

IPSWICH FAITH AND COMMUNITY FORUM
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
7.00 pm 19th NOVEMBER 2019

1. Opening and welcome

The chair, Gurmeet Sually (GS) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone

2. Notice of Any Other Business.

Charles Croydon (CC) said that the meeting was not being held in accordance with the constitution as follows:

- (1) Section 6.2 states "All General Meetings require 14 days' notice to be given to all Members informing them what is on the agenda and the reason for the meeting." CC said that he had not had such notice and had found out about the meeting only the previous week.
- (2) An agenda had not been sent out with the invitations to the meeting.
- (3) The accounts for the year 2017/2018 had been incorrect and needed to be corrected. Members should have been properly informed about this.
- (4) Members should be consulted about trustee nominations.
- (5) Section 5.6 of the constitution states "At the AGM of the Charity, the Trustees must formally consult Members concerning the current level of Membership and Affiliation subscriptions." An item about the membership fee should have been in the agenda.

It was explained that the reason CC had not received notice of the meeting was probably because CC had not given permission for the emailing service used by IFCF during the GDPR exercise in 2018. IFCF will ensure that no IFCF member misses out in this way in future.

Charles Jenkin (CJ) said that sufficient notice had been given for the meeting as the agenda was a standard one for an AGM. The question about the previous accounts could be answered during the meeting, the matter of election of trustees is already covered in the agenda, and the item about subscriptions can be added to AoB.

CC said that he thought that the accounts of the previous year still had to be corrected. The treasurer Punna Athwall (PA) said that the closing balance was in fact corrected in time for last year's AGM and that the corrected accounts had been duly approved at the AGM.

GS apologised for not sending an agenda with notice of the meeting, but affirmed that notice was given of the AGM in time. He asked CC what he felt we should do about it? CC replied saying that he felt the meeting should be postponed. GS then asked those present if we should carry on or if we should we delay.

On a show of hands there was a majority in favour of proceeding with one vote against. An item to consult the meeting on membership and affiliation fees was added to AoB.

3. Minutes of 2018 AGM

CC asked why Sandy Martin MP (speaker for the evening) had been shown as 'also present'. DJ said that the AGM was for members and as Sandy Martin was present but not a member that seemed an appropriate term to use.

CC asked why the minutes were incomplete because the most important item of the evening – the issue of the Kurds getting permission for a Community Centre raised in Sandy Martin's speech had not been recorded. Several trustees explained that although we had a speaker that evening his presentation was not part of the AGM. The AGM business was separate and was concluded by 7.40pm before the invited speaker gave his presentation. The secretary Denis Johnston (DJ) said

that this was a normal procedure at AGMs – after the business was concluded there would often be a speaker or possibly entertainment but as this was not part of the AGM business it was not minuted. It was a separate event. CC said that he thought it was important and should have been recorded.

CJ proposed that the minutes of 2018 be approved. PA seconded. The minutes were approved.

4. Chair's report to members.

GS read out the report. There was a correction to be made to the date of a future event.

CC said that there was a general lack of communication to members and asked if trustees were sending the chair's report to members. GS said that this would be done.

Referring to the report, CC asked what was outcome of the meeting with the Kurdish community leaders. PA said that (at the time) a local councillor informed us that the planning meeting was the following day. We were able to get relevant meeting papers which included a recommendation from council officers that the application be approved. There was nothing that IFCF could add to the planning process at this point. After this four IFCF Trustees visited the Mulberry Tree and had discussions with Mr Ali and his colleagues who were Trustees of the Nawracy Cultural Centre Ltd (referred to as the Kurdish Group) and offered our support.

CC said that he was looking for IFCF to comment in line with our constitution (section 1.4) in promoting religious tolerance and that we should have supported the Kurds in their application for planning permission. CC read out the letter that “an atheist” had written to the planning committee expressing disgust with the racist and anonymous flyers that had been distributed around the area of the Mulberry Tree. CC contrasted this with the silence of IFCF as they had not written supportive letters to counter these.

GS said that the trustees’ priority was not to write a letter to support the planning applications of any groups, but to help communities in understanding what they could do to support one another. This is what the trustees had done. PA said that planning decisions were technical matters and that the Planning Application for the Mulberry Tree Community Centre was a professionally produced and well-structured proposal. There was nothing that IFCF could have added. Linda Sheppard (LS) said that she had been involved in many planning meetings and that letters of a general nature for or against such a planning proposal do not carry any weight and would all be disregarded.

BL said she thought a short report or letter should have appeared somewhere in support. She said that we need to clarify what 1.4 of the constitution means in such circumstances. It is a learning point. CJ said that it is not the role of IFCF to be an automatic supporter of any religious organisation, but to foster good relations between faith communities. BL said that if IFCF does not take a stand against intolerance, who would?

