

Draft Minutes of Equal Lives AGM 2023

A hybrid meeting, held in person at Witard Road Baptist Church in Norwich, and virtually via Microsoft Teams, on Wednesday 29th November 2023.

Present (In Person):

Shaun McGarry (SM), Chair; **Fraser Bowe** (FB), Treasurer; **Martin Symons** (MS), Trustee; **Omotola Bello** (OB), Trustee; **Joy Croft** (JC), Trustee; **Katie Robinson** (KR), Trustee; **Ben Reed** (BR), CEO

Register for other attendees available on request

Minutes recorded by **Jordan Hunnisett** (JH), Business Support Officer

The quorum was achieved – 21 voting members either present (either in person or virtually) or counted by voting online via survey, plus 5 votes from Inclusive Norwich, who voted via MS, giving a quorum of 26.

Meeting Starts at 13:00 PM.

Agenda Item 1 – Introductions of the Board and CEO

SM welcomes all attendees. The microphone is then passed among the other Trustees (FB, OB, KR, JC), who each introduce themselves to the room.

SM shares that, due to illness, David Shraga has resigned as a Trustee. We wish him well and that he has a swift recovery.

Agenda Item 2 – Sign off the AGM 2022 Minutes

Motion	Total For	Total Against	Total Abstain	Total Votes
Approval of AGM 2022 minutes	5	0	21	26

Agenda Item 3 – Overview of 2022-2023 Financial Year

BR welcomes all attendees to the AGM.

BR acknowledges that, as an organisation, Equal Lives has been taking huge strides forward over the past year. We started three big new contracts. We had many new grants come through. It has been a challenging year, but we have seen great successes in teams that did not even exist at the time of the AGM in 2022. It has felt like the organisation has been able to successfully emerge from the times of COVID-19.

BR shares that we have received funding from the Henry Smith Charity. The Advocacy Team has been involved in this project. This is a big step forward; it is a big change in how we are funded as an organisation. We also increased our support of disabled people. However, we are still supporting disabled people in (increasingly) extreme and difficult environments.

BR describes financial developments across the organisation, starting with the Advice and Membership Team. We, alongside partnership organisations, successfully applied for a tender through Norfolk County Council. This meant that we had to restructure the Advice and Membership Team. The team has supported 850 clients this year through social prescribing and offering advice. This is a large number, considering how much work goes into each case. Another responsibility of the team is membership. We have grown our membership with 102 new Members over the past year.

BR turns his attention to the Advocacy Team. There has been more funding for the team than in any previous year. This funding is mainly from the Henry Smith Charity, supporting us with advocating for disabled parents. This has allowed us to expand our capacity in this team. There was also statutory advocacy, and two new contracts from Norfolk County Council. The team supported 373 people over the course of the year. **BR** compliments the team for doing a fantastic job keeping up with the demands of their service. In terms of stats, in June this year, the number of clients helped by the team per month became higher than it was before the outbreak of COVID-19.

BR discusses Shopmobility. In the beginning of April 2022-23, we had on average 1 person use the service per week. In contrast, we had 130 people use the service this November. This means that the service has increased in its usage by a huge percentage. A lot of this is due to the impact and remnant of COVID-19. Shopmobility is now perhaps the most used of all our services.

BR discusses Suffolk Independent Living (SIL). None of the current Payroll team are Staff who were with Equal Lives before COVID-19 pandemic. The team changed their software for their payroll service, which was a complicated process – an entire year’s worth of work. The team faced other challenging conditions, such as having to work from Shopmobility when Sackville Place became somewhere they could no longer work. **BR** gives a massive thank you to the team for keeping their service going. He also thanks HM for supporting with the move and PE for showing exceptional leadership during a tough period for the team.

BR discusses the Fundraising and Finance Team. The team has restructured. They have been incredibly successful at securing funding. This has allowed Equal Lives to move its funding from essentially five or six years ago being entirely funded by county councils and local authorities to more like twenty-five to thirty percent of our funding now coming from other sources (usually trusts and foundations). We parted from the NHS as well, meaning that we can be more independent and do not have to worry quite so much about global authorities changing policies or the government changing laws. The team is also looking to grow our legacy income as part of their fundraising approach.

