

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting  
Disability Rights UK Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 at 10.30 am –  
2.30 pm**

**Online**

**1) Liz Leach Murphy, DR UK Chair to open the AGM**

The Chair introduced herself and welcomed attendees to the 11th Annual General Meeting. She acknowledged the collective efforts of the DR UK team, trustees, and members over the past year in advancing the charity's mission. Key highlights from 2023 included:

- Launch of the new DR UK website, with a significant increase in visitors accessing information on welfare benefits and cost of living resources.
- DR UK's enhanced role in policy and campaigning, including co-participation in the COVID-19 inquiry and advocacy for disabled people's rights in the UN CRPD review.
- Continued advocacy for issues such as the closure of public transport ticket offices, where DR UK played a pivotal role in overturning the proposal.
- DR UK's strong financial position despite ongoing economic challenges.

Liz also thanked the CEO, trustees, team members, volunteers, ambassadors, and partners for their dedication. She explained the voting process for the AGM, which included approving the annual report, financial statements, auditors, and the appointment of trustee Fiona Creaby.

**2) Minutes of the Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The minutes of the AGM held on 24th November 2022 were presented, with no queries or concerns raised by members. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the previous meeting.

### 3) Audited Financial Statements and questions from the floor

Madeline, interim Treasurer, provided an update on the financial statements for the year ending 31st March 2023. She explained that the accounts had been audited by Goodwins and that a mini marketing exercise would be conducted next year to review their continued appointment. Madeline introduced Nick Spencer, who presented graphs to make the financial information more accessible.

#### Presentation of Financial Graphs (Nick Spencer)

Nick presented the financial statements, focusing on the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) for the year ending 31st March 2023. Key points included:

- **Income & Expenditure:** Income was reported at £1.626 million and expenditure at £1.607 million, leading to a movement of funds of £18,900. A comparative with the previous year showed a positive movement of £8,700.
- **Reserves:** Net assets amounted to £333,000, comprising both restricted and unrestricted reserves.
- A five-year comparison of income was shared, illustrating a dip during COVID-19 years, followed by recovery.
- **Operating Position:** Aiming for a breakeven or positive operating position, excluding one-off donations like legacies. The current operating surplus is £8,000, compared to £23,000 for 2022/23. Forecasts for the current year indicate a potential small deficit, with five months remaining to achieve a better outcome.
- **Final Position:** The bottom line reflects a healthy financial trend, with larger surpluses during COVID years, helped by grants and legacies.
- **Reserves Policy:** A reserves policy of maintaining three months of running costs was highlighted. The charity's unrestricted reserves are currently £5,000 below the reserve target of £280,000. The board remains committed to achieving and maintaining this level, adjusting as the charity grows.

Nick emphasised positive financial trajectory despite challenges and the uncertain economic environment.

Kamran provided additional clarification on the operating position, explaining that unusual donations and one-off expenses, such as website costs, are excluded to give a clearer year-to-year financial picture. He reiterated that relying on legacies is not sustainable, so the focus is on generating income from consistent sources like trust, foundations, and consultancy.

No questions were raised, and the presentation was well received by attendees.

#### **4) Appointment of Auditors for the following year**

The Board recommended the reappointment of *Goldwins* as the auditors for Disability Rights UK for the next financial year. It was noted that *Goldwins* have served as auditors for the past five years.

Disability Rights UK plans to conduct a review of the auditing position in the near future. The review will explore alternative auditing organisations to ensure that the best quality service is being received at a competitive cost. This review will inform future decisions about audit appointments, ensuring quality and cost-efficiency.

**Voting Outcome:** The majority of members voted in favour of retaining *Goldwins* as auditors for the next financial year.

#### **5) Approval of the Board's recruitment of trustee**

Madeline explained the process of recruiting a new trustee. After a full recruitment process, *Fiona Creaby* was selected based on her qualifications, experience, and her fit with the organisation.

**Voting Outcome:** The majority voted in favour of Fiona Creaby's appointment as treasurer. Fiona will formally start her role in January 2024.

#### **6) Short Break**

## **7) DPO Development Manager – first year progress**

The presentation outlined key definitions and the importance of DPOs in the Disability Rights Movement.

### Strategic Priorities of DR UK

- DR UK's strategic focus includes developing knowledge, providing advice and information, advocating for change, engaging the disability movement, and facilitating the DPO sector.
- The organisation's role is to act as a facilitator rather than a representative or leader of the sector.

### DPO Capacity Building Project

- Launched: September 2022
- Initial Steps: Conducted a research assessment to understand the DPO sector's needs without making assumptions. 32 DPOs participated, with 61 interviews conducted.
- Steering Committee: Established in early 2023 to guide the project, ensuring a co-produced approach.

