

Cotswold Link u3a network
Minutes of half yearly meeting held on 20 September 2024
at Rushwick Village Hall, Worcester

Present:

Chris Hucker (Chair), Marion Collighan (Secretary), Jenny Harrison (committee member), Sue Russell (committee member + Network Link Chair), Carmel Burton (committee member + Tetbury), Susan Parker (South West Regional Trustee), Jean Jackson (West Midlands Regional Trustee).

Margaret Cleverley & Chris Larkin (Bishops Cleeve), Paul Clark (Bourton & District), Elinor Padfield (Cam & Dursley), Paul Grierson (Churchdown), Robert Hart, Reyn & Linda Hauff and Ruth Sanders (Cirencester), Lesley Short and Geoff Stollard (Droitwich Spa), Alan Chambers (Evesham & District), John Lang (Fairford & District), Jan Broadway, Jeremy Furtado and Clive Harper (Gloucester), Alasdair Gibson (Ledbury), Alan Torbet (Malvern), Jackie Jolley (Pershore), Sue Gee and Jill Barrett (Redditch), William Lyons and Mark Eardley (Ross-on-Wye), Richard Bedford & Dilys Warren (Stroud), Mike Jones (Tewkesbury), Roger Steer (Thornbury), Paul McDonald and Lynne Smith (Winchcombe), Adie Ditchburn and Alan Russell (Worcester).

1) Welcome from Worcester u3a

Stephen Thorneycroft, Vice-chair of Worcester welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of Worcester u3a and explained the domestic arrangements. They have seen an upsurge in activity over the last couple of years. There are over 100 groups and they now have 16 Pickleball groups, all recently formed. Sadly, there has also been an upsurge in costs. They are struggling to find committee members, as evidenced by their current lack of a Chair. They have moved to the new u3a website on SiteWorks and are very happy with this.

2) Apologies for absence

There were voting delegates representing 20 u3as out of the 27 Cotswold Link members, which is 74%, making the meeting quorate.

Apologies had been received from: Ann Kelly (Treasurer), Anthea Whitehead & Mike Byrne (Bromsgrove), Ken Inglis (Cheltenham), Alan Meyrick (Droitwich Spa), Kim Brinkworth (Hereford), Gisella Lehman (Leominster), Tony Snowdon and Gary Smith (Newent), Pat Graham and Lorna Marshall (Northleach), Bernadette Bell (Tetbury & District), Ian Barber (Tewkesbury).

3) Acceptance of minutes of half yearly meeting held on 22nd March 2024

No issues were raised with the minutes from the previous half yearly meeting in March 2024. Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Richard Bedford and seconded by Alan Chambers. There were no objections to the approval of the minutes.

4) Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

5) News from the committee

a) Cotswold Link Fee 2025

Marion advised that the fee would remain at £14 for 2025.

b) Special Interest Day 2025

Although a theme has yet to be agreed, the Pavilion in Cheltenham has been booked for 12th June 2025. Chris explained that this is near the centre of the region and is very good value for money for the facilities we get. It was pointed out that the venue is accessible once you get there.

It was discussed that with about 100 attendees the car park was full, so this is probably the maximum that can comfortably be accommodated, although the venue would be happy to allow more.

Marion undertook to advise u3as about the options for getting to the Pavilion using public transport, for those who don't drive and can't get a lift. It was suggested that u3as promote car sharing for their members.

6) Feedback on peer support groups

a) Treasurers

Ann Kelly sent a written report as she was unwell and could not attend.

“Our peer group continues to thrive and I am pleased to say that we now have all the Cotswold Link treasurers signed up to the group. Our get-togethers are very practical based and if one person needs help there is always someone willing to help them.

Recently we discussed the use of sum up card readers for payment and we were able to clear up a rumour about their use for payment of subscriptions satisfactorily. We also discovered that we have a sum up guru in one of our groups which could be useful in the future. We used the experience of one of our treasurers to discuss the use of reserves and it proved a lively discussion. We also talked about how the Charity Commission had changed the way we report to them and that we should have accounts with them. Some treasurers are currently working on sorting this out and need to find out who their group contact is for the Charity Commission.

