

Minutes of a Community Base extraordinary general meeting held on 14th December 2006

Present: Sylvia Alexander-Vine (chair), Duncan Blinkhorn (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum representing Carousel), David Botipol (Assert), Michelle Butler (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum), Debbie Charman (Carers Centre), Ros Cook (aMaze), Bob Cristofoli (treasurer), Arran Evans (Sussex Interpreting Services), Paul Evans (NHS Support Federation and trustee), Jane Frost (Assert), Tina Harrison (TB Alert), John Holmstrom (Brighton Housing Trust), Mel Matthews (TB Alert), Katy McGrory (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum representing the Working Together Project), Naima Noudjem (Mosaic Black and Mixed Parentage Family Group), Emily O'Brien (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum), Sam Self (Scarman Trust), Roz Ward (Scarman Trust) and Anna Wilson-Patterson (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum).

In attendance: Colin Chalmers (director, company secretary and minutes) and Annette Moss (building manager).

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Sarah Bourne (trustee), Hong Lu (trustee) and Lucy Stone (trustee).

2 Chair's introduction

Sylvia Alexander-Vine (chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Sylvia said that the board of trustees had considered the issues raised in the five motions and decided that these issues would be best discussed in a non-confrontational way that allowed people to come to a consensus over issues. A review, involving an outside facilitator and ending in a general meeting, had been announced to do this.

Sylvia hoped the review would involve as many people as possible in agreeing policies that maintain the essential nature of Community Base as a home for community and voluntary groups and have the confidence and support of participant groups. Sylvia said that if anyone had any suggestions for how to involve more people in the review they should mention them when speaking so they could be taken into consideration when planning the review.

3 Motion one

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To withdraw the Notice to Quit served on Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum as the sector's representative body, on the grounds that we believe it is desirable for them to be based inside Community Base.

Arran (Sussex Interpreting Services) handed out and read out a statement on behalf of members submitting and supporting the motions tabled at the meeting. The statement welcomed the review, called for the meeting to support motions three, four and five as an integral part of the review process and looked forward to celebrating Community Base's tenth anniversary in 2007.

Sylvia (chair) welcomed the statement.

Ros (aMaze) withdrew motion one.

4 Motion two

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To withdraw the Notice to Quit served on Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum on the grounds that they are not hosting an employee of a third party organisation at their office and therefore are not in breach of the Licence to Occupy.

Sam (Scarman Trust) stated that the Scarman Trust believed that Brighton and Hove Change Up Consortium was not a separate organisation to Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (the forum) and withdrew motion two.

5 Motion three

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To adopt new best practice, transparent and accountable policies for the efficient running of Community Base, drawn from the Member's resources. Specifically: Allocation of Space, Disputes, Complaints, Bullying & Harassment and Communications. These policies and procedures to be approved by a meeting of Community Base Members held before March 2007.

Naima (Mosaic Black and Mixed Parentage Family Group) read and proposed the motion and said it spoke for itself.

Mel (TB Alert) asked Naima if she thought there were specific things wrong with current policies.

Sylvia (chair) asked for someone to oppose the motion but no one wanted to.

Duncan (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum representing Carousel) seconded the motion. Duncan said that the notice given to the forum highlighted the lack of policies and vulnerability of all participant groups to having their licences ended. Other participant groups had had their licences ended without having the chance to challenge the move and this made people feel insecure. This resolution called for clarity and a chance to challenge licences being ended.

Anna (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum) said it was unclear whether Community Base existed to support small, large or regional groups. Other community buildings were being created in Brighton and Hove which will affect Community Base. The policy on allocation of space is not clear. The fact that Community Base does not need to give any reason to end a licence agreement makes people feel uncomfortable. Policies need to be looked at.

Naima said Mosaic was willing to share its policies with Community Base.

Deborah (Carers Centre) said an open discussion of policies and licences was needed.

John (Brighton Housing Trust) said that Community Base needed a vision and the review should start with a visioning morning. The dispute between Community Base and the forum had been catastrophic. Participant groups needed to be involved so Community Base staff could do their job.

Mel said she could see arguments on both sides in the dispute between Community Base and the forum but did not agree that no reasons were given by Community Base for ending the forum's licence.

Naima said she had felt uncomfortable and vulnerable in the six months she had worked in Community Base because her organisation faced the risk of being evicted for no reason. Naima wanted to be able to state her views without putting Mosaic at risk of being thrown out of Community Base. Mosaic was willing to help Community Base with policies such as bullying and harassment.

Mel asked if Community Base had the policies specified in the motion.

Colin (Community Base director) stated that Community Base had a policy on the allocation of space and a complaints procedure but did not have specific policies on bullying and harassment or communications which were covered by our policy of good practice, equal opportunities policy, complaints procedure and staff grievance procedure.

Naima said an interactive approach was needed.

Debbie said meetings with the review facilitator would be useful.

Naima said the review needed proper planning or it would be a bad review.

Roz (Scarman Trust) said there needed to be a meeting with the facilitator beforehand

John said the review needed written terms of reference for the facilitator, a skilled facilitator and a transparent process. Community Base should not be scared to send out lots of emails to the Community Base email group to encourage discussion.

