

Reading Refugee Support Group

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Wed 17th Nov 2021 7.00 pm online and in person at Deloitte.

RRSG Trustees:

Present

(in person)

Mike Martin (Chair)	Richard Hanson-James
Jon Linley (Treasurer)	Thabo Makuyana
Fiona Zeneli	Faraj Ali
Charlene Wattley	

Online attendance

Patrick Ismond	Emma Broomfield
Emily Lloyd	

RRSG Staff

Nick Harborne CEO (mins)
Jonjo Warrick
Hadil Tamin

Guests

Charlene McNeil, Deloitte.

A total of 25 people registered for the AGM. 22 people attended in total, either online or in person comprising of 17 members and 5 guests.

All voting was done by members, and every vote was quorate.

1. Chair's Welcome

Mike welcomed everyone and explained the proceeding for the AGM.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from:

Mary Richardson
Lind Stacey
Bishop of Reading Olivia Graham
Lord Alf Dubs

3. Minutes of the AGM 17th Nov 2020 7 pm (online).

These were accepted without amendment.

Proposer: Charlene Wattley

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Presentation of the Annual Report

CEO's Report

NH updated members on the changing situation with the increase in dispersed asylum seekers in hotel accommodation and the challenges facing RRSg from the Afghan crisis. NH discussed mental health, noting the funding from the CCG for a Mental Health Care Coordinator. NH also touched on the Forbury Gardens incident.

NH noted the hard work from all the staff, trustees and volunteers over the covid pandemic and thanked the many donors and supporters.

Deloitte was thanked for hosting our AGM.

Questions:

PI noted the good news for the funding for the MHCC post, and there was a discussion around part-time or full-time options.

NH answered questions about the breakdown of the hotels and numbers: there are currently 7 hotels across Berkshire with approx: 4 hotels with dispersed asylum seekers and 3 hotels accommodating Afghan families.

The RRSg Annual Report 2020 – 2021 was accepted by members.

Proposer: Thabo Makuyana

6. Presentation of the Accounts

Jon Linley presented the treasurer's report.

Jon noted the impact of CV-19 in these accounts for 2020 – 21. Overall, RRSg retains a good level of reserves and remains in a healthy position.

Contract income tailed off in line with expectations due to the tapered funding over time of the Syrian Resettlement Programme. We lost income from families that were planned to arrive but didn't due to covid.

Donations and grants doubled largely to grants from Lloyds and DCMS, bringing in £111k, resulting in an increased surplus this year.

Expenditure was largely consistent with the previous year. Staff costs increase due to pay band increases, additional hours and new staff. Offsetting this were savings from decreases in room hire and event expenses and moving services online due to covid.

Jon noted the impact of the Lloyds grant wouldn't be felt next year and income and surpluses may reduce.

We remain healthy with £241k to c/f, which remains well over the £85k reserves to ensure the running of the organisation for 3 months in the event we have to close down.

Jon ended by noting the work and support of TC the Finance Manager and that we are lucky to have someone with his experience and qualification in an organisation our size.

Questions

PH asked about the £4k expenditure on Publicity and Marketing last year, dropping to £400 in 2020-21. Jon explained covid had caused a drop in events over the year. Additionally, there has been some reclassification of costs within the report, which has affected this figure.

PH asked about whether the reserves could be to provide support for people in the hotels. NH explained RRSg is reluctant to provide support directly to the hotels, where other contractors are well funded to provide support. If people access our services at our office, we do take them on as clients and provide support. If we were to extend our support to the hotels, the staff would be overwhelmed. MM noted the trustees agreement of this decision.

Also contained within the reserve is a designated fund allocated to purchasing a new office, which is detailed in the notes.

PH commented it would be useful to make that clearer in the main text of the report.

The Annual Accounts were accepted by members.

Proposer: Charlene Wattlely

7. Election of New Trustees

The Chair explained that the constitution required one-third of the board to stand down each year. This quota has to be made up of the longest-serving trustees:

Linda Stacey
Dr Mary Richardson
Emma Broomfield

MM informed the AGM Linda Stacey, was not standing for re-election.

Mary Richardson and Emma Broomfield confirmed they would stand for re-election.

The board of trustees have also appointed two new trustees Fiona Zeneli and Patrick Ismond, during the course of this year. These appointments need to be ratified by the membership.

MM asked members for permission to have a block vote. No one objected to this.

MM paid tribute to LS for her contribution to the board, noting that Linda intends to continue volunteering to see through the development of the new IT skills and job website she has been working on.

PI and FZ were invited to introduce themselves to the meeting.

MR and EB were re-elected. FZ and PI were confirmed as trustees.

Proposer: Mike Martin (Chair)

There were no votes against any candidate.

MM welcomed new trustees to the board.

8. AOB

MM raised his concerns over the Borders Bill currently going through parliament, urging everyone to write to their MP in opposition to the bill that would criminalise how people made the journey to the UK in order to claim asylum.

There was discussion around the Bill contravening the UN Declaration on Refugees, which the UK is a signatory. PH noted Priti Patel is creating a catch 22 situation where it is impossible to claim asylum outside the country you are in.

MM closed the formal part of the meeting at 7.55 pm and handed over the NH.

NH introduced Healthwatch Reading who announced their National Award for Engagement after working with RRSB to investigate conditions at the hotels.

Mandeep then explained to members about the research they were carrying out for the Accessible Information Standard. Mandeep thanked Shoa for all her hard work and support.

NH congratulated Healthwatch on their award, thanked Deloitte and Charlene for hosting the AGM and closed the meeting at 8.05pm.