Shamim (MAS) said that IFCF had done the right thing in going to meet the Kurdish community leaders. IFCF should not assume that its support was wanted. From his mosque point of view it would have been for the mosque to ask for a supporting letter. IFCF doesn’t necessarily know what a group’s needs are.

Ian Hartley (IH) said that he had been disturbed about that anonymous campaign against the community centre, and thought that it had been carefully arranged by some right wing group. We need to think very carefully about how we stand up to religious intolerance, but he supported how IFCF had responded in this case.

5. Presentation of Annual Accounts

PA summarised the accounts and explained in more detail that the expenditure on special events was for two years. This was because one large invoice for the January event was not paid until July. This year we had a deficit of £329.

Neil Winship (NW) asked what was the reason for a drop in “other income”? PA explained that this depended on a number of factors including how much we asked for in grants and whether grants were forthcoming.

IH asked about when fees were due. Paul Hodgkin (PH) said that he had not sent out renewal forms as currently the role of IFCF was not clear and he felt uneasy about pursuing membership fees.

CJ proposed that the accounts be accepted and this was seconded Ian Hartley and approved by the meeting with one vote against. The Secretary was asked to write a letter of thanks to the honorary examiner.

6. Nominations and elections for trustees

CJ advised that the constitution requires that 3 trustees need to stand down at this AGM, and it was agreed that it was the turn of Beverley Levy (BL), Barbara Richardson-Todd (BRT) and Paul Hodgkin (PH) to do so. CC reminded the meeting that there was also a power for trustees to co-opt. GS said that he understood that BRT was willing to be nominated again. BL said she wished to retire from the Board of Trustees but was willing to remain involved with IFCF as a representative of the Jewish community. Subsequently she was persuaded to stay on as a trustee. (Nominated GS seconded CJ).

DJ said that trustees had seriously considered if IFCF should continue, as apart from HMD and the Faith lecture our activities were limited. However our feeling was that at least while Brexit was likely to be a risk to community tensions we should keep going.

PH said that he was willing to be nominated again on the understanding that the role of IFCF needs to be clarified or it should close down. CJ was keen that BRT and PH be re-elected to be part of clarifying our future. PA said we still have a responsibility to deliver the HMD event On 29 January 2020 and the Annual Faith Lecture on 18 March 2020. All members should be involved at some point in discussions about the future of IFCF.

PH was proposed by DJ seconded PA. BRT was proposed by GS and seconded by MAS The appointments were approved by the meeting.

7. Any Other Business

Membership Fees: PA said that there was no need to alter the fee and formally proposed that we stick with current levels. Proposed PA, seconded Ian H. Agreed.

CC said that the membership have not received much about what IFCF has been up to and are not aware of all these issues. CJ agreed that we do need to communicate more. CC said that we needed a record of discussions.

Neil Winship (NW) had given out a leaflet about the visit of the “Ark” to Ipswich dock. An article in the EADT article had pointed out what an open society we are in Ipswich. IFCF could build on this. We can work for mutual understanding by looking at what the Ark represents from the points of view of different faiths and philosophies.

Martin Spettigue(MS) said that at EEFA they are working with Laura Squirrel at growing a culture of encounter and focus in schools and how to use this as a way of thinking.

He also read out a note from Stefan Freedman forwarded to him by Cynthia Capey which expressed a concern about the small numbers (relative to population) being drawn to interfaith activities. Firstly, a majority of younger people in UK today report that they have no religion or belief in God, and does interfaith have anything to offer them? In his note Stefan Freedman thought that the answer is YES, with an honest inquiry and dialogue about their own beliefs, and an ecumenical experience of listening inwardly. Secondly, Interfaith focuses largely on historic beliefs, customs, prayers and religious festivals, however Interspirituality is complementary to this. It explores common ground in the contemplative and transformative aspects of each tradition. He further wrote that broadening our interest to encompass BOTH starting points will strengthen and vitalise our local initiatives. It will also help engage younger people.

BL commented that Cynthia Capey had also created a Faith and Spirituality network, and asked whether there was room for two interfaith organisations in Ipswich. CC commented that EEFA is primarily about education and delivering courses.

GS closed the meeting at 8.40pm and thanked everyone for attending.

Present : Ian Hartley, Linda Sheppard, Kate Holmes, Martin Spettigue, Mahbub Alam Shamim , Neil Winship, Punna Athwall, Charles Croydon, Charles Jenkin, Paul Hodgkin, Beverley Levy, Denis Johnston, Gurmeet Sually,

Apologies: Barbara RichardsonTodd, Anne Spalding, Elizabeth Sugarman, Philip Ind, Roger Fern, Sushil Soni, Izzy Lane , Stefan Freedman.

Arriving late (teaching commitments): Daba Chowdhury, Robin Herne