**UNISON There for You**

**Annual General Meeting**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 19 June 2018 in the Brighton Conference Centre, Brighton BN1 2GR**

**PRESENT:**

**Board of Trustees**

Lesley Discombe - Vice Chair

Anthony Dockray

Andy Douglas

John Gray

Abiola Kusoro

Maureen Le Marinel

Gordon McKay

Margaret McKee

Karen Poole

Sian Stockham - Chair

Christine Tanner

Karen Worsley

**Guest Speaker:**

Margaret McKee President of UNISON

**Staff:**

Julie Grant Head of There for You

Maureen Nolan Caseworker

Andrea Barker Suport Staff

Belinda Dowling Support Staff

Maggie Newell Support Staff

**Apologies:**

**152 delegates were registered to attend**

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**SIAN STOCKHAM IN THE CHAIR**

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

The Chair warmly welcomed delegates and visitors to the AGM especially those attending for the first time. Expressing her wish that everyone would leave the meeting with a real sense of pride in what UNISON’s charity achieved in 2017, the Chair also took the opportunity to introduce all the trustees as well as the President Margaret McKee who was attending this year as guest speaker; and to congratulate Margaret Thomas on becoming the new Assistant Genereal Secretary.

The Chair handed over to Maureen LeMarinel to pay tribute to Cliff Williams, former Assistant General Secretary who sadly passed away in 2017. She spoke of a very unassuming man whose presence within UNISON was massive; noting his dedication to the work of UNISON and in particular There for You and all the work the charity does for our members. Describing him as a stalwart who promoted UNISON There for You at every opportunity, someone who was extremely proud that UNISON is the only trade union with a dedicated welfare charity. A charity which he would describe as the bedrock of what it means to help our members, providing them with both financial and emotional support. Concluding that Cliff was the “go to” person who will be sadly missed, she described herself as often thinking what would Cliff do, what would Cliff say, what advice would Cliff give? On behalf of the UNISON President, the Board of Trustees and all present she wanted to pay tribute to Cliff.

1. **Procedural matters**

The Chair drew everyone’s attention to the procedural arrangements that had been circulated with the programme. Whilst the AGM was run fairly informally, there would be a vote on a couple of items and only ‘registered delegates’ could take part. The Chair also outlined the rules and procedures in relation to the trustee elections in respect of who is eligible to stand for election and the personal statements provided by the current candidates; confirmed who is eligible to vote; and provided details of the ballot procedure and count.

1. **Minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting and matters arising**

The Chair invited delegates to approve the minutes of the 23rd Annual General Meeting. These were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

1. **Guest speaker**

Margaret McKee (president) began by identifying some of the momentous events for UNISON during the previous year, highlighting the crucial legal victory over the government on Employment Tribunal fees; and also how the union had broken the government’s pay cap with the recent NHS deal.

Margaret took the opportunity to remind those present of the importance of fundraising for There for You and to pay tribute to those who took part in the Pyrenees walking challenge in 2017 which raised over £26,000.

Touching on some of the key themes in the annual report, Margaret spoke of the assistance the charity was able to provide the victims of the Grenfell tragedy and Manchester bombing.

Whilst recognising that applications to the charity had increased by 12% in 2017, Margaret expressed concern that many eligible members are still not submitting applications for the assistance they clearly need.

Reflecting on the ongoing austerity resulting from the last 8 years of Tory cuts, Margaret highlighted the plight of people across the country with reports of 4 million people needing to resort to foodbanks; of further reports that 1.5 million people - including 350,000 children – experienced destitution last year; and how the disastrous implementation of Universal Credit had tipped vulnerable benefit claimants into severe hardship. Against this backdrop, Margaret confirmed the need for members to continue to work towards the removal of the current failed government.

Looking to the future, Margaret spoke of simplifying the application form in a bid to increase applications. Margaret confirmed the real difference the charity makes to members lives whether through financial support for the basics such as food, housing and clothes or the provision of advice and support. She reiterated the importance of the good work that There for You does and how it should not be underestimated.

Margaret drew attention to the impact that mental health issues are having on members, both at home and in the workplace; and the vicious cycle that exists between debt and stress, themes that will be explored at the seminar in September.

Finally she spoke of the essential role that the Branch Welfare Officers play in delivering the work of There for You to members, stating that the charity would be nothing without them. Margaret took this opportunity to thank branch welfare officers for everything they do and with a plea for them to continue with this vital work.

1. **Review of 2017**

In reporting on the highlights of 2017, Lesley Discombe (vice chair) remarked that it had once again been a busy, demanding and successful year. She paid tribute to the dedication of the Branch Welfare Officers describing them as the face of the charity who make a positive impact to thousands of members lives, providing help and support where it is most needed.

