**UNISON There for You**

**Annual General Meeting**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13 June 2023**

**At the ACC, Kings Dock, Liverpool**

**PRESENT:**

**Board of Trustees:**

Mandy Buckley

Alison Dingle

Margaret McKee

David Page

Karen Poole

Debi Potter (Vice Chair)

Theresa Rollinson

Donnie Taylor

Tony Wright (Chair)

**Staff in attendance:**

Abigail Coombs Acting Head of There for You

 Nadine Bryan Caseworker

Maggie Newell Support Service Team Leader

 **85 delegates were registered to attend, 64 attended.**

 **40 additional visitors attended on the day.**

**TONY WRIGHT IN THE CHAIR**



**Welcome and Introduction**

The Chair warmly welcomed delegates and visitors to the 2023 AGM and hoped that the branch, regional and NEC delegates as well as the visitors present would go away with a real sense of pride in what UNISON’s own charity achieved in 2022. Chair reminded all present that There for You holds charitable status and is separate from the union, as such the sole purpose of meeting is to support UNISON members when they need it most, the meeting is not a place for political debate or differences.

In addition to the Board of Trustees, the Chair acknowledged the presence of the UNISON President, Andrea Egan along with the Head of Welfare, Abigail Coombs.

**1. Procedural arrangements**

The Chair confirmed the procedural arrangements for the meeting and confirmed that delegates had been provided with details of these in the papers they had received electronically as part of their delegate documentation. The Chair reminded attendees that for formal matters requiring a vote, this would be restricted to registered ‘delegates’ to the AGM only.

**2. Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting and matters arising**

The Chair invited delegates to approve the minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting. There were no votes against. These were **AGREED** and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

**3. Guest Speaker**

The Chair introduced the UNISON President, Andrea Egan, and invited her to address the meeting.

The president confirmed that the work of There for You is more important than ever and paid personal thanks to the chair and vice chair for everything they have done to support There for You over the past year.

The president identified the past year as a really challenging one, in which the covid public health crisis has been replaced with a cost of living crisis; leading to thousands of UNISON members finding themselves in extreme difficulty; unable to pay their bills; struggling to heat their homes and many resorting to visiting foodbanks to help feed their families. She also highlighted that in the UK today, more than 4 million children are growing up in poverty and 13,000 “warm banks” were in operation over winter, just to stop people dying from cold.

The president spoke about branches needing to support members at a local level and provided examples of initiatives in the Bolton branch including:

* Having donation points in the branch at Christmas and Easter that also collected selection boxes and Easter eggs to ensure that children also got a treat included in food parcels
* Organising an annual subsidised coach trip for UNISON members to see the Blackpool illuminations
* Organising subsidised Christmas pantomime tickets for UNISON members and their families

She confirmed that branch leaders need to do all that they can to support There For you

including getting their branches to make a regular monthly donation to the charity.

Highlighting that the demand for the services of There for You have remained high over the past year, she recognised the wide impact the charity has, confirming that more than 5,000 members were helped in 2022. Over a million pounds was awarded in financial support; this has again proved to be a critical means of support for vulnerable UNISON members in 2022, which she described as a crucial safety net for those in need.

The president praised the impact of the small grant programmes describing the Covid Response Fund as an essential lifeline for many members; identifying that the School Uniform Grant programme continues to be a vital source of support for many low-paid members and identifying that £260,000 was distributed via Winter Fuel Grants programme last year.

The president highlighted the issue of spiralling energy costs as a particular concern for members last year and; how in response to this issue, UNISON and the charity came together raising a million pounds for the Energy Support Fund. The charity went on to distribute more than 700 grants in just three months and she stated that the funds will continue to be used to help members with their energy bills over the next two winters.

The president cited this as an excellent example of what can be achieved when There for You and the union work side by side; describing it as a sign of solidarity and a coming together when members need it most.

The president stated it is important that we also celebrate the hard work of the regions and of course our branch welfare officers who she said don’t always get the credit or recognition they deserve, not only in terms of the individual members approaching the charity for assistance, but also for the added value this gives to the wider union because no other union can offer anything like this dedicated resource to members.

**4. Review of 2022**

In reporting on the highlights of 2022 The Vice Chair described it as another busy and successful year, observing that it has been getting progressively and noticeably harder for members to get by.

2022 was a year in which the charity awarded grants totalling over a million pounds, benefitting over 5,000 members and helping improve members lives every working day; by providing urgent help, guiding them to specialist organisations, showing compassion and sometimes just by being a listening ear.

