



Minutes of 2022 Annual General Meeting

Unlock Democracy AGM 2022

Saturday 19 November 2022

Held in person and online via Zoom video conferencing

Present:

Chair: Jessica Metherringham

Members in person - not all of these members will have been present for all of the meeting

Catherine Bearder, James Bowen, Peter Briercliffe, Christopher Burden, Sarah Cowley, Eugene Dalton-Ruark, Hugh Dibley, Antony Frost, Stephen Gosling, Peter Hirst, Sue Kendrick, Sandy Martin, Jess Metherringham, Virginia Morck, Jane Reed, Oliver Robbins, Vicky Seddon, Tom Selwyn, Lucy Tonge, Ray Ward, Jacob Webb, Michael Wells, Luke Williams

Members online - not all of these members will have been present for all of the meeting

Nick Tatam, Victor Cadaxa, Stuart Hill, Sarah Page, Geoffrey Woodcock, Jane Robbins, Marisha Ray, Mary Southcott, Graeme Watts, Jenni Chan, Tony Marsh, Ray Neal, Maggie Nelmes, Erik Williams, Quentin Lang, Diane Holden, Linda Hoffman, Alicia Hull, Helen Close, Susan Hannis, Jane Wood, Geoff Mills, Rumi S, Barbara Cleary, Sue Kendrick,

Staff members present

Grace Barnett, Tom Brake, Steve Gilmore (online), Alice Jeffrey and Shaun Roberts

Proxy voters

The following members voted by proxy: Duncan Ponikwer, Paul Espley, Matthew Cunliffe, Antony Frost (attended the first part of the meeting but had to leave before the voting started)

Apologies: - Andy Manning, Keith Sharp, Rebecca Warren

The AGM opened at 13:00. There were 23 members present in person at the start of the meeting and 25 online , but attendance varied over the course of the meeting.

1. Approval of the AGM agenda

Jess set out the timetable for the agenda. This was put to a vote.

Proposal: To approve the agenda for the 2022 AGM (including timings for the motions).

Decision: Approved.

In person

For 20

Against 0

Abstain 0

Online

For 19

Against 0

Abstain 4

Total

For 39

Against 0

Abstain 4

2. Approval of the 2021 AGM Minutes

The Chair introduced the draft minutes of the 2021 AGM which were published as paper M. A link is provided below.

[2021 AGM Draft Minutes.docx](#)

No changes were proposed and they were deemed an accurate record of last year's AGM.

Proposal: To approve the minutes of the 2021 AGM.

Decision: Approved without any changes.

In person

For 17

Against 0

Abstain 3

Online
For 16
Against 0
Abstain 5

Total
For 33
Against 0
Abstain 8

3. Approval of the Director's Report

Prior to the formal start of the AGM, verbal reports were given by Shaun Roberts - Director of Campaigns and Digital, Grace Barnett Membership and Database Officer and Tom Brake, the Director.

Shaun also took members through a polling presentation.

A written Director's report was circulated to members prior to the AGM. A link to the report is provided below.

[Director's report 2022](#)

Proposal: To approve the Director's Report to the AGM.

Decision: Approved.

In person
For 20
Against 0
Abstain 0

Online
For 19
Against 0
Abstain 2

Total
For 39
Against 0
Abstain 2

4. Council Report on 2021 Policy Motions

The Chair referred members to section E of the AGM pack which contained the Council's written responses to the two policy motions passed at the 2021 AGM (for ease of reference they are provided below).

Policy motion 1

To respond to recent developments regarding the Labour Party's position on Proportional Representation

Proposer: Stuart Hill

Seconded: Mary Southcott

The AGM welcomes the fact that

Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales, is the latest politician to throw his weight behind Proportional Representation. At the Aneurin Bevan Memorial Lecture, on 25 October 2021, he called for "radical reform" of the electoral system to be put at the forefront of the next Labour Governments agenda.

Following the historic decision of Unite, Labour's largest affiliate, to reject First Past the Post and embrace Proportional Representation, Sharon Graham, the newly elected General Secretary, said

"Our political class has failed working people and our system is broken. It is time to change our democracy."

The AGM believes that:

The Labour Party Conference, in September 2022, will now vote to support PR.

The AGM commends the fact that:

Unlock Democracy members, within Unite, played an important role in promoting motions to the Policy Conference. They also canvassed for support amongst delegates. They helped leaflet delegates and supported the Pro-PR Conference fringe event.