Lesley spoke of the stark economic reality of the United Kingdom where in-work poverty is increasing and leaving members struggling to get by; where increasing rental costs are causing members to fall behind with their rents; and where members are skipping meals because there is not enough money to put food on the table. She spoke of larger issues where unforeseen circumstances resulted in debt and bailiff action against members; where members needed repairs to their homes; where broken domestic appliances were causing hardship; or where respite through a wellbeing break was required following a period of serious illness.

She described how There for You had responded in these situations by providing over 2700 grants totalling nearly £0.5 million to members; including emergency grants for the daily essentials including food, travel to work, prescription charges; grants for the larger issues ensuring members were able to keep the roof over their head; and grants to help with fuel costs and school uniforms.

She noted that 2017 saw an overall increase in the number of applications for financial assistance of 12% on the previous year and identified large increases in applications from East Midlands, Greater London, Northern Ireland, West Midlands and South West regions. These increases reflect the extensive efforts to publicise the assistance available through There for You during 2017 combined with the expansion of the small grants programme eligibility criteria which enabled many more members to apply. Echoing the Presidents earlier concerns that there are still many people who need assistance but are not applying, she confirmed that in 2018 the charity would looking at ways of addressing this including reviewing the application form and process, coupled with new publicity material.

Citing the 4,000 enquiries dealt with during 2017, Lesley highlighted the invaluable importance of the advice and referral work undertaken, including signposting to specialist organisations. She acknowledged the ‘Arranging an affordable and meaningful funeral’ and ‘Help with Fuel Costs’, guides that provide information to equip members with practical knowledge of what is available to help them. Following on from this she alerted delegates to the new ‘Directory of Useful Organisations’ produced as a resource for branch welfare officers to help them signpost members to other sources of help.

Lesley highlighted the support provided to branch welfare officers during the year which saw 187 participate in a variety of training; and other information events enabling them further opportunity to network and acquire practical knowledge and skills. Lesley went on to identify that in 2018 the branch welfare officer induction training has been refreshed, ‘Introduction to Benefits’ training will run again and the biennial seminar will take place at Croyde Bay in September. The latest development for branch welfare officers is a new ‘Branch Welfare Officer Handbook’ the contents of which had been directly informed by input from branch welfare officers, this will be made available to all branch welfare officers during the year.

On the issue of finances, whilst reassuring delegates that the fund is in a healthy position,

delegates were reminded of importance of fundraising to ensure that the charity is able to provide assistance long into the future. Overall, branch donations had risen slightly from 2016. Promoting UNISON Lottery, which has been successfully relaunched, she pointed out that if every branch paid just £10 per month, this would raise over £104,000 for the charity annually and underlined the beneficial impact this could have on members. She again acknowledged and applauded the fantastic efforts of all those involved in the 2017 Pyrenees Walk which had raised over £26,000.

In this, the 25th anniversary year of UNISON, she provided an overview of the amazing achievements of There for You. The charity has provided more than £16 million in financial assistance, it is in the top 5% of the benevolent fund sector for handling cases and has trained more than 7000 branch welfare officers.

In concluding the review, delegates were given a taste of some of the plans for 2018 and finally, echoing the presidents sentiments, she thanked branch welfare officers, regional welfare committee members, all volunteers and staff under the leadership of Julie Grant for everything they had done to support members in 2017**.**

1. **Receive and approve the report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2017**

The Chair advised delegates that no written questions on the report and accounts had been received prior to the AGM. However, if any member or branch had a question then this could be handed to a member of staff at the end of the meeting, or submitted by post or email to the Head of There for You. On being put to the vote, delegates agreed and accepted the report and accounts.

1. **Appointment of Auditors**

The Chair invited delegates to accept Crowe Clark Whitehill as the charity’s auditors for the forthcoming year. The appointment was agreed.

1. **Closing remarks**

In drawing the meeting to a conclusion, the Chair recorded her thanks to everyone for attending, the officers and supporters of There for You; and her appreciation to

Margaret McKee, President of UNISON for being this year’s guest speaker.

The Chair, thanked the previous Chair for all the help and support to the new Chair in her first year. The Chair also thanked the There for You staff who deliver the services and assistance to support Branch Welfare Officers; and in particular Julie Grant, Head of There for You for the fantastic job she does every day and for the support she gives to the Board.

The Chair referred to the fact that the charity’s achievements in 2017 were down to the combined efforts of everyone, the dedicated Branch Welfare Officers, our talented staff and generous supporters.

The Chair took the opportunity to remind those present that the biennial welfare seminar will be taking place at Croyde from 27 – 29 September, adding that it is a fantastic event and a great opportunity for branch welfare officers and regional committe members to get together.

The Chair reminded eligible delegates to post their trustee election ballot forms before leaving the building.

Finally, the Chair thanked everyone for all their hard work and their unstinting commitment to helping members in need.