# NCVO’S 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

# (AGM) MINUTES

Monday 16 October 2023 (online)

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## Welcome

The AGM began at midday. Priya Singh, chair of NCVO’s board of trustees, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Priya was joined by:

* Emily Agius, vice chair
* Paul Breckell, honorary treasurer
* Sarah Vibert, chief executive.

## Chair’s review of 2022/2023

**Priya Singh, chair**

Every time we hear breaking news of another humanitarian crisis, we are reminded of how important voluntary action is. As we watch in horror at the devastating situation unfolding in Israel and Palestine, we know the first to respond are voluntary sector colleagues who are on the ground offering aid; behind the scenes planning emergency fundraising campaigns; and at home offering support to families distraught for their loved ones abroad. We send our thoughts to all those affected and continue to hope for peace.

In the UK we’ve seen how rising inflation has pushed many families to crisis point, and again it is the voluntary sector that has been there to provide the safety net. At times of such challenge, it is easy to forget that charities are not only here for people at the most challenging of times, but also to bring communities together through leisure, hobbies, and shared interests, and to inspire hope and a sense of belonging. It is this diversity of focus that makes our sector so special.

This AGM focuses on the financial year 22-23 – which started with the appointment of Sarah Vibert as chief executive, welcomed by all in the sector, at a time of substantial change and challenge. The fallout of the pandemic was still being significantly felt, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis was beginning to bite. The sector was fearful of the year ahead – how would we all manage to support the growing demand for voluntary services, alongside our own financial pressures and dwindling resources?

### Offering stability

It was more important than ever that NCVO offered stability, a steady and secure place, where members could be assured, we would provide help and support. Our teams go above and beyond.

* The Small Charities Helpdesk is often run by only one or two people and gets hundreds of calls a week – and the feedback from customers is excellent.
* The networks team co-ordinates events across the country – bringing together members in forums so they can listen, learn and identify ways to work better locally together.
* Our training team is constantly evolving our offer, so we offer timely, relevant training and many free webinars on subjects that meet the emerging needs of members.
* Our consultancy team works hand and glove with organisations trying to solve their bigger issues.
* Our conference suite and reception team are constantly heralded as bringing warmth and welcome to the Society Building, which acts as a hub for the sector to come together.

Behind the scenes our staff across multiple disciplines pull together to ensure anyone that reads our social media, visits our website, contacts us about an invoice, applies for a job, shares their data, or checks our research – receives the same high standard of service as if they were interacting with us face to face.

### It has been a time to call for change

We stand with members. And while providing excellent services during times of pressure is crucial, we know that for long-term systemic change we need greater support and recognition from government, as well as the trust and confidence of the public. This year it was more important than ever to demonstrate that we would speak up for the sector and tell the story of the vital role charities play in society. Creating a community by bringing together members and elevating our collective voice has been crucial. We surveyed members so that we had meaningful data, we called for case studies to share stories of what was happening in communities, and we worked with partners to lobby government.

Our collective work paid off – we saw an extension to the Energy Bill Relief Scheme for charities and a £100m windfall for the voluntary sector in the Spring Budget.

While we celebrate these achievements and thank members for uniting with us in these important calls, we know it hasn’t been easy. And for some, it has come too late. We’ve lost members – not because they don’t see our value, but because they either can’t afford membership fees, or they simply don’t exist anymore. For every charity that closes, that is another lifeline taken away from a community.

We also saw the impact hit the infrastructure sector with the closure of the two main infrastructure bodies for small charities – the Small Charities Coalition and the Foundation for Social Improvement. Small charities make up over 90% of NCVO’s membership, and we are committed to continually developing our offer for smaller organisations now, and over the coming years.

### It has been a time of evolving and learning

We’re proud of how far we’ve come – but we will never rest on our laurels. We know we must continue to evolve NCVO. NCVO’s 100-year history is interwoven with the history of the voluntary sector itself – after the war we saw a need to provide support for older people and created a project which later became Age Concern.

Similarly, we saw that young people needed places to go, and created a project that later became the Youth Hostel Association. We feel the responsibility to ensure NCVO continues to play this sector shaping role that we’ve played since the 1920s into the 2020s, ensuring we are collectively able to respond to the challenges of the day.

During this year we began new incubation projects:

* Power & Integrity which looks to find a strategic, whole-system approach to power imbalances in the sector which have shaped, and reinforced, beliefs and behaviours, which benefit a few at the expense of many.
* Charity Interns which is supporting more people with no previous charity-sector experience, to find roles in the sector.

Both these projects are testing and sharing new approaches to boosting equity in the sector. Alongside this we’ve continued our own internal learning as we strive to become an anti-racist organisation and we were delighted to be awarded Race Equality Matters’ Bronze Trailblazer status in recognition of our progress.

