

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Citizens Advice Newcastle, held on 2nd March 2021 at 2.00pm via Zoom Video Conference.

Present

There were 37 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 were able to attend the “virtual” meeting, being held during the current pandemic lockdown.

1. Introductions and Welcome from Keith Reed Chair of Trustees

Keith explained that Citizens Advice in Newcastle had prevailed since September 1939 at the outbreak of WW2, but the last twelve months has been unprecedented in terms of changes. The charity has had to adapt very quickly to all the restrictions of the Coronavirus pandemic. He thanked staff, volunteers, and his fellow trustees for all the hard work during this difficult time. Keith welcomed Kim McGuinness, Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria, as guest speaker. He explained that Kim has been a long time supporter of Citizens Advice Newcastle, from her time as Cabinet Member with the City Council.

2. Guest Speaker: Kim McGuinness, Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria

Kim thanked Keith for his introduction, and said she was very pleased to be continuing to support the work of Citizens Advice Newcastle as PCC for Northumbria. The new Police Plan for 21-25 has just been published, after a huge amount of public consultation. She said that five years is a very long time, particularly given all the changes over the last 12 months, so the plan must be seen as a “work in progress” which will need to adapt to changing needs and opportunities, as they arise. At its heart is the fundamental need to keep Northumbria safe. We already have some of the lowest crime rates in the country, and overall our area is safe. However, we must never be complacent, and fight crime in all its forms. She is particularly keen to have Northumbria Police more visible, and is pleased that 459 more officers have been recruited this year. Neighbourhood policing is key to fighting crime and ensuring that we share intelligence, and give local people confidence. She said that Citizens Advice has a vital role to play in a number of areas, as a key partner with Northumbria Police

- Providing a safe place for clients to report criminal activity /seek advice;
- Sharing with Police our understanding of emerging themes/common concerns about crime;
- Providing a “human” response to people’s concerns - currently the 101 automated phone system gives a very poor response
- Supporting crime victims, especially those affected by scams and domestic abuse;
- Improving referral networks – currently there are 14 different systems;
- Providing client feedback on how Police services can improve.

She said that she is keen to develop even closer partnership working arrangements with Citizens Advice Newcastle, and the voluntary sector overall. Years of austerity and funding cuts have had a huge impact on the sector, particularly for children and young people's services. In some parts of the force area, outh services have suffered funding cuts of 90%. Similarly, lots of excellent projects are struggling to survive with one year funding provision - there needs to be a longer term commitment to give stability to their work.

Kim then answered a number of questions on cyber crime, scams, loan sharks, drugs, womens' prisons, women with no recourse to public funds, and child poverty.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from 15 members of the public including Councillor Nick Forbes, Councillor Joyce McCarty and Lord Shipley

4. Minutes of the last Annual Public Meeting held on 2 March 2020

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2020 were previously circulated. Proposed as a correct record by Ian McIntosh, seconded by Richard Harris. Agreed unanimously.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were none.

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

Keith said that 2019-20 once again showed effective partnership working to benefit local people. 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 for their ongoing commitment to our work.

During the year a number of projects were consolidated, including Help to Claim Universal Credit and energy advice services. Our research and campaigns work continues to be a particular strength, thanks to the hard work of Neil Duffy, our Research and Campaigns Manager, and to continued funding from the Millfield House Foundation.

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 giving both strategic leadership and staff support, which is all provided on a voluntary basis.

As he stated earlier, the last twelve months have seen huge changes in the way we provide our advice services. In late March last year the office closed and all staff shifted to homeworking, almost overnight. He paid tribute to all the staff who made this possible, overcoming lots of logistical and technological problems. Our IT systems are now substantially improved, together with the recent adoption of "soft phones" which make client calls free of charge, and enable us to provide much more digital advice.

During this time, we sadly lost Richard Chadeyron who died in April. Richard was a great support to the charity, always cheerful, good humoured and very wise. He was greatly liked by all staff and trustees, and Keith said he personally missed his funny stories - particularly cricket related ones.

In December, Nadeem Ahmad decided to retire from the Trustee Board after many years service. Again, his enthusiasm and commitment to the charity were very much appreciated, and we all send him our thanks and best wishes.

Looking forward, we are all keen to help with the Covid recovery process, ensuring that local people get the advice and support they will need to get their lives back on track. We are now working more closely with NHS services in the City, and hope that this will develop further in the post pandemic recovery.

7. Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020 – Honorary Treasurer, Tony Crawley

Tony pointed to the highlights of annual accounts which had been circulated in a 30 page report. We achieved a £20k surplus at 31 March 2020, and our reserves stood at £250k which is a very healthy financial situation. Our turnover for 19-20 was 23% higher than in 2018-19, with some new projects and new funding coming on stream.

As Keith said, the last twelve months have been full of new challenges as we cope with all the changes which the Coronavirus pandemic has brought about. It is hoped that we will be able to break even for the financial year 20-21, which is a considerable achievement in the circumstances.

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 MHA Tait Walker, our accountants and auditors.

Ian McIntosh formerly proposed the adoption of the accounts and Richard Harris seconded this. Agreed unanimously

8. Appointment of Auditors

Tony Crawley formally proposed that MHA Tait Walker continue as auditors for the following year and Richard Harris seconded this. Agreed unanimously.

9. Nominations and elections to the Board of Trustees.

All nine current Trustee board members had been duly nominated and seconded, so were declared elected.

The meeting closed at 3.08pm with Keith Reed thanking Kim McGuinness, our guest speaker and stating that we get great support from Northumbria Police. He was particularly interested in furthering more joint work, particularly for victim support services, in the year ahead.