have taken place. However, we are not quite there yet.
- 7.2.2 Tracy Harris suggested that greater use could be made of social media, especially for the middle generations and not simply for younger members. It was agreed that we do need to use technology more.
- 7.2.3 Robert Weiner asked how Rabbi Hannah Kingston will help within the community. Rabbi Mark explained that it was hoped that she will be able to broaden the connection with young families and with young adults. Having three rabbis will help all the rabbis to be able to spend more time with members.
- 7.2.4 John Epstein said that there was a sense that we do know what skills our members have and therefore cannot call on those skills. It was agreed that this is an ongoing work in progress. It was suggested that Lynette could be told what skills and interests members have. There was an example of skills being used, by the creation of the Alyth Green Team, which comprised of three members who had not previously been involved and who were now helping with the sustainable development.
- 7.2.5 Jeremy Baum was impressed that we are gaining about three people every week, but we are also losing a similar number. Some of these losses were natural, through death or people moving away. We needed to think about those members who were lost through lack of engagement.
- 7.2.6 Miriam Grabiner asked if the Rabbis could recommend a blessing for the start of community study or events, just so that we can recognise that we are a community. Rabbi Mark thought that this was an interesting idea and will try to come up with something appropriate. Perhaps there could be a sheet with different blessings for different spaces.

8. To re-elect the President:

The Chair explained that before Peter was originally elected it had been decided to reduce the term of the President from two three-year terms to two two-year terms.

She thanked Peter for his considerable support and wisdom to date. She was delighted to say that Peter had agreed to stand for re-election for a second two-year term.

Noeleen Cohen presented the proposal to re-elect Peter Backman the President.

Peter Backman was unanimously re-elected.

9. To elect a Vice-President:

The President presented the proposal to elect Andrew Gellert as a Vice President. Andrew indicated that he is willing to stand.

Proposed by John Cohen. Seconded by Gillian van Gelder.

The vote to elect Andrew Gellert as Vice-President was unanimous.

10. To elect members of Council:

The President expressed thanks to all those people who had served on Council and those who had agreed to stand.

Caronne Graham and Clare Lubin stood for re-election to Council.

Gary Lipman, who was coopted on to Council in July 2016, stood for election to Council.

Cheryl Brodie, Richard Fraiman, Catherine Becker and Nick Morris stood for Council

The President presented a resolution to elect members of Council as set out in the AGM notes. The resolution was proposed by Ruth Smilg. It was seconded by Sarah Langsford.

The meeting voted unanimously to elect the members as tabled to Council.

The President declared the members to be duly elected according to the constitution.

11. AOB

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 11.35am

Minutes taken by Lanny Silverstone