



Board of Trustees

17 July 2010
Argent, Brindleyplace, Birmingham

MINUTES

Paula Ridley (Chair)
Martin Meredith (Treasurer)
Freddie Gick
Helen Marcus
David Lovie
John Walker
Paul Myers
David Tittle

Tony Burton (Director)
Ian Harvey (Co-ordinator)

1. Apologies and Minutes of meeting of 10 June 2010

There were no apologies.

The Minutes were agreed and signed for the record. All the actions had been completed or were on the agenda. The Board would consider risk management at a later meeting.

2. Director's report

Tony provided an update focusing on four main areas – funding, campaigns, volunteer awards and proposals for a Corporate Forum. He also indicated a public announcement of Griff Rhys Jones' role as first President of Civic Voice would be made on 22 July.

The Board was delighted to hear that Civic Voice had secured funding from both CLG (for 2010/11) and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (tapering over three years and in excess of the amount requested).

Tony updated the Board on recent campaigns, including on broadband street cabinets, High Speed Rail and a Ministerial meeting on Street Pride. A copy of Civic Voice's letter in *The Guardian* on broadband boxes was circulated. The Board congratulated staff on the influence being gained in Whitehall and Westminster. Paula also reflected on the Big Society reception hosted in 10 Downing Street by David Cameron which Tony and she had attended and the overlaps with the Your Square Mile project being developed by the Big Society Network.

The Board welcomed proposals for two awards for volunteers and civic societies to be provided by the Marsh Christian Trust. There was discussion about the best way to use awards to encourage civic societies and volunteers, and the role they might play in developing Civic Day. The Marsh awards would be developed on the basis of simple criteria for public announcement at the AGM (**Action TB 25/10**).

Freddie outlined proposals for establishing a Corporate Forum as one way for Civic Voice to garner support from business. This would be focused on businesses with a direct interest in Civic Voice affairs. As well as providing funds this would help build understanding and provide a means of discussing issues of principle and acting as a critical friend. It could also provide expert volunteer trainers, be a source of employee volunteers and offer expert advice. The Board agreed it was essential that any corporate relationships did not fetter Civic Voice's independence and its ability to criticise or object to a business's activities. It was agreed to explore the potential of a Corporate Forum working on the basis of c£2,500 minimum fee and that each year there would be at least one get together and one-to-one meeting with each business. Members would also have rights to attend Civic Voice meetings and publicise their membership. This would be pursued by Freddie and David T who would develop some basic proposals in conjunction with staff (**Action FG/DT 26/10**).

The value of individual civic societies establishing effective relationships with local business was also emphasised and it was agreed that Civic Voice should support this.

The Board welcomed work being done to build stronger local links with CLG Ministers Greg Clark and Andrew Stunell and to establish an All Party Parliamentary Group on civic societies.

Paula proposed and the Board agreed Freddie as Deputy Chair of Civic Voice.

3. Success measures

Tony introduced the proposed success measures for Civic Voice which followed the Board's agreement of the strategy in April. These were agreed and the discussion emphasised the importance of renewals and the support provided by the help desk. It was agreed to report progress to each Board meeting and to include a basic traffic light system (**Action TB 27/10**).

4. Management accounts

An updated set of Management Accounts was circulated, including the new funding commitments secured. It was agreed to extend the staff contracts to June 30 2011 (**Action PR 28/10**).

There was discussion about the need for Civic Voice activity to extend beyond the staff and involve more trustees and other volunteers.

The Board agreed that Civic Voice's accounts need only be subject to "independent examination" as recommended by the Charity Commission and to a formal proposal being made by Martin at the September meeting from a short list of accountants he has approached (**Action MM 29/10**).

5. Membership

The latest membership position was circulated showing 250 groups with over 65,000 individual members. Tony indicated the speed of recruitment was widely praised by partners but recruitment rates were now dropping off and needed to be sustained if the civic movement was to achieve the financial security it wants.

Tony tabled information on the level of take up of Bluefin insurance by civic societies. This showed 188 groups have taken out insurance but not yet joined Civic Voice, despite this being a requirement of the insurance arrangements and a benefit provided by Civic Voice. It was agreed that Bluefin should remind groups of this obligation **(Action IH 30/10)**.

The Board also discussed the value of personal approaches to prospective members and agreed to increase the number of approaches they were each making to embrace up to 20 groups each on the basis of briefings provided by Ian **(Action Board/IH 31/10)**.

It was agreed that the options for Civic Voice's membership fee needed to be explored at a future meeting and this discussion needs also to address the level of ambition reflected in the low membership fees of many local civic societies **(Action TB 32/10)**.

6. Strengthening civic societies

The Board had a wide ranging discussion based on a paper prepared by staff in consultation with David T. This recognised the wide variation in the strength of civic societies and their approach to their own development. The paper stressed the importance of changing the movement's culture and increasing its ambition as well as the value of providing resources, workshops and information to support groups who wish to develop. This had been identified by civic societies as a priority for Civic Voice during the work of the Civic Society Initiative.

The Board recognised that many of the challenges facing civic societies are external and that difficult local authority relationships or a political environment which does not value the community voice can be a brake on groups. It emphasised the importance of Civic Voice's national lobbying and profile raising in building confidence and demonstrating widespread support.

The Board agreed Civic Voice needed to avoid a top down, "training" led approach and that it should be positive about civic society's achievements and value the principle of strengthening civic societies "by example" and through peer to peer discussion.

The discussion illustrated the lack of firm evidence when discussing the state of individual civic societies and the value of being able to identify where group priorities lie through assessment of calls to the help desk and by surveying groups. It emphasised the importance of individual programmes and projects run by local groups as a way of involving more people and reaching out to communities. It also emphasised the value of learning and development through viral methods of communication and dissemination. The Board agreed Civic Day provided an essential platform to strengthen civic societies.

The Board concluded there were no simple solutions to the challenge and opportunity of strengthening civic societies and that a wide range of approaches would need to be taken, including:

- Inspiring the movement through national campaigns and lobbying
- Using Civic Day as a focus for strengthening civic societies across the year
- Making the most of existing opportunities such as the AGM
- Providing a variety of ways to showcase and share ideas between different groups and learning from what works
- Providing practical support and information online and by email and telephone
- Workshops on key issues provided by Civic Voice or in conjunction with others, including on urban design
- Support for individual groups wishing to undertake health checks
- Using civic entrepreneurs and leaders in the vanguard of the movement to support and develop others
- Continuing to support a fast changing and up to date website
- Offering support to civic societies in trouble or new civic societies via neighbouring groups and trustees.

This workstream would be developed by staff working with David T (**Action TB/IH/DT 33/10**).

7. Civic Day

Freddie updated the Board on discussions with Paul and efforts to establish a small Civic Day Group of volunteers. He planned a meeting of the Group in August. Freddie reported good responses from civic societies with whom Civic Day has been discussed, whether or not they are members of Civic Voice. He stressed the importance of securing good sponsorship to provide Civic Voice members with the support they would need. The Board welcomed the update and emphasised the value of seeing Civic Day as central to the process of strengthening Civic Societies and not just as a one day event.

8. AOB

There was no AOB. The next meeting is 3-6pm on 14 September in London.