

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Citizens Advice Newcastle, held on 2nd March 2020 at 12 noon in the Bewick Room, Newcastle City Library, 33 New Bridge Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8AX

Present

There were 44 members of the public present. and the Chair of the AGM Keith Reed opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and stated that he was very pleased that so many people could make it.

1. Introductions and Welcome from Keith Reed Chair of Trustees

Keith welcomed everyone to the Citizens Advice Newcastle AGM and thanked the Lord Mayor of Newcastle for the official opening. Keith explained that Citizens Advice in Newcastle had prevailed since September 1939 at the outbreak of WW2. It was originally thought that it would close at the end of the war but here we are still going strong and have just celebrated our 80th anniversary. As in the very early days, our services are still heavily dependent on our amazing volunteers who gladly give their time to help others, sharing their wealth of knowledge and experience. Many statutory services, refer people to us for help, as do lots of other charities and voluntary groups. Indeed lots of City Councillors recommend us to their constituents.

2. Guest Speaker: Chief Inspector Steve Wykes, Northumbria Police

CI Wykes said that it was a privilege to be here, working in partnership to help local people and keep the City safe. He said that so far he hadn't had a huge personal involvement with Citizens Advice Newcastle but hoped that would change in the future. He talked about Newcastle as a Safe City and all the current initiatives underway to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. In his view, Newcastle is a fantastic place to live and work. There are lots of ways in which our two organisations can work more closely together. This includes support for crime victims, sharing intelligence about criminal activity, and promoting crime prevention work. In particular, he highlighted the key role for Citizens Advice Newcastle in:

- Providing a safe place for clients to report criminal activity /seek advice;
- Sharing with Police our understanding of emerging themes/common concerns about crime;
- Signposting clients to the Police;
- Reassuring the community that Northumbria Police are actively supporting them;
- Providing client feedback on how Police services can improve;
- Working collaboratively with the Police team on new initiatives, such as informal drop-in sessions at City Library.

CI Wykes then took questions from the floor, including the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner and hate crime across the City.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from 9 members of the public including Mr R Harris and Miss C Hall.

4. Minutes of the last Annual Public Meeting held on 19 March 2019

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2019 were previously circulated and Mr N Ahmad pointed out the misspelling of his surname. Nadeem Ahmed proposed acceptance of the minutes and this was seconded by Ian Mackintosh. Agreed unanimously.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were none.

6. Trustee Board Annual Report – Chair of Trustees, Keith Reed

Keith reported that since the last AGM the charity has had another hectic year. We saw 11,000 clients with over 30,000 different problems. Our premises in City Library are very easily accessible, so we are now in a place where a lot of people like to come to. Our small Team of specialist advisors now provide the Help to Claim services, assisting people to make their first claim for Universal Credit.

Our Home Energy Advice team, funded by Northern Powergrid, helps people with a myriad of fuel problems, and also provides emergency crisis top-ups for pre-payment meters.

Last year was our 80th anniversary of giving excellent advice to the City's residents and we celebrated this occasion at the Newcastle Cathedral. He paid special thanks to the Dean of St Nicholas Cathedral and the Bishop of Newcastle for kindly hosting the event.

Research and Campaigns work is a particular strength of Citizens Advice Newcastle, and we continue to run evidence-based campaigns to bring about changes to improve the lives of our clients. In the last year this has included work on the Living Wage, and on the problems our clients experience with Universal Credit.

A new project is being developed with Mesothelioma UK

Keith explained that more information about our achievements over the year are set out in our annual review which holds a great deal of information.

He paid tribute to the dedicated staff and volunteers who all do an excellent job, often working under pressure, with clients in distress or crisis.

Effective partnership working is key to our success, and he thanked our various partners, including Citizens Advice, DWP, MAPS, the City Council, Northern Powergrid, Millfield House Foundation, local Citizens Advice Offices and many others.

Keith thanked the members of the Trustee Board for all their hard work and commitment to the charity. In his view they do an excellent job in providing strategic leadership and staff support, all provided on a voluntary basis.

Looking forward, we would like to work more closely with health service providers, particularly local GP practices. It is well known that our advice can greatly improve people's health, particularly their mental wellbeing, which takes the pressure off the NHS.

We are now providing more advice by phone and webchat, but there is more to be done just as soon as we have sufficient resources to develop these services. Maintaining the high quality of all our advice is the key priority for everything we do. The year ahead looks likely to bring many new challenges, including Brexit, but we are confident that we are in a good position to meet these and continue to help local residents.

7. Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019 – Honorary Treasurer, Tony Crawley

Tony pointed to the highlights of the financial accounts on page 11, and summarised performance:

Currently have a healthy year-end surplus of £37,000.

We lost funding from the Children's Society for advice sessions at Brunswick Church, but this was offset with additional funding provided by Northern Powergrid. The new DWP funded Help to Claim service provided new income, together with new funding from the charity Action for Children. This has largely been spent on additional staff costs.

Balance Sheet page 13 is very strong - our free reserves are relatively healthy, which is very encouraging.

Funding for 20/21 includes some increased levels of funding, but there will be increased costs, so we anticipate a break even position.

Tony thanked all the funders for their support. Newcastle City Council continue to provide our main "core" funding, on a year-on-year basis. It is hoped that this might be confirmed for a longer period in future.

Tony thanked Geoff Dryden for his sterling work in keeping our finances on track. He also thanked his colleague Trustees on the Finance Sub Committee for all their hard work during the year, together with Tait Walker, our accountants and auditors.

Nadeem Ahmad formerly proposed the adoption of the accounts and Ian Mackintosh seconded. Agreed unanimously

8. Appointment of Auditors

Angela Carver formerly proposed that Tait Walker continue as auditors for the following year and Claire Irving seconded. Agreed unanimously.

9. Nominations and elections to the Board of Trustees.

All Trustee board members were elected with Cllr Cook formerly proposing and Keith Reed seconded.

The meeting closed with Keith Reed thanking our guest speaker and stating that we get great support from Northumbria Police. He was particularly interested in the "safe haven" project, and hoped that this is something we can actively support.