**SPECIAL FRIENDS CLUB’S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2020 – 7.30 pm**

**VIRTUALLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**Attendees:** Jane Joyce, Colin Gimblett (Chair), Maya Vaitilingam, Sophie Axford, Liz Stratton, Leanne Parkes, Chantal Byrne (Minutes), Jo Davies, Jackie Bignell, Jo-Marie Shanks, Pat Brooks, Helen Conway

Meeting opened at 7.30 pm.

1. **Welcome**

JJ had asked CG to chair the AGM this year. CG welcomed all attendees. He thanked all members for their continued interest in SFC and being patient while the Trustees work out what can be done in the current situation and how to navigate the next few months until activities can resume.

1. **Apologies**

Michelle Southgate, Jayne Wright, Sarah Rosser, Debbie Barefoot, Caroline LeRoy

1. **Minutes of previous meeting**

SFC’s Constitution had been amended to reflect the vote which took place at last AGM to make the club more inclusive.

It was confirmed that existing members with a sibling who had been newly diagnosed with a disability should inform the club and send proof of the new diagnosis, so that the charity’s records could be accordingly amended, and an additional carer added to their membership.

Subscription fees were raised as proposed in the last AGM, with the reduced rate being offered to families entitled to Income Support or Council Tax reduction.

The minutes of last AGM were agreed by all attendees as a true record – Proposed by JD, seconded by JB

1. **Chair’s report**

JJ thanked everyone for attending the meeting in these unusual circumstances. She explained that the period covered by her report was 1st September 2018 to 31st August 2019 and did not include the period affected by the pandemic.

In that period the club organized 89 activities and 2 short breaks, including a Center Parcs weekend.

Further details can be found in the Chair’s report.

1. **Treasurer’s report**

MV presented the Treasurer’s report for that period. She reported that the club got £2,709 from grants and £17,500 from subscription fees. The biggest income that year was from members’ contributions towards short breaks, such as Center Parcs and more expensive trips to the theatre and theme parks, amounting to over £40,000. Due to an administrative issue, the club didn’t receive a grant from South Gloucestershire Council that year so income was just over £63,000 and expenditure was over £94,000 of which £91,000 was spent on short breaks and activities and over £2,500 were spent on running costs – this covered mainly admin costs (e.g., for running the website and paying the club’s administrator MS).

£250 was also spent on governance for the accounts to be done.

MV commented that it had been an unusual year as expenditure was considerably more than income during that period – whereas on a normal year, they balance off. However, the club received 2 grants from South Gloucestershire Council worth £17,000 each during the following period to make up for the difference. At the end of the year, the assets were just over £36,000 which was a healthy amount.

There had been issues getting the accounts done due to Covid (the club’s accountant had been shielding and could not take documents from the Trustees until recently), but MV and JJ were in the process of getting them signed off and posted on the Charity Commission’s website. JJ explained the accounts should have been filed by the end of June, but Charity Commission had been lenient as many charities were experiencing similar delays this year.

All financial details can be found in the Treasurer’s report.

1. **Election of officers**

According to the Club’s Constitution, all Trustees had to stand down. All Trustees agreed to stand again for election and stay in their current roles as detailed below. Helen Conway put herself forward to join the committee as a Trustee (role to be confirmed at next Trustee meeting).

Elections took place as follows:

All candidates nominated by JB and seconded by JMS - Unanimous vote

Chairperson: Jane Joyce

Treasurer: Maya Vaitilingam

Secretary: Chantal Byrne

Vice-Chair: Colin Gimblett

Activities: Sophie Axford

Database: Liz Stratton

Funding: Leanne Parkes

JJ asked if there was any interest from anyone else for standing as a Trustee and added that anyone was welcome to come forward. The Trustees had been talking about succession planning and thought it would be good to have new people joining the committee, as some of the Trustees had been on the board for many years. CG added that the Trustees are always interested in more people getting involved as there is so much to do and it would help spread the workload across.

JJ commented that the club needed people with lots of different expertise and asked members to spread the word, even if they were not interested themselves.

1. **Appointment of auditors**

Sue Rickerby was the club’s current accountant and had done the accounts for many years. MV commented that she did not charge much to do the accounts and the committee was very happy with her work.

All attendees voted for SR to remain in her post - Nominated by CG and seconded by MV – Unanimous vote.

1. **Consideration, discussion and vote on adoption of amendment to the accounting period to reflect the requirements of reporting to funders and applying for grants**

CG explained that our accounting period no longer lined up with our AGM and this needed to be rectified as this was affecting the charity getting vital funding. As an example, LP had tried to apply for Children In Need earlier in the year, but the application was rejected because the accounts were already too old at the time of applying.

MV reported that the current accounting period took us from 1st September 2018 to 31st August 2019 and the next period would be from 1st September 2019 to 31st August 2020. Following that period, the plan would be to have a 6 month accounting period from 1st September 2020 to 31st March 2021. After this, a new 12 month accounting period would start on 1st April 2021 until 31st March 2022 which would be aligned with the vast majority of businesses’ and organisations’ financial year.

JJ added that it would be much easier for her to report back to funders on how money was spent during specific periods. Also, when funders look at the club’s accounts on the Charity Commission website, the accounts were sometimes 18 months old, and this was too old from a business and funding point of view – funders needed to see much more up to date accounts for grants to be approved. She also pointed out that the AGM needed to take place closer to the time when the accounts were produced.

