

Social Liberal Forum

Annual General Meeting 2011

Saturday 13th August 2011, 11.30am

William Penn Room, The Priory Rooms, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street,
Birmingham, B4 6AF.

Minutes

Attended: Prateek Buch, Chris Burgess, Matt Byrom, Dale Cox, Lawrence Cox, Lee Dargue, Liz Davidson, Maureen de Beer, Sue Doughty, Chris Edwards, David Eggington, Arnie Gibbons, Sandra Gidley, James Graham, David Hall-Matthews, Evan Harris, Simon Hebditch, Robert Hutchison, Howard Hyman, Linda Jack, John Kennedy, Janet King, Nigel Lindsay, Alastair Macpherson, Paul Meara, John Merritt, Virginia Morck, Penelope Morgan, Chris Nicholson, Dave Nicholson, Geoff Payne, Uday Reddy, Mary Reid, Brian Robson, James Sandbach, Sadie Smith, Charles Stone, Janice Turner, Joan Waller, Richard Whelan (40 members)

Apologies: Hugh Addy, Nigel Ashton, Pamela Bain, Charles Bates, Mark Blackburn, Marion Bland, Louise Bloom, Jacki Boyle, Paul Brighton, John Bryant, Peter Canning, Lee Chalmers, Richard Cheney, Peter Clarke, Mike Clements, Kat Dadswell, Ellen Dahrendorf, Trudy Dean, Simon Dodd, Gareth Epps, Isabel Ewing, Sue Farrant, Suzanne Fletcher, Helen Flynn, Norman Fraser, Andrew George, David Grace, Rebekah Gronowski, Catherine Hodgkinson, Geoff Heathcock, Joan & Martin Hewings, Geoff Hinchcliffe, Neil Hughes, Jonathan Hunt, Matthew Huntbach, Chris Hurst, Carrick James, David James, Kirsty Jerome, Joe Jordan, Ros Kayes, Paula Keaveney, Toby Keynes, Peter Kunzmann, Dave Leonard, Jim Loder, Christine Mackay, Liz Maffei, Alex Marsh, Helena McKeown, Dave Mitchell, Martin Moore, Glenise Morgan, Simon Morrow, Philip Nathan, Bridget Pigott, David Rendel, Alan Rice, Keith Richardson, Bob Rinaldi, Jane Robins, Christobel Seath, Phil Shaddock, Bob Shekyls, Roger Shelley, Naomi Smith, Gregory Smyth, Clive Sneddon, Lee Thacker, Serena Tierney, Chris Tucker, Sandy Walkington, Lucy Watt, Ruth Wilkinson, Allan Wisbey, Peter Wrigley

1. Chair's Report

David Hall-Matthews, Chair of Social Liberal Forum, welcomed everyone.

There were no minutes of the last AGM, but the constitution was approved, and was followed by policy discussion.

The Council was elected in Summer 2010, to serve for two years. It first met in Sept 2010, when it appointed initial the Executive members and Chair. Including later appointments, the Executive team now consists of: David Hall-Matthews (Chair), Mark Blackburn (Director), Prateek Buch, Sue Doughty, Sandra Gidley, Evan Harris, Mary Reid, Naomi Smith, Janice Turner.

In Feb 2011 the Executive appointed Mark Blackburn as Director. Matthew Sowemimo, the previous Director, had resigned when he left the party.

There are 1238 members of the Social Liberal Forum (up from 110 in August 2010). Members were largely recruited at Autumn and Spring Conferences, at our SLF Conference and through signing the NHS amendment.

At Autumn Conference 2010 in Liverpool we ran two fringe meetings, on Party Positioning and Education.

At Spring Conference 2011 in Sheffield we were successful with our emergency motion on banking, our major amendment to the Health motion, and we held three fringe meetings. On Health, Higher Education and Strategy.

At the forthcoming Autumn Conference 2011 in Birmingham we will be running six fringe meetings.

Our first conference in June 2011 was well attended and included speeches from Vince Cable, Chris Huhne and Simon Hughes.