I have many thank yous to say in closing. I want to thank everyone for working so hard during such challenging times. Thank you to my fellow trustees who are all volunteers and bring so much expertise and experience and a particular thank you to those trustees we will lose this year ‒ to Sheila Taylor, Paul Buchanan and Ingrid Tennessee ‒ we have all benefited hugely from your wisdom and expertise. Thank you to Sarah and her leadership team, who have taken on each challenge with ambition and enthusiasm, and to our wonderful staff who work tirelessly for the benefit of the sector. Finally thank you to you, our members – we exist for you.

## Financial review of 2022/2023

**Paul Breckell, honorary treasurer**

### Overview

It is to the incredible credit of the leadership team and the staff at NCVO, to see our income back at over £7million – it was £7.1million for the year up from £5.4million.

That is really the story of the growth and recovery from what was a challenging two years as a result of the coronavirus pandemic in particular as well as the pressure more broadly on the sector. There was a whole year where our conference facilities couldn’t be open at all due to the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdowns. We have seen a recovery in that as well as activities across the board that has put us in the position where we have an unrestricted operational breakeven position which is in line with the budget.

That’s been achieved with £1.6million of cash in the bank and a further £3million in investments. Overall we have £3.1million of free reserves of which £2million is readily realisable which puts us in a secure financial position having been able to grow our income and activities after the challenges of the pandemic.

### Income

Going on to look at income in a little more detail to talk about the key drivers.

Membership is incredibly important to us, both philosophically as we are a membership organisation first and foremost, whether that is our non-paying members or those who are larger and do make a contribution. Despite it being an incredibly challenging time in the sector with the cost of living crisis and a period of austerity, we’ve seen our membership income grow as part of a four year trend.

There is also the partial bounce back in our income from Society Building and from conferencing. I’d encourage you to look at the conferencing income and rental income together as we slightly changed our mix of how we use the building recognising that the face-to-face conferencing is in a different position to that it was pre-pandemic so we now have some more reliable rental income as well as growing conference income back further.

In terms of training and consultancy, there is again a significant bounce back of income following the pandemic and with a significant focus on that team.

The two real successes of the year as well as sound financial management from the team, are that from a position two years where we had no conferencing income at all and is really important from not just a financial perspective but also a social purpose perspective with conference suite delegates rose from 7,981 in 2021/22 to 23,128 in 2022/23 and we expect that trend to continue.

The other success story to draw to your attention is the work around training and consultancy. Again, this is against the backdrop where we know that charities are having to make some very tough decisions about discretionary spend. Learning and development is important to all organisations and delegates on our online training rose from 3,276 to 4,146 over the same period which is a testimony to the expertise of the team and the quality of the training.

Just to look to the future, like all good treasurers, this is about building on the greatness which is already there. It is important that we at least maintain a breakeven operational position going forward and that’s absolutely the plan that Sarah and the executive team are following, supported by the board.

It does give NCVO the opportunity to think about wider strategy and think about new activity in a way that has been harder over the last couple of years given the external environment. So there will be the opportunity to look to see if we can build new income streams to support the sector and indeed, grow our activity base.

That needs to be done of course, in balance with the intention to re-build cash reserves which are still at a perfectly sound level as I shared but we did use some reserves during the pandemic as it was the appropriate thing to do to continue to maintain our activities and support the sector but now we have come back to slightly more positive financial times, the focus for the board and the executive is to make sure that we work together to re-build those cash reserves for whatever the next rainy day might be which links to our work to build new income streams and to check in again on our reserves policy and to make sure it is still fit for purpose.

So, from a financial perspective, the future to be honest, is more of the same and continuing to build from this now positive position.

## Resolution outcomes

Members voted using the polling function via Mi-Voice.

### Resolution 1

**That the minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting be adopted as a true record of the meeting.**

The resolution was proposed by NCVO member Georgina Carr, from The Neurological Alliance. It was seconded by NCVO member Angela Spence, from Kensington and Chelsea Social Council. 22 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes with four members abstaining and no members voting against. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

### Resolution 2

**That NCVO’s audited annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 be received and adopted.**

The resolution was proposed by NCVO member Crewenna Dymond, from CPRE – The Countryside Charity. It was seconded by NCVO member Georgina Carr, from The Neurological Alliance. 25 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes with one member abstaining and no members voting against. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

### Resolution 3

That PKF Littlejohn be appointed for the ensuing year and that they be paid for their services a sum to be determined by the NCVO Trustee Board.

The resolution was proposed by NCVO member Angela Spence, from Kensington and Chelsea Social Council. It was seconded by NCVO member Georgina Carr, from The Neurological Alliance. 28 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against or abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

### Resolution 4

**That the elected trustees can join the board:**

* **4a Emily Agius (re-elected)**
* **4b Sarabajaya Kumar (re-elected)**
* **4c Brian Seaton (new)**
* **4d Ayesha Tariq (new)**

The resolution was proposed by NCVO member Georgina Carr, from The Neurological Alliance. It was seconded by NCVO member Daniel Wright, from MK Community Foundation.