Emily (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum) said the review was a positive move and this meeting was a good start to it.

Paul (NHS Support Federation and trustee) said this sort of discussion had not happened before and it was good it was happening.

John said the general meeting at the end of the review should sign off decisions reached by consensus rather than be a forum for arguments.

Anna said the complaints procedure should be improved.

Bob (treasurer) said policies should be reviewed and welcomed the review.

Sylvia said that we needed to rely on trustees to do their job.

Paul said discussions of policies should be prioritised with the board of trustees improving policies such as the complaints procedure.

Naima said she did not want to feel threatened with eviction for no reason as she did at present.

Paul said he was concerned that Naima felt threatened. A facilitator was needed to look into some issues but other issues which were uncontentious and for which consensus already existed could be dealt with relatively quickly by the board.

David (Assert) said time was needed for dialogue with the consultant.

John said the motion required the general meeting marking the end of the review to take place by February 2007 and this was too soon. The meeting agreed to amend the phrase "before March 2007" to "before May 2007".

The meeting unanimously passed the motion.

6 Motion four

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To draw up options for current licensees that strengthen licensees' security of tenure, to be approved by a meeting of Community Base Members held before March 2007.

Sam (Scarman Trust) proposed the motion which called for greater transparency. Reasons needed to be given if a licence was ended, there needed to be an appeal process, some membership involvement and any group having their licence ended needed to be given a fair hearing.

Katy (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum representing the Working Together Project) seconded the motion.

Debbie proposed and Naima seconded an amendment changing "before March 2007" to "before May 2007" and this was agreed by the meeting.

Anna asked what made Community Base different from other buildings and suggested it was the sense of being together with other community and voluntary groups and Community Base's credibility. The forum had read Community Base's legal advice about the implications of turning current licences into leases and agreed this would not be sensible. It was important that Community Base trustees needed reasons to evict any group.

Paul said that while the legal position was that any licence could be ended by either party without a reason or fault, no licence had ever been ended without a reason. Community Base offers community and voluntary groups protection, shared control and a good ethos.

Naima said her main concern was democracy and there was no democracy in place.

Ros (aMaze) said it was important not to prejudge the review.

Bob (treasurer) said the motions were reasonable. Sometimes consultation is not always possible, for instance if a group refused to pay rent action needs to be taken. More participation is needed, there have been participant groups for years but few people go to them. The review would be an opportunity to express views.

The motion as amended was passed unanimously.

7 Motion five

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To work with Community Base Members to develop a shared vision, mission and strategic objectives for Community Base that strengthens

partnership, collaboration and decision making accountable to Members, for the purpose of promoting the voice and interest of the local voluntary and community sector.

Arran read and proposed the motion and handed out a written statement from himself. A vehicle was needed for dialogue. To build a community, Community Base needed an ethos and values and there was no clear statement of values on the Community Base website. A discussion of our ethos and values was needed.

John seconded the motion and said we needed a discussion of Community Base's ethos at the beginning of the review. What do we mean by an independent voluntary sector? A lot of us feel we do not want to become agents of the state. Restrictions put on participant groups by Community Base meant groups had to second guess Community Base about whether they were allowed to carry out specific activities and this was another layer of accountability. The dispute between Community Base and the forum had been a disaster for the whole sector and while there were arguments on both sides it should never have got to where it did. Members had not raised any concerns about any of these issues at the Community Base annual general meeting in September. More trustees were needed, sometimes hard decisions needed to be taken, but there should not be such a gulf between trustees and members in the future. There should be a skills audit of trustees.

Anna wondered if there was a lurking conflict between the forum and Community Base. What was the role of Community Base given that the forum was the representative body for the local community and voluntary sector? New resources and buildings were coming along and Community Base should adapt to this.

Arran said Community Base was nearly ten years old and the review process was an extremely useful one. Community Base has no clear mission statement. Is Community Base just about providing accommodation and services or something more. What is Community Base's ethos?

Naima wondered how other activities carried out by Community Base fitted into its ethos. Mosaic is a strong organisation and was willing to share its best practice with Community Base.

Colin said Community Base had 30 cultures in its building. The diversity of participant groups was good and there was no reason why all participant groups should share the same ethos, beliefs or goals. However for Community Base to function there needed to be rules and policies, specifically on what grounds a participant group could have its licence ended, that all participant groups accepted as fair.

Anna expressed concern that when statements came from Community Base it was not clear whether it was the director or trustees making the statement.

The motion was passed unanimously.

8 The Community Base review

Colin asked the meeting whether they thought it would be sensible to set up an email group specifically for issues concerning the review. This email group would initially have the same membership as the Community Base email group but it would allow people not interested in the review to continue to receive emails on other issues. The meeting agreed this would be a good idea.

Colin said he was working on a questionnaire as the first part of the review. The questionnaire would ask people to consider situations where licences may be ended to encourage thinking around what a fair policy on this matter would be.

Sylvia thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.