Unlock Democracy has members in many different unions. Only 11 unions are affiliated to the Labour Party. The great majority are not. All decide their policies through their own democratic processes.



The AGM calls for:

Unlock Democracy to mobilise any members who are in a Trade Union and ask them to raise the issue of supporting PR at the next Trades Union Congress.

Unlock Democracy to continue to work closely with all its partners that support PR and especially the Labour for a New Democracy coalition.

Finally the AGM believes that:

The challenge is not simply to win votes at conferences, important as that is, but to win voters in their workplaces and everywhere else to support the kind of politics that Proportional Representation promises. A real, historical, cultural revolution is within Unlock Democracy's grasp.

A written report back was circulated prior to the meeting. It is included below.

Report Back

Over the last 12 months, Unlock Democracy has worked both separately and in partnership with Labour for a New Democracy, to promote PR.

Unlock Democracy (UD) firstly surveyed its members to establish how many UD members were members of a Trade Union (and of which Trade Union).

UD then emailed our Unison members ahead of Unison's National Delegate Conference. We asked members to write to their branch secretaries and ask that Conference delegates prioritise and vote for a PR motion. At that Conference, Unison decided to back PR.

UD also asked all our Labour Party members to table a PR motion at their Constituency Labour Party. Ahead of the Labour Conference, we also asked Labour Party members to write to their CLP delegates and ask them to vote for the PR motion at the Labour Conference.

UD has continued to work closely with a range of organisations committed to PR such as Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER), Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform (LDER), Conservative Action on Electoral Reform (CAER), the Electoral Reform Society and Make Votes Matter (MVM).

UD held fringes at all the major party conferences (Con, Lab, SNP, Green - the Lib Dem was cancelled because of the Queen's funeral) where PR was the main point of discussion.

In the discussion following the report back, Stuart Hill and Vicky Seddon expressed support for the progress to date on the motion's recommendations.

Tom Brake confirmed this is work in progress.

Policy motion 2

Protecting democratic values and campaigning for a written constitution

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Seconded by: Catherine Bearder

The AGM notes:

There has recently been the exposure of unacceptable behaviour by some MPs, some of whom have used their position of influence to lobby on behalf of their extra-parliamentary funders. Others have taken on lucrative contracts that use their professional skills to a degree that must impact on their ability to fulfil their obligations to their constituents.

That such circumstances provide opportunities to assert that democracy is broken and needs fixing. There are already some indications that this concern is gathering clout; Unlock Democracy and its members and supporters need to be ready to use these opportunities.

The behaviour of individual politicians is only one aspect of the system's democratic failure; but it can be the starting point for action on a wide range of issues. There are a multiplicity of Government initiatives that demonstrate the readiness of the government to undermine democratic processes, from the Elections Bill, the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. Even the Human Rights Act seems to be within the Government's sights.

The AGM welcomes:

the way in which Unlock Democracy has recently upped its profile, shown it can and will work with other organisations, and demonstrated its responsiveness to the political climate.

The AGM calls on Unlock Democracy:

To maximise its ability to be influential at this crucial moment and

- **Be well briefed and be ready to stand up and advocate for democracy**
- **To work with other democracy organisations to speak with a common voice**
- **To act with other organisations that campaign on specific issues, to help articulate the ways in which the undermining of democracy will impede their work**
- **To take care that, in opposing Government actions, Unlock Democracy finds space for people of all parties and of none who wish to join in the campaign to protect existing democratic rights, values and processes and to extend democratic protections**

The AGM commits Unlock Democracy:

To organise a collaboration of interested parties to join Unlock Democracy in outlining what must be included in a written constitution to strengthen democracy.

Report Back

UD has continued to work closely with a range of organisations committed to PR such as LCER, LDER, CAER, ERS, MVM. UD held fringes at all the major party conferences (Con, Lab, SNP, Green - the Lib Dem was cancelled because of the Queen's funeral) where PR was the main point of discussion.

In the last 12 months, Unlock Democracy has held a webinar on a written constitution with George Peretz QC. Unlock Democracy is also working on a project with Gopal Subramaniam for a DIY constitution builder. This would involve identifying 3 or 4 different types of constitution which might suit the UK's constitutional, political and institutional environment.

