

Thames Valley Network

**Minutes of the u3a Thames Valley Network Representatives’ Meeting**

 **held via Zoom on Friday 2nd February 2024**

**Present:**

**Committee:** Fay Sinai, Chair (Abingdon);Anne Marie Lord, Mins. Secretary (Chinnor & District); Susie Berry, Events Co-ordinator (Ridgeway); Avis Furness (Reading).

**Representatives:** Harry Brooks and John Orchard (Abingdon); Chris Fieldsend and Liz Rowe-Jones ( Banbury); Tomy Duby and Janice Laker (Bicester); Janet Russell (Bracknell Forest); Heather Haydock and Howard Mordue (Buckingham); Ian and Josephine Wright (Carterton); Jane Barker (Chalfonts); James Cadle (Chess Valley); Annette Dearmum and Margaret Lambert (Chinnor & District); Peter Foot (Faringdon & District); Celia Barnshaw (Goring Gap); Mike Price (Greater Thame); Patricia Lee (Headington); Michael Wright (High Wycombe); Jenny Alder (Maidenhead); David Part (Marlow & District); Frank Parisi (Milton Keynes); Mary Butcher (Reading); John Sutton (Thame & District); Ann Dibble (Thatcham); June Grunwald (Wantage and Grove); Ian Crookall (Wendover);Dave Humphrey (Windsor); Susie Wood (Witney); Sue Blackshaw (Woodstock);Rodney Fox and John Waddington (Wokingham); Chris Mould (Woodley).

**South East Region:** Susie Berry

**1. Welcome and Apologies**:

Fay welcomed everyone to this meeting.

**Apologies received from:** David Morton, Vice-Chair, and website administrator (Reading); Derek Randall, Treasurer (Thame & District); Patsy Thornton (Wokingham, TVN committee); Ann Martin (Abingdon); Patricia Foster (Banbury);Janet Mills (Haddenham); Mary Blake (Newbury) Stephanie Steevenson (Thatcham); Neil Kelly (Thameside, Wallingford); Graham Randall (Tring); Patsy Thornton (Wokingham).

**2 Minutes of the last meeting** (27th October 2023). Available on the TVN website and sent to Reps with the Agenda.

Min 4.8 Fay said that the new Treasurer could explore making use of on-line banking NOT Beacon.

Min 8.2ii Avis hopes to contact Groups Co-ordinators.

The Minutes were agreed.

**3 Matters arising.**

None that would not be dealt with elsewhere.

**4** **Chair’s report** Fay Sinai (sent with the agenda)

**Resume of the Report:**

For reasons explained in her report Fay has been unable to attend any meetings since October. However, Avis also attends the SERN (South East Region Networks) meetings and will give a report on Fay’s behalf. There have been no Network link meetings during this period.

Fay has handed over the loading of the Events and Contacts database onto Beacon to the Vice-Chair. He plans to contact the Beacon team for support.

In order to help Fay at this time she was encouraged to drop at least two of the committees she was sitting on. Reluctantly she decided to resign from the EDI committee.

The other was the Events team. Fay hopes to be able to make a suggestion now and again!

Fay emphasised changes due on the TVN committee and asked Reps to appeal to their u3a members for a Treasurer and Minutes Secretary for TVN.

Derek has offered to stay on for one more year until a new Treasurer comes forward. He has been an excellent treasurer.

Anne Marie has been taking the minutes for the committee and reps’ meeting for 11 years. The duties are ONLY to take the minutes for the committee and reps’ meetings (these occur four times a year only, that is eight meetings per year), submit them by email in the first instance to the Chair for checking AND THAT’S IT! No correspondence, no dealing with the membership at all. She will be taking the minutes at the AGM and that is when her duties cease. We need a Minutes Secretary to take over from her at the reps’ meeting which immediately follows the AGM.

This is a friendly committee which will assist any new member as much as possible. A venue for future committee meetings will be decided asap.

High Wycombe advised that an AI app, wudpecker, is available to take minutes if it is attached to the meeting. <https://www.wudpecker.io/>

**5 Treasurer’s Report** Derek Randall **Financial Statement to the 2nd February 2024** circulated to Reps before the meeting.

As Derek was unable to be at this meeting no Report was given. Fay asked if there were any queries, she would forward them to Derek for a response once he was recovered. There were none.

Summary:

One Event to date and Zoom licence paid. The accounts currently show a deficit of £15.20.

Cash in Lloyds Bank totals £6762.78. Two cheques not yet presented stand at £344.00

The total value of assets is £9418.78.

**6. SE Region/TAT report** Susie Berry

**6.1** All u3as will have received notification that the presentation, ‘Fit for the Future’, will be made for consultation at a SE Region Event. It is also included in this meeting.

Restructuring proposals including a widening of membership on Committees is part of this presentation.

Feedback will be sought.

**6.2** The Trustee for the NW and the Trustee in Wales have both resigned.

**6.3** The Grants system has been modified.

The Trust would like u3as to hold Open Days that are more interactive and offer potential members something they can be involved with.