#### 4a Emily Agius (re-elected)

25 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against or abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

#### 4b Sarabajaya Kumar (re-elected)

24 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against or abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

#### 4c Brian Seaton (new)

22 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against and one member abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

#### 4d Ayesha Tariq (new)

22 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against or abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

#### Resolution 5

That Dr Priya Singh be appointed chair for a second three-year term of office in accordance with clause 3.1 of the regulations made under Article 10.2 of the Articles of Association.

The resolution was proposed by NCVO member Laura Riley, from Mums In Need. It was seconded by NCVO member Daniel Wright, from the MK Community Foundation. 26 members voted for the resolution plus three proxy votes and no members voting against or abstaining. The vote was carried in favour of the resolution.

## Overview of NCVO and the sector

**Sarah Vibert, chief executive officer**

In her introductory talk today Priya reflected so well everything I am proud of from the past year. NCVO has evolved for the better ‒ more in tune with our members, more focussed on our values, and have a fiercely committed staff team. And as Priya said, we exist for members and the voluntary sector, and it’s great to see so many of you here today.

The voluntary sector is at a critical point in its own evolution. Therefore, my focus for this talk will be on the external landscape - not only the immediate challenges, but the future.

### Immediate challenges

This year I have met thousands of members across the country. Many – particularly our smaller members ‒ are focused on how they will cope this winter. They’re looking at inflation rates, the commissioning cycle, the next round of funding and if government will recognise the need for additional support in the Autumn statement.

While we have many large member charities, over 90 percent of our membership are small. These charities are heavily reliant on public donations and have seen a drop in income of over 3% - as reported in our latest Almanac research. 3% drop. That’s £1.8bn that could have been used to house women fleeing domestic violence, provide emergency food parcels, help families out of poverty, support survivors of sexual abuse, or prevent the cruel treatment of animals. And we’re not just grappling with finances. The sector is exhausted, many staff are burnt out, and doing the job of three people.

One member told us that to prevent service cuts she doesn’t turn the lights on, that she works in the dark, wearing lots of warm layers instead of putting the heating on. And its members like this that are supporting the most in need, the most marginalised in society, the most reliant on voluntary services and the most at risk of falling through the gaps. It's not fair. And it’s not sustainable.

### Speaking truth to power

This week we returned from the cycle of party conferences. With the recent rhetoric from some ministers about charities right to campaign – there may be some nervousness about speaking truth to power. But speak truth to power we did.

We shared the impact of under-funded public services on communities. We expressed the importance – and risks – of unfairly commissioning services. We spoke of the devastation that poor policy making has on people. And we told them of the joy, achievements, life changing interventions, and unsung heroes that are working day in and day out to improve lives. We shared our member stories with ministers, policy advisors and philanthropists, demonstrating the value of the sector.

We know it’s often not our voice that should be heard. We are here to elevate the voices of others. Joining the NCVO panel in Liverpool was Lisa, from the member-led organisation People First. She told the shadow minister for arts, heritage and civil society, Lilian Greenwood, how People First had changed her life. Her friend and peer added, ‘if I didn’t have the organisation and advocacy I have now, I wouldn’t be alive.” Lilian told us after that she is committed to working with the sector to create a strategy for civil society.

### The future

2024 will see a general election – and we will be ready. We’ve built solid relationships with government departments and civil servants. And alongside ACEVO we have facilitated the views of hundreds of members to form what will be a manifesto for the voluntary sector.

We’re also making strides with creating the Vision for Volunteering and have held multiple sector workshops to understand the current challenges. All this will help ensure that the final long-term strategy creates a better future for volunteering.

We know that recruiting volunteers is only one part of the workforce challenge. And next year we will begin a project looking at a sector workforce plan – that helps us recruit and retain talent, so everyone feels the voluntary sector is a place they belong and can have a fulfilling and flourishing career.

We are also supporting members to take action on working towards net zero. With all these projects, NCVO takes a convening role. We know we don’t have all the answers. We are continually listening, learning, linking-up and creating routes for people to share vital information that will have a demonstrable impact on the sector and the organisations we all work in. And we want more ideas – we want to hear from our members about what they want, what they need and ideas they have for innovation and improvement. We are the charity’s charity and we must ensure what we do helps you, and the people you serve.

We know that there is much to do. And that at times it will feel hopeless. But there is hope. As Priya said, there is a million people working for charities, and 14.5 million people volunteering. That’s more people than in the armed forces, working in Tesco, or Amazon UK combined. We are stronger than we realise, and we’re definitely not alone.

NCVO will continue being your support. We will continue to help you raise your voice. And we will continue standing shoulder to shoulder with you as we weather the storms.

Thank you for putting your trust in us.