### Research Findings

- Four Overarching Themes:
  - DPO Echo system: Defined by relationships and inclusivity.
  - Survival Climate: Focused on sustainability, especially during crises like the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.
  - Internal Capacity & Resources: Highlighted the need for staffing, training, and resources.
  - Sector Barriers: External factors (funders, local governments) that either hinder or support DPO development.

### Target Areas for Action

- Promotion: Promoting the value of the DPO sector to key stakeholders (funders, political representatives, educational institutions).
- Training: Developing resources for DPO sustainability and self-development.

- **Connectivity:** Enhancing relationships within the DPO sector and mapping the sector.

#### Action Streams

- **Promotion:** Focus on lobbying funders, local governments, and educational institutions to support DPOs and encourage new leaders.
- **Compensation Framework:** Developed to ensure fair compensation for services and research participation.
- **Lobbying and Advocacy:** Working with DPOs to lobby as a collective, upskill organisations in advocacy, and engage in traditional marketing to enhance visibility.

#### 8. Upcoming Plans

- **Evaluation:** A key evaluation of the project will occur shortly to assess its impact and make necessary adjustments.
- **Future Developments:** Continuing co-production with DPOs and expanding the capacity-building project through 2025.

### **8) Annual Report and questions from members – CEO and Leadership Team DR UK panel / Q&A**

**DR UK Strategy Update:** Kamran provided an update on the DR UK strategy, following on from Rebecca's presentation on DPO engagement and strategic areas. Key points:

- The Trustees formally adopted the new strategy in March, following internal and external consultations with staff, trustees, volunteers, DPOs, and other partners.
- The new vision is to create an inclusive society where disabled people have equal power and opportunities.
- The mission is to support the Disability Rights movement and campaign for the rights and justice of all disabled people.
- Core values include recognising disabled people as part of human diversity and upholding their human rights while opposing all forms of discrimination.
- Five strategic goals were highlighted:
  1. Supporting and engaging with the Disability Rights movement.
  2. Building organisational resilience and capacity within the DPO sector.

3. Advocating for change through campaigns and lobbying.
4. Developing knowledge and understanding through evaluation and evidence-based actions.
5. Providing high-quality advice and information written by and for disabled people.

**Website Launch:** Kamran highlighted the new DR UK website, which went live in January. The site was developed to be more accessible, user-friendly, and compatible with screen readers and assistive technologies. The website now offers better categorisation of information and easier access to content.

**Other Key Achievements:** Kamran mentioned several additional achievements from the past year:

- DR UK's continued partnership with Sport England, funding 59 projects through the Together Fund, 14 of which were led by DPOs.
- DR UK's involvement in the UNCRPD review process, including attending sessions in Geneva to highlight the worsening conditions for disabled people in the UK.
- The ongoing work with partner organisations to participate in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, representing the disabled community, who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

**Policy and Advocacy Work:** Fazilet, Head of Policy, provided an overview of key policy areas defended and promoted:

- **Defending Rights:**
  - DR UK worked with Liberty and other organisations to prevent the scrapping of the Human Rights Act.
  - Efforts to limit restrictions on protest rights in the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act were not successful, but materials were developed to support safe, inclusive demonstrations.
  - DR UK opposed the introduction of voter ID requirements, working with the Electoral Commission and providing evidence on the disenfranchisement of disabled voters.
- **Promoting Rights:**
  - DR UK advocated for disabled people's rights in areas such as education, employment, housing, social care, and transport.

**Advice and Information Work:** Madeline invited Michael, Head of Engagement, to explain how the advice and information work has benefited disabled people this year. Key points included:

- The DR UK website has proven highly beneficial, with over 1.1 million unique visits. The revamp led by Kamran has significantly improved user experience.
- The information provided via the website and helplines is created by disabled people for disabled people. The helplines cover topics like independent living and education, supporting over 7,000 individuals with queries on various topics.
- Feedback from users highlighted the efficiency and effectiveness of the helplines, with many expressing gratitude for the support received, particularly from the education helpline.

**Opportunities for Collaboration:** Madeline asked about opportunities for working together with other organisations and the role of the new data insight officer. Michael responded:

- The recruitment for the data insight officer closed recently, and interviews are scheduled for Monday. The addition of this role is expected to enhance data utilisation across all areas of DR UK's work.
- The new officer will help integrate data analysis into the helpline program delivery and website management, supporting policy work, campaign efforts, and bid writing.
- The role will also assist DPOs in becoming more data savvy, helping them to enhance their capacity and reach more disabled people across the UK.

## **Update from Tony Stevens - Head of Development, Training and Consultancy**

### **Trends Noted:**

- **Increased Inquiries:** Inquiries from employers have tripled since pre-pandemic, indicating a greater focus on disability and EDI.
- **Lack of Confidence:** Employers recognise the need for disability awareness but often feel unsure about how to engage in conversations about it.

- **Disability Confident Scheme:** There is growing interest from employers in the Government's Disability Confident scheme, with many seeking support to navigate the process.
- **Commercial Performance:**
  - **Strong Year:** Exceeded budget expectations in training consultancy, working with 80-90 employers.
  - **Sales Insights:** Handbook sales have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, while radar key sales surged to 23,000 last year, driven by stable pricing.
- **Future Considerations:**
  - Need to expand capacity through investment in marketing, new products, and additional trainers to sustain growth.

## **Rebecca Clarkson, Head of Partnerships (formerly Fundraising Manager)**

### **Key Insights on Fundraising:**

**Changing Funding Landscape:** There's a significant shift in what funders expect. They are now focusing on outcomes and impact rather than just event attendance numbers. This represents an opportunity for partnerships that allow for a richer dialogue about shared goals and collaborative problem-solving.

**Emphasis on Co-production:** Co-production is crucial for aligning services with the needs of individuals. It involves all stakeholders—service users, providers, and funders—in a collaborative process to address issues effectively. This method challenges traditional power dynamics and promotes more meaningful engagement.

**Decolonisation of Funding:** Awareness of the need to decolonise funding is growing. This involves re-evaluating who holds power and resources in the funding landscape and ensuring funds are distributed equitably within communities. The Lan Kelly Foundation is cited as a notable example of rethinking funding practices.

## **Break**

### **9) Disabled People's Manifesto – break out into groups**



An introductory overview of the manifesto followed by breakout group discussions.

Main question for breakout groups: "What are the top three issues that stand out for you from the manifesto?"

Aim to gather feedback on priorities for a new government.

### **Breakout Room Discussions**

Breakout groups were formed to discuss:

Top three priorities for a new government.

How to effectively campaign to ensure politicians and the media engage with the manifesto.

### **Feedback from all groups:**

- Emphasised the importance of a clear and actionable manifesto regarding education, housing, and employment issues for disabled people. Discussed the need for better communication of policies and support mechanisms, particularly in the context of addressing systemic discrimination.
- Highlighted the necessity for specific recommendations in the manifesto related to mainstream education and housing. Advocated for positive discrimination and better enforcement of the Equality Act in educational settings, stressing the need for practical measures to combat discrimination effectively.
- Discussed the significance of co-production and the need for government policies that support Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs). Highlighted the importance of access to justice for disabled individuals facing discrimination or rights violations. Emphasised the necessity for financial commitments from the government, particularly in health, education, and the construction of accessible homes.

- **Emphasis on Co-Production:**

Participants across multiple groups highlighted the significance of co-production in the manifesto's development. It was recognised that involving disabled people in discussions and decision-making processes is essential to address their needs effectively.

The importance of having disabled voices in decision-making spaces, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, was emphasised, noting that their absence negatively impacted outcomes for disabled individuals.

- **Need for Broader Policy Framework:**

There was a consensus that the manifesto should adopt a broader and more structural approach to policy, moving beyond isolated issues. This includes advocating for comprehensive support systems rather than piecemeal solutions, especially regarding social security and employment opportunities.

- **Focus on Rights and Enforcement:**

Discussions pointed to deficiencies in the Equality Act and the challenges in enforcing rights for disabled individuals. Participants called for strengthening the rights framework, particularly regarding the socio-economic duty of the Equality Act, to ensure it is prioritised in decision-making.

- **Youth and Representation:**

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of youth involvement and representation within the manifesto. Participants discussed the need to challenge stereotypes surrounding disability and to encourage more disabled individuals to run for political office, thus enhancing representation in Parliament.

- **Engagement Strategies:**

Various strategies for gaining support for the manifesto were discussed, including engaging with charities, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), and broader community organisations. It was suggested to leverage the influence of larger national infrastructure organisations to amplify the message.

Participants recognised the need for diverse outreach methods, including social media, community engagement, and traditional media channels like newspapers and letters to the editor, to reach a broader audience.

**10) Thanks to members for their support, participation and attendance.**

Madeline thanked everyone for their participation in the AGM and contributions to the sessions,

- Acknowledged the staff team as terrific and highlighted their commitment and talent as significant strengths of Disability Rights UK.

**KAMRAN:**

- Expressed gratitude to all members and attendees, with special thanks to the Board of Trustees for their behind-the-scenes efforts in keeping the organisation on course.
- Emphasised that Disability Rights UK is a people organisation, reliant on the contributions of the staff team, trustees, and members, particularly disabled individuals across the country.
- Reiterated commitment to continuing their work and stated that the strategies previously outlined would be available on the website.
- Highlighted the importance of engaging with members throughout the year, not just at the AGM.

**11) Close of meeting.**