U3as with less than £5000 will be able to apply for the replacement of merchandise Open Days.

**6.4** Sam Mauger will be retiring at the AGM. A new CEO will need to be found and appointed.

**6.5** The Festival in York (18th-20th July is open for bookings.)

**7 Discussion**

**7.1 Support and Diversify groups (Goring Gap).** Fay had received an email from the Groups Co-ordinator in Goring Gap u3a. It was agreed that this would be passed to Avis as she is already addressing a query re Interest groups.

**7.2 Fit for the Future – presentation.**

This presentation is part of the consultation process regarding possible changes to governance of the Third Age Trust. The Consultation is taking place January-April 2024.

**Susie gave a brief resume of the background to change.**

**a/** As a registered Charity and a registered company, the u3a Trust has to comply with Charity Commission guidance and legislation from Companies House. Members of the Board of Trustees will need to have expertise and competence in areas such as Finance, Legal issues, and Governance to ensure oversight and compliance.

Trustees will need to have the necessary knowledge and competencies.

**b/** Additionally a new Representative Forum called the u3a Council will enable the Trust to meet the needs of its members.

These proposals have been developed over a 2-year period and include a pilot council.

The Consultation is designed to enable the Board to judge if there is support for these proposals.

There will be a wind-up consultation in the SE Region with Liz Thackray on 4th March at 10.30am on Zoom.

**Notes on the slide presentation.**

**i/ Communication Channel for u3as**

The u3a council will focus on issues, ideas raised by u3as, with time for these to be properly discussed.

There will be two -way communication between the Board and the u3a council and the u3a council and the Board.

**ii/ Improve quality of Governance on the Board,** to satisfy the requirements of the Charity Commission, Companies House etc.

**iii/ Proposed changes.**

* Set up a u3a Council with 2 Reps per Region/Nation plus 3 Reps from Networks. The Council will deal with matters raised by and relating to u3as.
* A new smaller Board of u3a members experienced in relevant oversight and compliance. Ten members will be Trustees elected by u3as.

**iv/ Appointment of Reps**.

 Council and Board members will all be elected from u3a members.

Council members will be elected by u3as in their Region or Nation. They will not be Trustees. They will need to have the ability to develop clear communication. All u3a members will have the opportunity to express an interest, they will need to be proposed and seconded.

U3a members wishing to serve on the Board will need to have the necessary skills. Nominations will be reviewed by a nominations committee and nominees will be voted for by all u3as.

**v/ Will u3as lose their voice and representation?**

Currently there is little time to discuss u3a matters in any depth at Board Meetings.

The Council will have a greater voice as it will be able to identify the needs of u3as and consider u3a-wide priorities. It will encourage u3a participation in any initiatives.

The Board will oversee and deal with the legal responsibilities of the Third Age Trust as a Charity and Limited Company.

**vi/ Is this just tidying up?**

The Trustees have a responsibility to ensure the Trust is compliant, but they also need to keep u3as informed.

They have been the first port of call when advice has been needed or when things go wrong.

Some Regions have difficulty in disseminating information.

**vii/ Do we already have committees to deal with u3a issues?**

In some areas yes, in others no, and some committees have drifted away from their original brief.

Strategic aims now need to be developed to respond to the needs of all u3as and take things forward.

The findings of the Consultation using the presentation will be reported to the Council.

**Susie added the following comments.**

There will be no change to the local, independent operation of each u3a. The responsibility of running their u3a will remain with the members and elected committee.

U3as will have a louder voice; some changes have already been made e.g. notes on the Constitution and the grants system have been updated.

There will be more direct representation by u3a members on the Council.

The cost of running the organisation has fallen significantly due to Covid and changes to implemented such as use of Zoom for meetings, a venue in Milton Keynes is also used. The Pilot Council has held four meetings.

**Consultation and proposed timeline of introduction of changes**

January – April **Consultation with u3as.**

May – June **Board decides on a resolution if applicable.**

June **The resolution will be sent to all u3as for information.**

July – October **A period for Q and As**

October 18th **Resolution submitted to the AGM**. Seventy-five percent of votes cast at the AGM are required for it to be passed.

October 2024-April 2025 **Nominations and election of members to serve on the Board and Council.**

April 2025 **Current Board and Pilot Council dissolved. The new Board and Council set up.**

**If the proposals or resolution are rejected the status quo will prevail.**

**The SE Region has set a deadline of 4th March for the consultation when there will be a S E Region via zoom.**

**The Consultation will close nationwide at the end of April.**

**All u3as should send their reactions/ comments/ responses for collation and evaluation to** **governance@u3a.org.uk**

**Notes on the discussion that followed the presentation.**

Chalfonts- How many Reps on the Council? Will anyone serve on both Council and Board?

*There will be 32 Reps on the Council. Some TVN Reps felt this would potentially impede decision making.*

*Susie explained that The Chair of the Council will be ex officio on the Board and the Chair of the Board will be ex officio on the Council.*

Will proposals made on the Council have to go to the Board?