JD and LS thought the change in the accounting period was a good idea. LS added that things could get very out of date and with the impact of Covid, it was important for the club to show that it had not suffered financially. JJ had already had a meeting with funders at South Gloucestershire Council to report on SFC’s activities to explain the current challenges faced by the club and they were very understanding, but she still needed to report back to them, and it would be very helpful for her to have up to date information at hand.

MV commented that the club had an extraordinary membership - families had been offered to put their subscriptions on hold for the period of uncertainty, as no activities had been taking place due to the pandemic, but the vast majority of members had carried on paying their subscriptions. Thanks to this, the club was still getting good income. JJ added that this showed how much members valued the club.

CG explained that our next AGM would have to take place sooner and there was a need to map this out at the next Trustee meeting to make sure deadlines are not missed. JJ confirmed that the next reporting period would be from 1st Sept 2019 to 31st August 2020, which was the period just gone. She suggested the next AGM was held after a 6 months period in March 2021. CG proposed to have an EGM instead.

JD commented that it made sense to move the start of the financial year to April, because it was what commissioners requested. JJ added the club’s current accounting period from August to September only made sense for schools and there was no advantage in SFC following that.

All attendees voted on the adoption of a new accounting period from 1st April to 31st March - Proposed by JJ and seconded by JD – Unanimous vote.

1. **Confirmation of suspension of subscription payments for those whose financial situation has been adversely affected by the pandemic**

As already mentioned by MV above, when the Trustees realised that the club was not able to put on any activities due to the pandemic, they decided to offer families who were struggling financially to suspend their membership and stop paying their subscriptions. The Trustees wanted to have this officially confirmed at the AGM and would like to acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of members had carried on paying their subscriptions - even though these had just been increased before the pandemic hit.

CG added it had been challenging to put on activities with the constant changes in restrictions and venues not accepting group bookings.

LS also noted that, when subs were increased, the club lost some families and other families adjusted their membership to take siblings off. MV commented that, for some members, it was a realisation that they were not using the club as much as they used to and they did not want to pay more for a service that they were no longer using. Some members had actually mentioned they wanted to make space for other families who might make more use of the club. JJ added that older siblings tended to drift off as they got older, which was a natural thing.

JB mentioned that some of the older disabled young adults had gone to residential settings and circumstances had changed for some families. The Trustees agreed that this was happening every year and recognised it was a healthy development. JB added that, now that her son was at residential college, they only attended a few activities, but she felt it was still worth being a member. JJ confirmed that young adults were welcome to stay in the club up until their 26th birthday.

JD asked if her son, who was also at residential college, could come along to activities with his carers from college – the Trustees confirmed it was absolutely fine to do so. JJ confirmed that a lot of young people attended activities with a carer rather than their parents.

All attendees voted onthe suspension of subscription payments for families whose financial situation has been adversely affected by the pandemic – Proposed by JB – Seconded by HC – Unanimous vote.

1. **Any questions**

JB thought that things might not go back to normal for quite a while after the pandemic and venues might not be able to accept bookings of large groups any longer. She asked if there was a possibility of dividing the group into smaller groups to make it possible to attend more activities. The Trustees confirmed that the club would have to adapt and recognised that smaller group activities needed to be organised on a more regular basis going forward. JJ pointed out that people might avoid overcrowded activities in the future, and these were not accessible for a lot of the disabled children in the group. The Trustees were aware of the uncertainty of the current situation but acknowledged that there was a need to listen to members, talk to venues and work out how the club could go forward. JJ stressed that the fact that members had carried on paying their subscriptions showed that they needed the club.

JD mentioned that, according to government guidance, charities and vulnerable groups such as SFC were allowed to organise activities for groups of up to 15 people. Through her work, she knew that a lot of the adventure parks within Bristol were willing to work with small groups and so were the cinemas and museums. She also reported that there had been a lot of success with young disabled people connecting on Zoom and wondered whether this could be explored by SFC, as it might help families stay connected and some young people might really benefit from it. She added that organisations like Gympanzees had also been running online sessions with sensory and music activities. The Trustees agreed that they would do more of this, even though some members might struggle with online activities.

CG added that, in terms of venues, the challenge was them recognising that they still needed group bookings. The recent railway trip had been encouraging as the venue was able to accommodate families safely in separate compartments. Times ahead will be challenging, and more work will be needed – this was also why the current committee needed more help from members coming forward as Trustees or volunteers to help get these activities off the ground. JD volunteered her help, as she had the knowledge through her day job, and said she could give the Trustees a list of venues that might be interested in working with the club.

JJ reported that South Gloucestershire Council had expressed their concern about SFC arranging group activities as they feared the group might attract negative attention from the public, even if it was within the law. The Trustees would not want to bring public disapproval on members while out and about with the club. JD replied that the charity could arrange sole use activities to avoid this problem.

HC asked if the club still has a waiting list. The Trustees replied that there was currently no waiting list to join.

JB asked if the club had received her email from Easyfundraising. MV replied she had been dealing with it and that she was now their nominated person in the Club. She reported that there was about £1,000 accumulated in the club’s EF account.

CG reported that Avon Valley had just cancelled all their Santa train trips, as Bristol was in Tier 3 restrictions.

CG thanked all attendees for their time and hoped to see everyone at the next AGM in March.

Meeting ended at 9 pm