

**Minutes of 2020 Annual General Meeting
Beds & Northants MS Therapy Centre
Tuesday 22nd June 2021**

The meeting was held via zoom

Kay Taylor welcomed guests and our patrons – HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis and Alastair Compston.

Helen Nellis gave an introduction in which she thanked everyone at the MS Therapy Centre for keeping things going during 2020, and she encouraged supporters to ensure the future of the Centre by leaving a legacy in their will.

Helen spoke of another Patron, Clifton Ibbett, and how much he will be missed by many charities in Bedfordshire.

Kay thanked Helen for her communication over the year and echoed the comments made about Clifton Ibbett, who had been a valued supporter of the charity for many years.

1. **Apologies:** Melanie Hawman (Trustee)

2. **Approval of Minutes of AGM held in 2020 (year 2019)**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

Proposed: Sue Napper

Seconded: Michael Street

3. **Financial review – Tracy Mckenzie**

2020 was a challenging year for the Centre and raising funds. All community fundraising ceased, and much other funding was directed towards COVID-19 support. We were grateful for the continued support of our service users who maintained regular donations despite not being able to access the services due to lockdown, and donated £100,951 over the year.

Donations from members represents the Centre's most consistent and reliable source of funding. To these people myself and the Trustees say a big thank you, we are truly very grateful to you for continuing to support the Centre. Now, more than ever, the Centre is dependent on these donations to support the Centre's ongoing existence during this uncertain time.

P17 of the accounts: As expected the Centre's overall, our income was £138,300 lower than in 2019. Income from donations and gifts (including a legacy of £18514) was £104,719 lower than that received in 2019 with our income from fundraising events reduced from almost £80,000 to £30,000.

The reduction in income was offset, to some extent, by grants from the Government Job Retention Scheme (JRS). We received £38,035 under the JRS scheme.

We managed to reduce our expenditure by £104,848. Most of the reduction (£88,680) was due to staff being furloughed and self-employed therapists being temporarily laid off. Indirect costs largely remained the same, with a small reduction from £87,000 to £79,000.

Overall, we managed to attain a small surplus of £15,803. This can be carried forward into 2021, which is another challenging year for raising funds.

P18 of the accounts: Total assets of the charity are stated as £722,640. It should be noted that of this £88,155 is fixed assets such as the minibus and hydrotherapy pool and £78,328 is restricted funding that can only be used for specific projects.

The Centre is required to carry out alterations to the building in order to deliver all services on the ground floor for the reasons of fire safety, ensuring that all members with reduced mobility will be able to escape from the building in case of a fire. Because of this we have designated £75K initially for this purpose although the figure is likely to be substantially more.

This leaves £481,157 of free reserves, of which £201,814 is held in investments.

P33 of the accounts gives a nice clear picture of what the Centre's income and costs were in 2020.

Although 2020 was a tough year for us with no fundraising events, we were able to make big savings leaving the Centre in good shape for 2021 and able to continue to adapt due to the ongoing pandemic.

In conclusion the auditors report that these accounts, prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and in accordance of the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, give a true and fair view of our financial affairs as of 31st December 2020.

The accounts were presented and accepted.

Proposed: Kay Taylor

Seconded: Laurence Culhane

4. Chair's Report –Kay Taylor

It goes without saying that 2020 was an unprecedented year that required many changes to our usual service delivery.

In my address to you last year, I reported the numbers of sessions of various therapies that we had delivered in 2019. In 2020, however, it wasn't about numbers, but about keeping in touch with our members and rising to the challenge to provide therapies in a safe manner.

During the periods of closure, we found that our members reported significant decreases in mobility, confidence and independence, thus highlighting the impact that the MS Therapy Centre has on the lives of people living with MS.

Some people accessed NHS care where they would otherwise have come to us, demonstrating that we act as a first port of call for people with MS, and go some way to protecting the NHS.

At our AGM in July last year, we were on the brink of opening again. This went very successfully, with members being able to access one therapy each at the start. We had no cases of coronavirus arising from the MS Therapy Centre. Thank you to Tracy for organising and managing the procedures at the Centre, to Harriet and Karen for phoning everyone to arrange appointments, to Guy and Linda for their flexibility in delivering the therapies at the Centre, and to Annie for keeping us safe with her additional cleaning regime.

Volunteers have delivered oxygen therapy, as usual, and we are very grateful to them for their continued support. Other volunteers have worked in the background to support the Centre in the gardens and, more recently in our charity shops.

The number of people attending the Centre in 2020 who were newly diagnosed was reduced compared with previous years, and we will work hard to make sure that newly diagnosed people are contacted and offered support if they would like it.

We moved a good number of our services online: Our MS nurse, Emma, and counsellor, Gill, were available by phone, or email, and we had several different exercise classes either via video link, or live Facebook feeds, so that there were 4 or 5 exercise classes each week. These sessions not only helped keep our service users active, but also provided a chance to meet up with others on a regular basis, albeit online. I'd like to thank all of our online exercise instructors, Jenny, Jen and Bridget for stepping up to the challenge.

We moved our newsletter to an online version, delivered by email, or via our website and Facebook, and made it monthly, rather than every quarter, in order to keep everyone updated.

In terms of fundraising, some of you may be aware of our online postcard-sized art sale organised by Bela Brown, which raised £3,000. This was a new venture for us, and was a welcome boost to funding and morale.

In other areas, Swarupa and Jane have done a fantastic job in finding any funding streams that were available.

We have now been open for nearly a year, gradually increasing services as restrictions allowed.

