



# Larger Civic Societies

Notes of a meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2017  
at Leeds Civic Trust Headquarters

## Attendance

Gill Battarbee	<b>GB</b>	Addingham Civic Society	<a href="mailto:gillbattarbee@gmail.com">gillbattarbee@gmail.com</a>
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## 1. Welcome

JH welcomed members to the meeting which followed on from two previous meetings in Oxford and Chester. The group had now been officially constituted as a working group of Civic Voice with the aim of ensuring that Civic Voice was responding to the needs of larger societies, whose interests and concerns were often distinct from smaller groups.

MH then welcomed members to the HQ of Leeds Civic Society and gave a brief outline of the building's history.

## 1. Introductions

The participants were then asked to introduce themselves and the organisation they represented. They were asked to state the membership fee for their society and to nominate another civic society which they felt was doing an effective job.

## 2. New Developments

IH gave an update on the latest developments in Civic Voice with particular focus on the progress that had been made on implementing the 42 recommendations in the Green

Balance report which had been published at the 2016 Convention. The Vision, Mission and Values of the organisation had been confirmed and a new strategic plan (to 2020) and a risk register were in place. The unexpected general election had necessitated postponement of the Design Awards presentation but plans for Civic Day and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Conservation Areas were progressing well. The success of the War Memorials programme showed what could be achieved when the civic movement worked together.

A discussion followed on conservation areas and the production of an update of the 2015 Civic Voice Manifesto.

### 3. Leeds Civic Trust

MH presented the work of Leeds Civic Trust. Operating in a city of around 750,000 population it has around 500 individual members (membership fee £30.00), 85 corporate members and some 25 affiliated societies. It owns its city-centre headquarters, with offices, meeting rooms and a shop and employs 2 full-time and one part-time staff.

The Trust focused on an influencing role and had generally good and positive relationships with the local authority, which had led to positive involvement in large-scale developments and the development of planning policy in the city. They were actively involved in Leeds' bid for European Capital of Culture.

Some activities that might be of interest to other societies included:

- Events specifically for new members
- An Open Forum for members to feed ideas into the annual business plan
- Lunches for corporate members
- "Networking" events for more junior staff of corporate members
- A small grants scheme for inner-city areas
- A "free trial" membership scheme for three months.

### 4. Open Session

IH introduced the session with the results of a survey of which CV activities larger societies thought were most important. They most valued CV's lobbying and publicity activities at a national level. The main concerns of civic societies generally were the need for more volunteers, particularly for committee roles, ageing membership and the need to raise the profile of the movement.

RVP raised the issue of "Branding". A discussion took place on the use of the word "civic", whether it should be "reclaimed" by the civic movement. It was noted that several societies did not use the word "civic" in their titles.

PP asked for further information about the response to the "Green Balance" report and its recommendations. IH explained the measures that were being taken to ensure the future sustainability of the organisation. Termination of the lease of the Liverpool office had led to a move to shared office accommodation in Birmingham. Funding of £60,000 pa for the next three years had been obtained from Historic England and a staff restructuring was in progress.

PP noted that the Finchley Society had found insurance policies that were cheaper than the policy offered through Civic Voice. It was pointed out that the CV policy with Lockton's had been designed to meet the particular needs of civic societies and other policies might not serve them as well. But IH agreed to look at the alternative.

MH raised the issue that some cities, such as Leeds, were experiencing a plethora of applications under permitted development rights for telephone boxes whose real purpose was to serve as advertising hoardings. It was agreed that this was an issue that Civic Voice should investigate further.

## 5. Next meeting

It was agreed that a further meeting should be arranged to focus on specific issues of concern. IH noted that Malvern, Oxford and Lytham societies had offered to host.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm and members then had a short tour of developments in Leeds city centre, kindly arranged by Leeds CT.

David Evans

10<sup>th</sup> July 2017