We discussed the possibility of a Treasurer's Forum which is being considered by National and welcomed it as another form of help for treasurers but decided that we will send representatives to each forum and they will keep the rest informed.

When a group decided to sign up to Beacon the peer group was invaluable to the treasurer, helping them to find their way around the Finance section.

We will continue to meet via Zoom every two or three months and members are welcome to bring guests. This might be helpful when there is going to be a change and the new treasurer will have a source of help from the start. Our next zoom will be after the Christmas break in early January.”

b) Secretaries

10 people are now registered for the business secretaries peer support group. This is meeting approximately every 2 months over Zoom, facilitated by Marion. Paul McDonald explained that it is a good forum to discuss a variety of topics, including policies, communication and governance. He feels that the knowledge gained from sharing with others can reduce the work a business secretary has to do, although he thinks the meeting format needs to be adjusted.

c) Groups coordinators

7 people are now registered for the group’s coordinators peer support group. This is meeting approximately every 2 months over Zoom, facilitated by Marion. Adie Ditchburn highlighted that the different financial models used by u3as lead to different funding approaches for groups. He mentioned some of the issues discussed in the meetings, the next of which is on 11th Oct.

d) Membership secretaries

6 people are now registered for the membership secretaries peer support group. 2 meetings have taken place up to now over Zoom, facilitated by Marion. Attendance is still rather low.

e) Chairs

Chris Hucker advised that only 1 person attended the last scheduled meeting, so this group has been put on hold unless more people express an interest. It was mentioned that the National Chairs Forum is too large to allow attendees to have a good discussion of their issues.

f) Speakers’ secretaries

A group for u3as in Gloucestershire is being coordinated by Anne Cox from Tetbury. Speakers’ secretaries from more than half the u3as attended an in-person meeting in the spring. There is not enough interest currently to have a regular meeting for those in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

g) Questions discussed

Potential role holders and those from outside the Cotswold Link are welcome at the meetings, provided that the size of a group does not become too large.

Cotswold link does not have a Pro Zoom licence but usually the meetings are scheduled by a member who attends who has one.

Report from the regional trustee for the West Midlands – Jean Jackson

Jean advised that the West Midlands has 85 u3as but only 2 networks, so she is keen to promote the formation of more networks. Membership numbers are slowly recovering following the drop during covid. She currently has no WM regional support team but would like to form one. A regional Newsletter will be sent out next week. She drew attention to the new Siteworks website, the Friends Newsletter and the TAM Magazine.

Resolution 500k

She feels that the resolution passed at the last AGM is achievable, as it would require an increase of 16% in the membership over 3 years.

“Abilitynet”

Offer free technical support to anyone over 55 and are happy to support the u3a movement. They provide seminars and courses but will also visit people in their homes. They can arrange a FREE training session for your u3a. Contact details AbilityNet.org.uk. Also IT Helpline for over 55s: 0300 180 0028, 9-5pm, Monday to Friday – solves technical issues and IT queries.

Recruitment

Workshops on recruitment, attended by about 200 people, were recently run by Paul Martinez based on the “pathfinder” initiative.

Grants are more likely to be approved if there is a recruitment element.

Ian Cassidy

Jean hopes he will help the Trust to improve their use of technology.

He will visit the WM next year and she is looking for people to help arrange this.

Difficulty of obtaining committee members

Jean is aware of the need to be alert for u3as who are struggling to obtain committee members and sees collaboration between u3as as being helpful. This sparked a lively discussion.

The following barriers to obtaining fully staffed committees were highlighted:

- The Trust’s model constitution causes problems because it forces role holders to leave their posts after 3 years, even if no replacement has been found.
- Some potential committee members are put off by becoming a “trustee” as they are afraid that they will be personally liable.