Currently, we are delivering a full set of therapies including hydrotherapy and complementary therapies, and Frank is running our minibus again. We are also setting up some more formal peer support sessions for members to meet in small groups.

We hope to be able to return to raising funds, indeed, we have some great challenge events going on at the moment, and our charity shops are now open, thanks to the volunteers who have been keen to get cracking again. We are hoping to run our charity sale again in July, and are optimistic that Bedford Park Concerts will take place this year. We need volunteers to help at the Proms concert on the Sunday if anyone is available.

We hosted an online art course, attended by some people living with MS, this was a great boost to wellbeing and companionship, and we hope to facilitate some more such groups in different interest areas, either online or, hopefully, in real life.

It is now time to think about the future:

In the near future we will invest more money to further upgrade the hydrotherapy pool to a larger size, with better access into the pool.

Changes in Fire Safety regulations now mean that we must be responsible for evacuating everyone from the building in the event of a fire. It is no longer acceptable to wait for the emergency services to arrive. In practice, due to the large number of people with mobility issues, this means that we must deliver all of our therapies from the ground floor.

We are now embarking on the task of working out how we can rearrange the layout of the building to make this possible.

It is important for us to now return to developing our strategy for the next five years, bearing in mind the changes that have taken place due to the pandemic.

The use of the building will be a significant factor in how we go forward, but areas that we are currently considering are:

- How do the new treatments available for people with MS affect the support that is needed?
- Is this particularly relevant for people who are newly diagnosed – what do they want from us?
- Is there a place for retaining some online services?
- How can we develop partnerships in the community in order to share resources and knowledge, and provide the best range of services for our members?

Once we can meet in real life, the trustees will consult with staff and members about the way forward.

I'd like to finish with some words of thanks - none of our therapies could be provided without the dedication of our wonderful members of staff and volunteers who have remained flexible and willing to do what is needed to get the Therapy Centre back up and running.

Furthermore, as Tracy has said, it was largely thanks to the continued support of our members that we avoided a deficit in 2020, and I would like to thank them for their loyalty in helping to keep the MS Therapy Centre afloat through this challenging year.

5. Election of Trustees:

Retiring Trustees - Kay reported that Neil Randall had stood down. Kay thanked Neil for his expert financial advice, and mentioned that Neil would still be available for advice when needed.

5. Election of Prospective Trustees

Three prospective trustees stood for election. Each had provided a summary of their background and interests in the Centre. All three have been diagnosed with MS.

The appointments were approved

Elizabeth Toogood	Proposed: Jean-Pierre Brown	Seconded: Jenny McCarthy
Maggie Marshall	Proposed: Michael Street	Seconded: Laurence Culhane
John O'Mahoney	Proposed: Sue Napper	Seconded: Pat Parkinson

7. Election of Returning Trustees - Kay Taylor, Susan Napper, Jean-Pierre Brown, Alex Scott, Melanie Hawman, Michael Street and Laurence Culhane were elected '*en bloc*'.

Proposed: Val Woods

Seconded: Elizabeth Toogood

8. Election of Auditors

Kay recommended that Collett Hulance be asked to audit the accounts once again and explained that they are always very helpful and know our business in great detail.

Proposed: Harriet Steel

Seconded: Jean-Pierre Brown

8. Any other business

Questions were taken throughout the meeting:

Alastair Compston asked whether there had been a direct financial impact of Coronavirus on the Centre and members. Tracy and Kay replied that there had been a number of impacts on both staff and members, although not all financial. There have been salary costs involved in repeatedly phoning members to make appointments after the various stages of closure and reopening.

Pauline Hooper asked whether members would be able to have more than one therapy. Tracy explained that this was already possible, with members able to access oxygen plus the gym and APS, plus one of the physical therapies (hydro, physio, Bowen, Shiatsu)

Jenny Podesta asked whether we would once again employ two shiatsu and two reflexology practitioners. Tracy explained that one shiatsu practitioner had retired, and the reflexology practitioner was not able to offer therapies unless a minimum number of people required it. Tracy said that we are currently meeting the demand, and will always address staffing levels if demand is not being met.

Val asked whether we would get back to the same ethos as before the pandemic, with people able to socialise. Tracy and Kay agreed that the social aspect is a huge part of what the members gain from the centre, and the reason that they feel part of a family. Bookable outdoor slots are already happening during the summer.

Jenny Podesta asked whether anything is being done to support those who have been living with MS for a long time, as well as those who are newly diagnosed. Alastair Compston gave a very succinct and encouraging report on the status of research, which is now highly focussed on secondary progressive MS with the aim of holding back symptom progression.

Jenny McCarthy asked whether it would be possible to deliver group exercise classes if we were unable to use the upstairs of the building. Tracy said that this would need to take place downstairs, and Kay added that the reception area would need to perform as a multi-functional space.

Alastair Compston asked whether we had taken advice about the building work required. Kay replied that we had taken extensive advice on the need to do the work in terms of fire safety, and were now embarking on discussions with the landlords and architects in order to see what was possible and affordable.

Helen Nellis asked whether there plans to address the governance of the charity. Kay said that several Trustees had attended a webinar organised by the Cranfield Trust, and that part of the strategic review would be to consider aspects of governance, although this is an on-going process.

Kay thanked Jane Everett for her fantastic work as Trust fundraiser, and stated that Jane had helped to put the Therapy Centre into a good position for the difficult year. Jane will be leaving the Centre for personal reasons.

Kay then closed the Annual General Meeting.

Signed as a true record of proceedings: