



Board of Trustees

27 January 2011
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

MINUTES

Paula Ridley (Chair)
Freddie Gick
Carl Carrington
David Lovie
Helen Marcus
Martin Meredith
Neil Sinden
David Tittle
John Walker

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

1. Welcome and apologies

Paula welcomed Neil Sinden to his first Board meeting. There were no apologies.

2. Minutes of meeting of 30 October 2010

The October Minutes were signed.

3. Director's report

Tony reported on the marked shift in mood and expectations around Civic Voice as it was increasingly seen as important to efforts to give communities more of a say about the future of their areas. This is presenting a host of opportunities on which he was looking for the Board's guidance.

He summarised a fast moving policy agenda, especially noting the opportunities around the Localism Bill whilst also needing to ensure it was effective and the support needed by communities to take advantage of its provisions would be made available. A number of civic societies had contacted their MPs with the key issues identified by Civic Voice. The Board welcomed the influence which Civic Voice was having on the legislation and stressed the importance of addressing the key issues being identified by civic societies through our lobbying. It was agreed to strengthen the informal network of volunteers involved in commenting on policy issues with a Planning Panel to be chaired by a volunteer selected by the Chair and Deputy Chair. This would be on the basis of the

desired skills and experience circulated. Other members would be invited to join the Panel which would operate with a minimum of bureaucracy, comprise a mix of lay and professional knowledge and advise staff. It is expected that the Panel's work would be reported through the Director's report and the Panel Chair would attend the Board annually (**Action TB 1/11**).

The Board welcomed the progress which has been made on commissioning a history of the civic movement from Lucy Hewitt at Newcastle University and asked to be kept in touch. The Board also welcomed the links with CPRE and the opportunity to jointly host events which would bring closer connections between CPRE branches and civic societies.

Tony reported progress on the first civic society survey for which funding had been secured from English Heritage. This would begin in February.

4. Neighbourhood planning – CLG prospectus

David Tittle and Tony introduced the proposal to apply for funding from DCLG in partnership with the Architecture Centre Network in response to the prospectus offering support for community groups on planning. The Board recognised a successful proposal would have a major impact on Civic Voice; requiring extra staff, introducing new responsibilities and creating reputational risks and opportunities. There was discussion about the merits of the Architecture Centre Network as our partner and it was agreed it provided a good fit in terms of existing links between Architecture and Built Environment Centres with the civic movement and the "ready to go" expertise they could provide.

There was some discussion about whether there were risks in becoming dependent on external funding and any lessons to be learned from the Civic Trust experience. The Board recognised this funding aligned directly with Civic Voice's core business and agreed a clear approach to managing the risk of funding being withdrawn. This would largely be provided by making the programme capable of being scaled up or down in response to funding or demand.

The Board stressed the importance of the programme reflecting the approach to community engagement and leadership which Civic Voice championed and the opportunity this presented to ensure neighbourhood planning was developed in a manner sympathetic to civic societies. It also recognised the need to ensure communities supported through the programme did not have too high expectations of what could be provided. The Board emphasised the advantages of increasing contact between civic societies and other community groups and parish and town councils engaged in planning.

Staff were cautioned to take a flexible approach to the programme in its first year when a considerable amount would be learnt, and not to become overcommitted to specific targets or outcomes.

The Board concluded with strong support for a Civic Voice bid and asked staff to finalise this in discussion with Paula, David Tittle and Martin (**Action TB/DT/PR/MM 2/11**).

5. Heritage Open Days – English Heritage tender

Tony introduced the proposal for a partnership with the National Trust and Heritage Alliance to take on responsibility for co-ordinating Heritage Open Days from 2012 in response to English Heritage's tender. David Lovie supported the approach and confirmed the importance of HODs to civic societies.

The Board agreed that HODs was a jewel in the crown of the civic movement and strongly supported efforts to restore its voluntary ethos and put it on a more sustainable footing. It was recognised that HODs performed a different role to Civic Day and Civic Voice should be a central part of its future. It was anticipated that the National Trust would take on lead responsibility for staff and transition arrangements and our role would be to promote and support HODs more over the next few years and help lead the programme for finding a long term future without Government funding support.