It was suggested that the Charity Commission are very keen to limit length of service of committee members, particularly officers. However, Jean stressed that the Charity Commission offer guidance, they don’t mandate maximum committee terms. The Trust’s model constitution should be “largely” followed but u3as can make some changes and don’t have to follow exactly. However, it is important to get potential adjustments agreed before voting on at the u3a’s AGM, as the

wording of all constitutions must be approved by the Trust. This is to make sure they will be acceptable to the Charity Commission.

Some people will be deterred from standing if roles are not time limited. Also, where roles are not time limited it can be difficult if a committee becomes dominated by a person who will not step down.

The following suggestions were made:

- We need to make it clear to members what the responsibilities of the trustees and the roles on the committee involve. This should particularly include the concept of collective responsibility and the presence of trustees' insurance.
- We need to promote a culture of being welcomed as a volunteer, as it can be daunting for a member to join an established committee. It helps if the committee is socially cohesive and people enjoy the meetings.
- Members can be invited to join the committee initially without a specific role.
- Roles can be shared if one person can't be found to fill a particular role.

7) Report from the regional trustee for the South West – Susan Parker

Susan covered the following points:

a) "Fit for the Future"

She attended the final pilot council meeting this week and feels that things have come a long way in the last 18 months. From a shaky start the format has evolved to the point where decisions can be made. If the proposal is passed at the Trust AGM the position will be reviewed after 3 years. For individual u3as the advantages of the proposed changes are that they will have 2 trustees per region and the trustees won't need to attend board meetings, giving more time to assist u3as.

b) SW regional support team

Currently this only consists of 4 members and she would like to have more help if anybody feels able to join.

c) Workshops

She feels that the workshops offered by the Trust have evolved a lot over the last 5 years and recommends that people attend, even if they have been before. She hopes to arrange regional workshops in the SW.

The following workshops can currently be booked using Eventbrite:

- i) 9th Oct – EDI workshop for the SW region
- ii) 10th Oct – EDI coffee morning (national)
- iii) 30th Oct – Keeping It Legal (national)
- iv) 25th Nov – Managing Complaints (national)

d) U3a festival

The recent festival was thought to be a big success with the most valued part being the opportunity to meet people. The next festival will be held in 2026, also in York, to build on the knowledge gained this year. Then there will be a festival in 2028 in another location.

e) Grants

Anybody who receives a grant from the Trust will need to send a report afterwards. Susan would like these to include photos and wants to put them on the SW regional website.

8) AOB

In her role as Network Link Chair, Sue Russell gave some feedback on the Pilot Council.

The process

The last 18 months have been about how best to communicate during pilot council meetings. At the first meeting there was one big circle of chairs, which was awful. Next people were split into pre-defined groups, which was better but still did not work well. In the end discussions took place in group that people chose for themselves. This worked well and allowed people to vote on a number of issues and feel they were able to disagree.

The last agenda

The last meeting involved discussions on the following topics:

- An update on the u3a 5000 initiative, including the advertising on Boom radio. Boom radio was felt to be targeted at the u3a demographic and not too expensive (£15k for the 3 months contract). It is difficult to be sure how effective the campaign has been, although hits on the website and enquiries have increased. To obtain more information every u3a would have to add boxes to their membership form to capture information on where people heard about the u3a. The Board were asked to allocate a budget for marketing in the future.
- The u3a festival
There is a Network Link meeting in 2 weeks where information will be given on how to organise a successful event.
- Dementia and how it should be dealt with within the u3a.
- The Winter fuel payment and whether we should campaign on issues like this. It was agreed that the u3a would not sign a letter being supported by a number of other age related charities asking for the payment to be kept, as we have insufficient information.
- The Fit for the Future proposal

Overview

Sue advised that she had been extremely sceptically when the Fit for the Future proposals were first announced and very unhappy with the initial Pilot council meetings. However, she is now supportive of the changes and can see how they can work.

9) Date and time of next meeting

This will be hosted by Ledbury & District u3a on Thursday 27th March 2025 at Ledbury Community Centre, Lawnside Road, Ledbury HR8 2AD.

Signed..... Date