*It will depend on what the proposal is about. In the main the Council will be as independent as possible.*

Bicester- Clarification of link between the Trust and u3as.

*Each u3a has to be a member of the Trust but is otherwise independent. If the financial turnover is more than £5000 per annum it would need to register with the Charity Commission. All other u3as are charities through the Trust.*

What are the legal and policy obligations?

*U3as are legally required to adopt some policies but others are issued as Guidelines and here u3as can make “reasonable adjustments”.*

High Wycombe – To what extent will the Board have a say on Finance?

*The Board will need to approve the overall budget but will not set the Capitation fee which is decided at the AGM.*

What impact will these changes have on the visibility of u3a as a brand?

*There is a need to be clear on what is publicity and what is marketing. The Trust has done well in terms of publicity and is now addressing raising the profile through marketing. Three papers have been sent to u3as regarding this with a Q&A.*

Faringdon – *raised a concern relating to the constitutional relationship between the Board and the Council and asked whether the Board could be in a position to veto any ideas coming from the Council*.

Chess Valley – *expressed a concern regarding the size of the Council and whether this would impede decision making.*

On a show of hands many u3as indicated that they would support the proposals, no u3a indicated they would be against.

**7.3 Chalfonts u3a regarding the gender issue which they feel is a retrograde step on behalf of the Trust.** Chalfonts u3a committee wish to know the percentage of male and female members within their u3a in order to assist their u3a in understanding how their membership relates to the community. It is understood that this information can no longer be requested under EDI. They wish to know why it is illegal because, in their view, it is relevant to how we develop our u3as. There is a concern about lack of communication with the Trust. The committee would be happy to create a third box to indicate non-binary.

Fay responded by saying that there is a handbook which will be sent to all u3as which may clarify these concerns.

The Beacon newsletter refers to the fact that Beacon will no longer collect gender data.

Susie explained that Beacon is looked after by TATTLE. It will not have been discussed at the Board.

Susie will take this to the Board and report back in April.

Milton Keynes believes that this information can be collected where there is reasonable justification with a clear, legitimate purpose. Once collected and used it should be deleted.

**8 Network Link** Avis Furness (sent to Reps with the agenda)

The next Network Link meeting will be on Zoom on February 12th, 10-12.30. To date 150 people have registered countrywide. In the past it was restricted to Chairs of Networks but now, on Zoom, it is open to all members.

The agenda includes Susie who will be speaking about the Pilot Council.

Pre-retirement planning courses will also be discussed as it is becoming more difficult for u3as to become involved.

Alison May from the u3a office will also be speaking.

There is also an opportunity to discuss other matters. Do let Avis know if you have a specific request or email the Network link Chair (Sue.Russell@u3a.org.uk )

There is no charge, registration is through TicketSource.

Reps were asked to pass this information on to members.

The next Network Link meeting will be in the summer, date to be agreed.

If you wish to be added to the mailing list for information re future Network Link Events contact the Network link Team on u3anetworklinkmeeting@gmail.com

**9 Events Team Report Susie Berry**

This will be sent and included with the Minutes. (NO REPORT FROM SUSIE AS YET)

The next Event will be on 27th February – The Music of Burt Bacharach. Information will be put on the website.

**10 Information**

**10.1 Speaker Database** (maintained by Avis). An up-dated version has just been sent out. As well as recommending speakers Avis asked Reps to let her know if any speakers have been disappointing.

**10.2 Face Book** (maintained by Avis Furness) There are fifty-four members. Please mention it to members and encourage them to join, it is a closed group for members only. Look for u3a Thames Valley Network in the Facebook search box or use <https://www.facebook.co/groups/377393767067766>

**10.3. List of Interest Groups (**maintained by Fay) Please send information to Fay.

**10.4** **TVN Contacts list** (maintained by Chair). Avis has kept this up to date on Fay’s behalf over the past few months. Please let Fay have up-dates when they occur, please include names when changes occur especially where generic email addresses are used.

**10.5 Events Contact List** (maintained by Mike Price) There are one thousand on this list. Mike is still using email to send information as the transfer to Beacon has not been completed to date.

**10.6** **Website** (maintained by David Morton) [www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk) This is updated regularly and well maintained.

**11 AOB**

**12. Date and Venue of next Reps’ meeting:**

**Future meetings:** Friday 3rd May (AGM and Reps meeting), Friday 26th July and Friday 25th October all at 10.30am at Benson Village Hall, OX10 6LZ.

**Please register using TicketSource.** This helps our administration, please ask for help if you are unsure.

Date ……………. Chair ……………… 08 /02/2024

Chair TVN Fay Sinai fay.sinai@icloud.com

TVN [www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk)

SE Region <https://u3asites.org.uk/south-east>

SE Region Trustee <https://u3asites.org.uk/south-east/contact>

Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/377393767067766> or search Facebook for Thames Valley Network.

SERN South East Region Network

Network Link - to receive information about future events. *u3anetworklinkmeeting@gmail.com*

Information on Networks may be found at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/advice/u3a-networks>