The Board agreed that HODs was so important to the civic movement that we should seek to secure its future even if a partnership approach was not possible.

Staff were asked to develop a response to the tender in discussion with Paula, David Lovie and Martin (**Action TB/DL/PR/MM 3/11**).

6. Civic Day

Freddie reported on the growing number of civic societies signing up to Civic Day and indicated that the second bulletin would be being sent out by Ian very shortly. He also reported on the positive reception for the workshops being delivered by Ian around the country. There was some discussion about the idea of introducing a Love Local photography competition as an element of Civic Day for those societies who wished to participate. This was agreed as a response for requests that Civic Voice provides support for a particular project. The Board was also informed of the preparation of a colour booklet *101 civic ideas* which would be circulated shortly and launched to attract others to participate in Civic Day. Ian reported that he expected a considerable number of civic societies would be coming forward over the next few weeks.

The Board thanks Freddie and Ian for all their work in developing Civic Day.

7. Success measures

The latest performance against the agreed success measures was noted.

8. Developing our “common voice” – prospectus, views and campaigns

Tony introduced proposals to develop the “next chapter” of Civic Voice's thinking about what it stood for and on what it should campaign. The Board agreed this needed to be done in as participatory way as possible and supported the style outlined in the paper. Neil summarised CPRE's experience in developing a vision for the countryside and the value of external input and focused debate on key issues which emerge. He also emphasised the value of an approach which focused on outcomes rather than the organisation and one which thought through how it would be used to shape campaigns.

The Board agreed the process for developing the “common voice” would be as important as the conclusions and it needed to build a strong commitment and sense of ownership. It recognised this would be challenging given the diversity of Civic Voice's membership and that this would be the first time a common approach had been developed. The

Board recognised that any conclusions would not be binding on any individual civic society.

The approach proposed by the staff was supported but the Board concluded that, while the process should begin as soon as possible, the timetable was overly ambitious. It agreed an 18 month programme running till the October 2012 AGM. This would allow time for full discussion and wide participation. It would also allow for the development of a network of volunteers keen to work on and support Civic Voice and address these strategic issues. We might expect to identify some of the key themes for the civic movement during the coming year and these could be debated and discussed by civic societies to inform the programme in 2012. The Board also emphasised the value of the Civic Panel and other external inputs to inform the discussion and focus in on possible issues of controversy.

9. Membership renewals

Tony introduced the proposed approach to membership renewals which had been debated at the October 2010 awayday. It was agreed to make no change to the membership fee (£1.50 per member) or cap (£500). It was also agreed that clusters of civic societies, including regional associations, should not expect to pay a membership fee and for free reciprocal membership to be arranged.

It was agreed to emphasise the growing benefits to civic societies from membership of Civic Voice and the decision not to increase the membership fee or cap as had been anticipated when approaching groups to join or renew.

The Board also discussed the value of civic societies discussing Civic Voice as part of their normal agenda and forwarding Civic Voice bulletins and information to members via email.

The benefits of groups joining through direct debit were discussed and Martin was asked to explore the feasibility of introducing this **(Action MM 4/11)**.

10. Civic society insurance

Tony introduced the proposals to shift the civic society insurance scheme to Lockton. This followed a tendering process which Bluefin had chosen not to participate in. He confirmed that the level of cover would be enhanced, the premium for civic societies reduced and the process would be streamlined by making it part of the membership/renewals process. The Board welcomed these improvements and agreed the scheme, highlighting that it would cost less than civic societies had been paying four year previously.

Tony was asked to finalise the arrangements with Lockton in discussion with Paula and Martin **(Action TB/PR/MM 5/11)**.

11. Financial update

Martin presented the management accounts to end 2011 and reported a solid financial position to the end of 2012. It was agreed to present a budget for 2011/12 to the April meeting along with a longer term view on the finances. This would include a reserves policy **(Action MM/TB 6/11)**.

12. Membership update

The latest membership update was noted.

13. Staff issues

The Board discussed and agreed to extend the staff contracts to the end of June 2012, with a 3% increase in salary (**Action PR 7/11**).

14. Any Other Business

There was no AOB.

David volunteered to host the next meeting on 7 April at MADE's offices in Birmingham.