BR addresses Staff retention and pay throughout the organisation. The cost of living is an increasingly difficult problem to deal with. This has led to Equal Lives struggling with Staff retention. During COVID-19, a plan was put in place to increase pay, but this went out-the-window quickly because when COVID-19 “ended”, the cost-of-living crisis “started”. After this, a 7% pay rise was given to all Staff. The organisation is committed to continuing that increase so that Staff are paid at least competitively to other organisations doing similar work.

BR addresses the finances of 2022-23. We ended 2022-23 in a far better financial position than we originally hoped. This is mostly due to Staff retention issues. We made a deficit in 2021-22. In 2022-23, we made a surplus of just under £100,000 in terms of unrestricted income. This means that our reserves are much better and at the level we want them to be. This was mainly due to Staff vacancies, new funding opportunities, and unexpected changes to interest rates in the UK.

BR touches on the upcoming year. He notes that our teams and services are seeing much improvement. He shares that Equal Lives is dedicated to removing disabling barriers across Norfolk and Suffolk. He thanks all Equal Lives Staff, Equal Lives Members, and Equal Lives Trustees.

Agenda Item 4 – Financial Overview

FB gives a financial overview of 2022-23; the year went very well financially. We had a larger surplus than expected. This is largely because we changed the way we saved money, therefore earning more interest. Also, because interest rates went up, this allowed us to make more money. Staff vacancies that we carried also contributed to the surplus and we managed to save some rent money due to the dispute regarding Sackville Place. This has raised an issue surrounding how we manage our reserves going forward. This means that, early in the New Year, we will be reviewing our reserves policy. We are looking to budget for a pay rise in the new financial year.

Agenda Item 5 – Member Voting and Announcements

Motion	Total For	Total Against	Total Abstain	Total Votes
Fraser Bowe to be a Trustee	18	2	5	25
Omotola Bello to be a Trustee	19	0	7	26
Katie Robinson to be a Trustee	19	1	5	25
Joy Croft to be a Trustee	20	1	4	25
Approve 2023 Accounts	16	0	10	26
Approve current Auditors	10	0	0	10

Agenda Item 6 – Short break for Attendees / Vote on Chair and Treasurer

A twenty-five-minute break, in which the Board of Trustees voted on a new Chair and Treasurer.

Agenda Item 7 – Guest Speaker (Dr Katherine Dean BSc, PHD)

KD gives a talk. It is about her life and work in recent years. She is an Associate Professor in Health Care Research at UEA (as well as an Access Ambassador). She conducts research on the co-created management of long-term conditions and disabilities. She has published over 80 peer-reviewed journal articles, and her work informs the guidelines of both the National Health Service (NHS) and World Health Organisation (WHO).

Agenda Item 8 – Services and Teams

BR invites the Managers at Equal Lives to introduce and discuss their teams and services.

Order of Speakers	Staff Member(s)	Team / Service Introduced
1	SL	Advice and Membership
2	CM	SIL Advice
3	PE	Payroll Service
4	KM	Finance and Fundraising

5	MB and IM	Advocacy (and NAP)
6	BR	Volunteering
7	IM	Shopmobility
8	BR	Business Support

BR announces the results of the Board of Trustees vote on their new Chair and Treasurer. **FB** is the new Chair. **OB** is the new Treasurer. **FB** and **OB** are congratulated.

Agenda Item 9 – Q&A

BR opens the Q&A. There are no questions asked, both in-person and virtually.

BR shares that **SM** will now be stepping down as Chair after 10 years of service as a Trustee. **SM** is thanked and presented with a card and bouquet of flowers.

Agenda Item 10 – Networking

BR invites in-person attendees to network for a thirty-minute period over teas, coffees, and biscuits.

BR thanks everyone for attending.

Meeting Ends at 15:00 PM.