

Minutes of the Special Meeting held at County Hall Preston on the 9th January 2010

Present: Peter Colley (Chairman & Ambleside/Cockermouth & Cumbria Federation), Winnie Clark (Lancaster), Barbara Colley (Ambleside/Cockermouth & Cumbria Federation), Adrian Dunning (Worsley), David Evans (Blackpool), Kathy Fishwick (Rossendale & Lancashire Federation), Rob Foreman (Manchester), Roger Frankland (Lancaster), Brian Gilbert (Rossendale), Ian Harvey (Wavertree), John Kershaw (Manchester), Stephen Langtree (Chester), Christopher Norton (Blackpool), Beryl Radcliffe (Blackpool), Elaine Smith (Blackpool), Paul Thornhill (Didsbury), Charles Walker (Bury), Tom Webster (Didsbury), Martin Widden (Lancaster).

Apologies: Kate Cartmell and Marion Coupe (Lytham St Annes), Iain Gerrard (Littleborough), Susan Spibey (Merseyside), Terry Edgar (Wallasey) and Cynthia Radford (Hoylake).

1 Peter opened the meeting by welcoming everyone who had managed to overcome the difficult travelling conditions caused by the bad weather, and checked to ensure that they had seen the three documents produced by the Civic Society Initiative. In considering these, the Chairman expressed personal disappointment about the fact that there had been only one real proposal on governance for the new national organisation. Options had been promised at the Birmingham meeting and in contrast the Regional Spatial Strategy consultation paper contained four different options for comment. The proposal only provides for direct contact between societies and the central body without regions or 'clusters' having an effective role in the organisation's activities. Tony Burton has indicated that it is considered that members of the board should have general, not geographical concerns and that their suitability would be filtered via the proposed Nominations Committee. This is essentially different from the way regions fed into the National Committee in the previous Civic Trust structure.

2. The proposed structure and governance.

Stephen felt it was unfair to have a one vote per society, whereas the proposed subscription would be on a per capita basis.

Elaine thought this had to be the case because of the problem of logistics both for each society and the national organisation.

Kathy was concerned that societies would need to look at their constitutions to see whether there could be clashes with what is proposed, to which Adrian responded by saying that a new constitution should be fit for purpose and satisfy the needs of societies without looking back to the past. Kathy later elaborated on her concern by asking whether societies would be likely to give up their own charitable status and other matters that dated back to their origins. She agreed with looking to the future, but reminded everyone that only 40% of societies were ever registered with the Civic Trust.

John Kershaw thought that votes should be proportional to the numbers in each

society to which Stephen suggested one per 50 members. Peter later added that he thought this could be achieved by weighting votes to reflect the size of larger societies.

John thought the proposed nominations committee could produce the effect of an oligarchy, to which Peter responded by saying that after six months of discussions, it was difficult to see that any of the suggestions that had been put forward had been accepted, but that all the decisions had however been made by someone in the CSI i.e. a top down process.. He also referred to the requirement for societies to enter into an agreement on joining, with potential penalties for non-compliance.

With general acceptance of the need to move forward, Stephen said that Chester does not see any risk to the autonomy of individual societies and would propose proportional representation. However, there would be a need to argue for a reasonable management structure.

Concerns were raised about those who would run the organisation. Christopher (Blackpool) thought there should be open competition but that, since there would probably not be any question of honoraria, even expenses, we could be talking about similar people to those previously involved with the Civic Trust ie those who live near London or have independent means. Tom echoed these views, stating that they should be people involved in the movement now and that the document needed simplifying. John confirmed his belief that societies will not be happy with the governance package and that there should be open, democratic elections.

3. The proposed funding.

Peter identified the fact that no detailed budget or business plan had been provided and that there are questions about the breakdown of what is offered for the different levels of subscription. What is the cost of lobbying for example, all this compared with the much lower set up and running costs of Heritage Link (of which we are members)? The workshop with Dragon Rouge involved the projection of groups of images showing sporting events, personalities or typefaces so that participants could select the one they thought most appropriate for the movement. This was just a branding exercise with no indication so far of the outcome. Martin (Lancaster) added that they are not clear what the new organisation would have to offer. Why should societies link with this when its purpose is not really known? Stephen on the other hand, felt that the report represented what people want.

4. The position of regional associations.

Peter explained that, whatever fee societies would be charged for registration, plus the one for associations and 'clusters', the cost of running the regional associations would need to be met. Other regions are continuing, and have previously or intend in the future to ask societies to pay an annual fee. For example YHACS has set this at £40 per society.

Elaine questioned the role of the regions, compared with that of the national body to which Stephen responded by explaining how the region can influence umbrella policies with local impact. Peter provided evidence by reading the policy on the historic environment that was inserted into the North West Regional Spatial Strategy as a result of the pressures applied by the North West Environmental Link on which he is our representative. Our membership of this and other similar regional organisations is dependent on our being a properly constituted regional body representing a specific sector.

Several members of the group confirmed that the role of the region involved

significant networking and could be further developed, possibly including a change of name.

Beryl said that the fees for both national and regional bodies should be clear cut with payment deadlines.

John talked about the sense of identity found within a region and Roger thought both levels important against a background of a possible London-centred national body.

David (Blackpool) thought the region should aim to become stronger, to which Stephen gave an account of the conservation area campaign and influence with English Heritage.

It was suggested that there was a need to improve communication, networking and further develop mentoring and the formation of new societies such as the one proposed for Warrington.

Stephen felt that some of the fee payable to the national body should come back to the regions, like the £2,000 annual subvention previously awarded. He proposed a motion on meeting regional association costs which was agreed by those present: "It is regrettable that regional associations will have to go and ask for a separate subscription in order to pay their running costs".

Peter referred to his research into insurance costs for societies not wishing to join or take up the Bluefin offer from the national body. One could be available as a group scheme for about £150 after checking out the kinds of activity that would be covered.

5. Conclusions

Following earlier discussion, it was agreed that the following motion from John Kershaw be accepted by majority vote:

- a. Voting should be on a weighted basis according to the size of the membership of individual societies in the country.
- b. There should be open democratic elections based on an electoral college.
- c. The existence of regional organisations should be recognised in the new national body.