The annual report had identified that members come to the charity for help for a variety of reasons and many had multiple and complex needs. For example:

* Poor or inadequate housing
* Low income and debt
* Financial and work insecurity
* Relationship problems
* Mental health difficulties
* Bereavement
* Loneliness and isolation

In addition to providing financial assistance; through the use of our online benefits calculator the charity has also enabled members to claim government support where it’s due to increase their income.

Similarly, the budgeting tool has enabled members to improve their financial management and to increase their control of expenses whilst at the same time reducing their feelings of being overwhelmed.

As well as the cost of living crisis, in 2022 energy bills rose to levels never seen before. In response, the Board launched the £1 million energy support appeal, the target was exceeded by the end of 2022 enabling the Energy support fund to provide grants of £200 to members to help with their fuel bills. The vice chair identified this as an incredibly proud moment and example of how the UNISON family, came together to achieve the seemingly impossible. The funds were raised through a significant donation from UNISON, use of some of the charities reserves and donations from every single region and a number of UNISON branches.

With thousands of applications being received within hours, the demand for the energy and fuel grants was truly unprecedented. The energy support appeal funds will continue to support members during the winter of 2023.

The vice chair highlighted that over the past three years the charity has been able to give grants in excess of £1.5 million pounds in response to the covid crisis; yet another example of how There for You manages to respond whenever called upon.

All of the There for You small grants programmes continue to be a success story and raise awareness of the charity.

Collectively, the advice and support work plays a big part in what the charity does and what There for You is about. None of what is done to help members could be achieved without the support from across the union.

The vice-chair told the meeting that although there has been an increase in the number of applications, the charity is sometimes unable to help members because the do not always follow up their application with the There for You team, for example by providing the necessary supporting documents that are requested and without which the application cannot be processed through to final assessment.

To try and overcome this issue, the vice-chair asked those present for their help to make sure that members do send these documents. To this end a factsheet and guidance information have been produced for Branch Welfare Officers to explain how and why to liaise with the team.

Turning to There for You income during 2022 the vice chair reported that in addition to the

annual donation from UNISON, the charity investments produced a return of £260,095 and the UNISON Lottery brought in £124,696. But yet again, the major source of income was from the branches with donations of £440,375.

The charity remains in a sound financial position however, going forward, cash reserves will be required to support the financial assistance programme and the Board of Trustees will continue to review funding arrangements and carefully manage the charity’s investment portfolio so that it can continue to support members in the years to come.

The vice chair explained that whilst a grant is often a lifeline for those members in need of extra help to cope with unexpected events, we always consider how else we can help - for example by signposting to other organisations that can assist, collaborating with welfare services, local and national agencies.

Looking forward to 2023 the objectives are to increase the number of members the charity is able to assist.

Trained Branch Welfare Officer will be an important factor in achiving this, so far in 2023 training has already been rolled out to nearly 150 BWO’s and there are plans to offer more online updates, webinars and regional links.

There for You will continue to roll out the energy support grants this winter, as well as increase our help in other areas during the cost of living crisis.

The charity also wants to focus on fundraising: locally, regionally and nationally – to make sure people know about us and what we offer.

As always the charity will continue to consult with BWOs and survey members on important matters, to make sure we know what is needed and how it should be delivered

In conclusion, the vice-chair stated that she couldn’t be prouder of our union, our charity – of our members, of what we do - and the difference we make together and what our collective determination and support means to those who need it.

**5. Receive and approve the report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022**

Referring to the annual report and accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022, the Chair invited delegates to vote to approve the annual report and accounts. There were no votes against, and the report and accounts were **AGREED**.

**6. Appointment of Auditors**

The accounts are audited annually and the Chair invited delegates to accept Crowe UK LLP [Formerly Crowe Clark Whitehill] as the Charity’s auditors for the forthcoming year. There were no votes against, and their appointment was **AGREED**.

**Chair’s Closing Remarks**

The Chair acknowledged that in terms of the formal proceedings, the meeting had reached the final item on the agenda.

Reiterating that the annual report described just how crucial the work of the charity is; how it clearly demonstrated what a vital service There for You is to UNISON’s overall member offer; he confirmed that in the year ahead there will be greater emphasis on raising awareness of the help There for You can offer. He went on to say that together we will continue to take action to support members facing hardship; concluding that no other union comes close when it comes to the level of support that we provide; support he identified which is now needed more than ever.

The Chair made final comments on behalf of the board, thanking those who have supported the charity for many years, the dedicated branch welfare officers, the regional welfare committees, and the talented staff. He confirmed that the past few years have been relentless for everyone, again thanking everyone for all they do.