Additionally we launched a campaign calling for action on law breaking, sleaze and cronyism - which included a key ask on a written constitution.

We're calling on our new Prime Minister to immediately:

Commit the Government to obeying international law and keeping the UK's treaty obligations

Appoint an independent Ethics Advisor with real powers to tackle sleaze

End cronyism in appointments to the House of Lords and other public bodies

Restrict MPs' 2nd jobs to prevent more scandals

Instruct the Cabinet Office to start work on building a Written Constitution to restore order and trust to our politics

We will be holding discussions shortly with respected human rights lawyer, Helena Kennedy KC, on constitutional reform.

In the discussion that followed Tom Brake set out the purpose of the DIY constitution builder and its role in helping to make the constitution a subject that is more accessible.

5. Finance Items

5.1. Rodell

Stephen Gosling (SG) gave an update on the progress of the Rodell project. His report set out the arrangements for the loans Rodell is taking out to fund the redevelopment of Grays Inn Road and bridging finance for Cynthia Street.

Tom Brake confirmed that the Rodell accounts will be coming to the next Council meeting on 25th November (after the Rodell AGM which will be held immediately before).

Since the AGM, these accounts have been made available.

[N1587 0-Limited company accounts 22.3-LTD-EW-20221108.PDF](#)

5.2. Unlock Democracy Accounts

Members were referred to section N which contained a link to the accounts. The link is provided below.

[Unlock Democracy updated accounts 2022 22nov_v1.pdf](#)

Tom Brake highlighted some aspects of Unlock Democracy's accounts. The notes which follow set these out.

[Notes on the 21/22 accounts](#)

A vote was then proposed.

Proposal: To approve Unlock Democracy's accounts for 21/22.

Decision: Approved.

In person
For 19
Against 0
Abstain 0

Online
For 17
Against 0
Abstain 2

Total
For 36
Against 0
Abstain 2

Tom Brake explained that, following agreement at last year's AGM to authorise Simon Howard to identify new and cheaper reporting accountants, he had secured the services of Thorne Lancaster Parker, 4th Floor, Venture House, 27-29 Glasshouse Street London W1B 5DF. The AGM approved their appointment.

Proposal: To approve Thorne Lancaster Parker as Unlock Democracy's reporting accountants

Decision: Approved.

In person
For 19
Against 0
Abstain 0

Online
For 17
Against 0
Abstain 1

Total
For 36
Against 0
Abstain 1

6. Risk management statement

Jess talked through the risk management statement, section G of the AGM agenda pack. This is a new item on the AGM agenda and will appear on the agenda for future AGMS.

The report is available to Rodell and Council members [here](#).

[Risk management report 2022](#)

The report highlighted a number of external risks, including the risk of more restrictive legislation and falling foul of that legislation.

The report was approved by a show of hands.

7. Policy Motions

The Chair introduced the five policy motions items, section J of the AGM agenda pack. No amendments had been tabled with the required 48 hours notice to be automatically considered at the AGM.

First motion debated

The first motion to be debated was Alicia Hull's. The original motion is set out below. In the absence of Peter Crouch (the original seconder) it was seconded by Virginia Monck.

In the debate a number of speakers expressed support for some aspects of the motion but opposed others (such as the proposal for a National Government of Unity).

Peter Hirst proposed an amendment that would have deleted the reference to a National Government of Unity. The AGM decided not to take this amendment.

Catherine Bearder asked that staff consider including environmental, social and economic issues in polling.

There was a suggestion made by Vicky Seddon (seconded by Luke Williams) that, rather than voting on the motion, it should be remitted back to the Council for consideration (including online consideration).

Alicia agreed to this suggestion and therefore there was no vote.

At the next AGM Council will report back on the action taken on this motion.

1 - Democratic Reforms And Climate Change

Proposer: Alicia Hull

Seconded: Peter Crouch

This AGM notes:

At this time of economic collapse, social distress and gross inequality, the major threat to our survival is imminent catastrophic climate breakdown and species extinction.

The government is ignoring the issue. It has gone back on its promises. It is hastening disaster by promoting growth to increase carbon emissions. The one certainty is that climate change will not be addressed.

This issue is so urgent we cannot waste time hoping for a change in policy, nor wait for a general election, nor assume another party in power would act decisively enough in time.

Our current system of government is broken. Its top-down control, unrepresentative voting system, toxic party hostility, and hostile press mean we cannot install an effective government in time using conventional means.

This is the context for this motion.

This AGM believes:

Our only hope in this crisis is to appeal directly to the public – the other half of democratic government.

Campaigning needs to focus on informing the public and bringing them together to produce a People's Manifesto, using all the knowledge and values of civil society.

Priority issues for Unlock Democracy such as a written constitution, a proportional voting system and an inclusive democracy will be central to this manifesto and will ensure emergency action to combat climate breakdown and support people in the current economic collapse is prioritised.

In this work Unlock Democracy should cooperate with other groups which share our aims. This should include Diem25, (Democracy in Europe Movement) as they have been working on a People's Manifesto since 2016, have a New Green Deal

for Europe and an established system for developing policies from the grass roots.

This AGM resolves:

That Unlock Democracy demands a National Government of Unity for one term to be directed by citizens' assemblies to tackle the current environmental, social and economic crises and restore real democratic government.

And that we work with others to produce the Manifesto.

Second motion debated

The second motion to be debated was Marisha Ray's. The original motion is set out below. In the absence of Duncan Ponikwer (the original seconder) it was seconded by Jane Reed.

Marisha Ray explained reverse mentoring as the process whereby a black person mentors people in positions of power within an organisation to help address discrimination, institutional racism etc.

Stuart Hill explained that motions that were passed at the AGM were for the Council to consider and decide which aspects of any motion they wanted to act on.

Catherine Bearder asked a question about UD's ethnicity monitoring. Grace Barnett confirmed that UD does seek that information from members and that the responses confirm UD's membership is not representative of the wider community.

In the debate a number of speakers expressed support for some aspects of the motion but others expressed concerns (such as whether Unlock Democracy would have the resources to deal with the proposals in the motion or the focus in the motion on specific London boroughs).

Again there was a suggestion made by Peter Hirst (seconded by Stephen Gosling) that, rather than voting on the motion it should be remitted back to the Council for consideration.

After it was confirmed that the Council would report back on progress, Marisha agreed to this suggestion. By a show of hands the motion was remitted to council.

At the next AGM Council will report back on the action taken on this motion.

2 - Improving Unlock Democracy's diversity

Proposer: Marisha Ray

Seconded: Duncan Ponikwer

Improving Unlock Democracy's Diversity

The AGM recognises that Unlock Democracy already campaigns for changes which will benefit many including members of visible minoritised communities and other under represented groups, nevertheless it is not an organisation with substantial visible diversity. This can be and often is taken as an unspoken sign of ethnocentricity by the under-represented.

The AGM recognises that:

1. Many people from under-represented groups and minoritised communities find a lack of visible diversity off putting and take this as a sign of a bad attitude and latent hostility towards people who are not White even when this is not or may not ever have been present at all.
2. Many people from all ethnic communities and backgrounds find the presence, active engagement of and dialogue with a diverse group an attractive feature of productive, fruitful and fast moving political movements and all organisations.
3. A lack of display of empathy, free flowing dialogue with and incorporation of thoughts from people from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities can be and often is taken as a sign of ethnocentricity.
4. Unlock Democracy already has among its teams all the skills necessary to address the possibility of an appearance of ethnocentricity.
5. Unlock Democracy is not yet deploying its resources in a way to best engage with minoritised communities and people who are not White and this can improve rapidly.
6. It is necessary to immediately address any current impression of ethnocentricity among people from diverse communities and under-represented groups who decline to become involved at present.
7. An appearance of ethnocentricity and the successful practice of inclusion do not fit comfortably together.

The AGM instructs the Council to rapidly investigate the following measures to improve diversity and better test inclusion:

1. Co-option of at least two experienced board members from a variety of organisations, who are from visible of minority ethnic communities, diaspora communities or international experts in diversity to each formal and informal body which are active in governance of Unlock Democracy
2. Reverse mentoring for all who participate in the governance of the organisation, one of the most effective methods of addressing a lack of diversity.
3. Training on implicit bias using free materials.
4. Awareness of the diversity of speakers, guests and all materials made available to members, supporters and followers.
5. Creation of a year round online book club or reading list with a structured, interactive, discursive element on the Unlock Democracy themes which are most likely to appeal to an ethnically diverse audience.
6. That correspondence to elected board members on inclusion, diversity and the comfort of people from under-represented, disadvantaged or groups conventionally excluded from politics, be initially acknowledged and responded to by an appropriate person in a substantive manner indicating a willingness to engage in dialogue in a reasonable time.
7. That the fast and flexible Equality Impact Assessment methodology be used with respect to all new campaigns and that it be developed within Unlock Democracy through its application to current campaigns.
8. Unlock Democracy has and has had offices in the London Boroughs of Islington, Hackney and Westminster and should engage with the local communities in these and other areas where no one ethnic community is a majority in order to test and develop campaigns which are relevant to all ethnic groups.
9. Ideas gathered from correspondents should be acknowledged when these are taken up should the correspondent so wish.
10. That the Council investigates small tweaks in present arrangements to improve diversity and give the organisation a still more welcoming feel.

11. That the Council recognises that expecting people from diverse communities to volunteer to undertake tasks that they dislike - in effect working for free - when they cannot afford to do so is frequently a behaviour which is construed as racism by the members of those communities.

Third motion debated

The third motion to be debated was Stuart Hill's. The original motion is set out below. The motion was seconded by Mary Southcott. There was clear support for the motion with a suggestion that diaspora, muslim organisations and youth organisations should be added to the list.

Stuart Hill explained that with his motion he intended to improve the diversity of the membership as well as the Council.

A concern was raised about the cost of advertising and whether there was a risk that people applying would have to join Unlock Democracy as a member but without any guarantee that they would secure a position as a council member.

A discussion took place around whether the motion was clear in stating that Council members would be elected to fill these vacancies or co-opted. The constitution is silent on the subject of by-elections to fill vacancies but makes it clear that Council can choose to co-opt extra Council members (without voting rights), subject to 2/3rds of Council members supporting the co-optee's application. Some members spoke in favour of elections, others against and some for co-option.

The motion was put to a vote.

5 - Strengthening Unlock Democracy's Council

Proposer: Stuart Hill

Second: Mary Southcott

This AGM recognises the need to strengthen the existing Unlock Democracy Council both in numbers and in diversity, and, therefore, agrees that the four potential vacancies be advertised.

These vacancies to be publicised, wherever possible, considering such places as the following:

Operation Black Vote
Runnymede Trust

Women 50:50
w4MP.org
Activate
Fawcett Society
The Voice Newspaper
Disability UK
Gypsy Council
TUC Equalities Reps
Major trade unions

Proposal: To approve Stuart Hill's motion

Decision: Approved.

In person
For 17
Against 2
Abstain 0

Online
For 12
Against 0
Abstain 0

Total
For 29
Against 2
Abstain 0

Fourth motion debated

The fourth motion to be debated was Peter Hirst's. The original motion is set out below. The motion was seconded by Stephen Gosling.

A variety of views were expressed about the motion with strong views expressed about the irrelevance of manifestos, the problem being governments and PMs without a mandate and recall elections.

The motion was put to a vote.

3 - Holding new governments accountable to General Election manifestos

Proposer: Peter Hirst

Seconded: Stephen Gosling

Unlock Democracy believes that a new government should be held accountable to the previous one's manifesto in the absence of a renewed mandate in the form of a General Election.

Proposal: To approve Peter Hirst's motion

Decision: Approved.

In person

For 12

Against 3

Abstain 3

Online

For 9

Against 4

Abstain 4

Total

For 21

Against 7

Abstain 7

Fifth motion debated

The fifth and final motion to be debated was Vicky Seddon's. The original motion is set out below. The motion was seconded by Stuart Hill.

In the debate Vicky Seddon underlined the importance of the Returning Officer's central role in making decisions about election processes.

The motion was put to a vote.

4 - The role of the returning officer in internal elections

Proposer: Vicky Seddon

Seconded: Stuart Hill

Where there are issues within our elections processes about who can stand, the validity of the voting process and the results, the Returning Officer will make the final decisions about how they are resolved, in line with our constitution.

Proposal: To approve Vicky Seddon's motion

Decision: Approved.

In person

For 8

Against 2

Abstain 9

Online

For 12

Against 0

Abstain 2

Total

For 20

Against 2

Abstain 11

8. Appreciation

After some closing remarks from the Chair, including appreciation for all who had a hand in organising the AGM, the meeting closed.

AGM concluded at 16:35