We want to establish SLF as a national UK organisation. We already have branches in Scotland and Wales, NE, NW, Yorkshire and Humber, and other branches are on the way. Branches are very important as we need to develop good policy at grassroots level and to provide a presence at Regional conferences, in order to maximise awareness and recruitment.

Maureen de Beer proposed acceptance of the Chair's Report, which was agreed nem con.

2. Financial Report

See separate spreadsheet. It was noted that the main expenditure was the cost of events at Conferences.

Members raised a number of questions and discussion points on the accounts.

Costs of events – main expenditure

Q: As SLF does not ask for a membership fee, should it ask for voluntary donation?

It was generally agreed that free membership helped us to boost our numbers and removed barriers to people signing up. However, all members should be encouraged to make a

voluntary donation when they join, and that we should appeal to all existing members as well, as well as to attendees at Conference fringe meetings.

Q: Why is there a problem with the Paypal account?

This related to a change in officers, and the need to sort out bank account. It is being resolved.

Q: ALDTU is being suspended as an AO. Should we offer them membership of SLF?

It was agreed that we would look into this.

Q: Can regional groups have local websites and paypal accounts?

They will have separate pages on the main SLF website. Running multiple paypal accounts might be tricky, but branch officers could set up their own if feasible.

Maureen de Beer proposed acceptance of the Financial Report, which was agreed nem con.

3. Motion 1: Policy Development

This AGM recognises that – in an increasingly interdependent world – a government is needed in the UK that faces up to the mounting global and national challenges of environmental degradation, food and energy security, the growing gap between rich and poor, an irresponsible banking system, citizens alienated from the political process, ever-increasing privatisation of formerly public services, and widespread abuses of corporate power.

While fully acknowledging the achievements of the Coalition Government – and the part that Liberal Democrats have played in those achievements – we question the Government's judgement, and 'direction of travel', in crucial areas of foreign, economic, environmental and social policy.

The AGM calls on the SLF Executive Team to set up a working group – as representative of the membership as possible – to consider and report on:

1. The policies that the UK government needs to implement to safeguard the natural environment for future generations, to build a more equal society with high quality public services and fairly-remunerated work for all, and in which the next generation has more control over their lives.
2. The political changes and innovations that will be needed to ensure that Liberal Democrats maximise their role in moving from the government that we now have to the government that we need.

It is proposed that the working group reports to the SLF Executive Team and Council before the end of 2011 and through the Executive Team to the SLF membership.

Proposer: Robert Hutchison

Seconder: Christopher Edwards

Amendment

Final sentence to read:

It is proposed that the working group submits an interim report on the scope and timetabling of its work to the SLF Executive Team and Council before the end of 2011 and through the Executive Team to the SLF membership.

Proposer: James Graham

Amendment accepted by the proposers of the motion.

After a good debate the motion, as amended, was overwhelmingly passed.

The Chair asked for nominations to join the working group.

4. Motion 2: Corporate Social Responsibility

The SLF notes the extent to which large corporations manipulate public opinion, dictate to national governments and inflict serious damage on individuals and communities in pursuit of their own profits. Detailed legislation is too easily by-passed and is quickly overtaken by events. Consequently, self-regulation provides the only realistic prospect for change. However, the overall response to demands for corporate social responsibility falls well short of what is necessary for effective democratic accountability. The SLF proposes, therefore, that we explore:

1. The theoretical and practical implications of a legal requirement for all powerful organisations to install a free-standing institutional conscience with power to ensure the organisation's compliance with statutory accountability guidelines. (Proposed guidelines will be tabled).
2. The theoretical and practical implications of the accountability of businesses being improved by the conversion of existing organisations to cooperatives, mutuals and employee-owned organisations.
3. The theoretical and practical implications of promoting these alternative business models across all sectors of the economy and society.

Note: A 26 page review of theoretical and practical implications is available as a free download at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/46327012/Installing-Proactive-Democracy>

Proposer: John E Merritt

Secunder: Dave Nicholson

Reference Back

It was proposed to refer the motion to the working group established in Motion 1 for further development.

Proposer: James Graham

Secunder: Janet King

The reference back was put to the vote and supported by a clear majority.

Any other Business

Janet King gave notice of John Bright Study Day in Birmingham, on 19th Nov in the Art Gallery.