



People First Highland



SPIRIT Advocacy

Strengthening People In Raising Issues Together

Incorporating HUG Action for Mental Health (HUG), People First Highland (PFH) and SPEAK (Stigma Prevention through Education, Advocacy and Knowledge)

**Minutes of SPIRIT Advocacy EGM held on Monday 25th September 2023
at the Merkinch Community Centre, Inverness**

Approved Wednesday 1st November 2023

1. Welcome

Jamie welcomed everyone and the membership were asked if there were any objections to David chairing the meeting. There were no objections.

2. Chaired by: David Brookfield, Centred Scotland

3. Present & Apologies

Susan Lyons, David Brookfield, Kate Maclean, Michael Beddard, John Macleod, Marianne Morrith, Joanna Higgs, Tina Jordan, Mairi Hill, Emma Grant, Lizzie Fraser, Levanah Rowell, Peter Todd, Karen Findley, Kevin Shouhouse, Rhoddy Shand, Michelle Vroom, June Craig and Mags Macdonald were present at the meeting

Online

Alan Bithell, Margo Neilly, Emma Knox, Daniel Mackenzie-Winters, Bill Cook, Jacqueline Lewis, Ivor Bissett, Gill Terry and Karen Mohan attended online.

Apologies

Apologies were received from John Gallon, William Macleod, Alison Gibbons, Chris Evans and John Irvine.

In attendance

Carrie Waugh, Jamie Bird and Marina Patience

4. SPIRIT Advocacy Update

Jamie gave a brief update in general. Over the past year there has been lots of good work, we had our relationship with the NHS and with other organisations, such as Centred, Scotland. However, over recent weeks our board resigned which is why we are here today, to hopefully elect 3 new members on to the board. Financial update from Marina.

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5. Finances

MP: Currently we have £45,979 in the bank, and are due the remaining £60,000 of this year's funding to March '24. Monthly salary cost for Jamie, Marina, Carrie, is £5,147.

We need a new treasurer to sign off on the accounts. I will go through everything with the new treasurer and accountant. Salaries from October to March for Marina and Carrie will be £21,672. If we employ a new part time development worker it will cost £7,500, and a new part time manager will cost £7,280.

Question from attendee - how long will the remaining money last? What is going on? What happens if we do not get more money? Why aren't the board here explaining?

Why did the board resign?

DB - My understanding is that the board resigned due to personal issues, not the structure of the organisation.

Attendee - Surely we need to know why the members left the board before we commit to a position?

Attendee - Why just members, shouldn't there be independent people on the board too?

DB - Constitution says 3 SPIRIT members then 3 HUG, and 3 PFH members.

MP - Update to constitution in 2019, we can have 6 non-members on the board.

JH - Requests attendees to raise hand and wait turn to speak, and say our name for the benefit of those joining online.

Marianne - Maybe we need another constitution. I used to be on the board, I'm finding it difficult that it has come to this.

Bill - The constitution worked well until recent months, it was designed to increase representation of those with lived experience on the board.

Sue - We're a members led organisation, so it should be up to the members. There may be some members who want SPIRIT to cease. The projects can continue even if SPIRIT does not continue.

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Sue cont'd - IF members think this is it for SPIRIT and decide this today, there is no point in electing a new board. I was a manager and board member of SPIRIT. We should see this as an opportunity to seek funding elsewhere. If we are no longer beholden to the NHS then we do not have to remain SIAA members. SPIRIT is the financial organisation. We can continue but it is up to the members whether that should happen.

Peter - I resigned the board because I was uncomfortable with what was happening behind the scenes. I asked for a members meeting twice and was ignored.

Joanna - Online comments not being fed into the discussion, so I know I am not the only one who thinks this. Going into detail today isn't necessary, it needs to happen but not today. 3,3,3,6 is a maximum, 5 total is minimum, so not sure where you are getting the 3 from. Funding is not certain. Is SPIRIT going to continue? Then new board and constitution needed.

Mags- It's time you didnt pull the wool over our eyes. We were told to cancel. I was suggested to leave the board. How can we trust in SPIRIT? We need to change our ways. We dont vet our members and board. Our reputation has been blown. It's down to poor management.

John M - Here here.

Michael - We had a group of affiliates, small group, co-opted by Ken. We have a very vague definition of why people should be represented. SPIRIT is the umbrella for HUG.

DB? - Elect 3 to the board, board co-opt 2 more, then add in HUG and People First members.

Joanna - Why just 3 not 5?

Margo - Board need to be elected first to make the decision to continue or not need a board to close down the organisation.

Mags - We should have no board, the members should be in charge. There's been bullying on the board, it's lost us members, bullying by the chair. I was bullied. We had board members whose remit was to cause chaos and destruction.

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Joanna - We do need a board to disband, a new board will be different, with different ideals and behaviours etc.

Peter - You volunteer for the board to give people a voice.

Michael - Election goes to SPIRIT members. We've had to deal with people's personal agendas - poverty alliance - co-opting without thinking what people represent.

Joanna - The projects exist to give people a voice, SPIRIT does the business that allows projects to do the work.

Karen - I've not been offered any kind of counselling or mental health support since losing my leg.

DB - We're straying from the point - we're here to elect new board members.

Marianne - This is collective, not individual advocacy. Collective voice should be out and challenging some situations that are happening in the Highlands. How do we get 3 people for the board when there's been this calamity. How do we choose those 3?

Mags - How do we support the board, what training? And only 1 staff member?

Joanna - Those are good points, important issues to decide, but we need a board to do that. I propose we find 5 not 3.

Mags - We need an envelope vote.

DB - Secret ballot is an option.

Joanna - Want to suggest we make a promise that the new board will discuss relevant details so we do not need to go into this today.

Tina - If SPIRIT is the governing body, have you come with 3 names? How do we know they have the skills needed, how do we know what we are voting for? We need to know people's skills to know if we want to vote for them.

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Sue – There is an AGM in November, board members can resign, new board members elected etc.

Levanah - People on the board need to be passionate, empathic, intelligent; it's taking a leap of faith.

Tea break

DB - Sue will explain the purpose of the board and Jamie some of the history of the situation.

JB - in July there was an issue where board members tried to constructively dismiss a member of staff, which led to issues and interplay within the board. Vulnerable members were made aware of the legal responsibilities. Everyone resigned and that is what led to this meeting here today.

Sue - SPIRIT is the legal entity that manages HUG and PFH. Without SPIRIT, HUG and PFH still exist without any management, staff, finances. Staff would be made redundant. We can employ a solicitor to shut down SPIRIT; HUG and PFH can exist as voluntary organisations who can later become a charity if needed. If we do not elect a board today we cannot make any decisions/recruit staff etc. To be clear, HUG and PFH still exist without SPIRIT, but with no framework. If we elect a board, the board has until the AGM to come up with a plan. If we have no board, SPIRIT closes and HUG and PFH still exist.

Marianne - It's difficult to understand who would support and direct them.

Sue - It would be a voluntary organisation, so would be up to ourselves to decide what to do. Volunteers can continue running it. Voluntary groups. There should be money that can be transferred to voluntary organisations. A solicitor could wind up, could be a fee but many do pro bono. HUG, PFH still exist, but we are deciding about SPIRIT today. Are people happy to let SPIRIT go and become something else as HUG, PFH or both?

Margo - seems that 2 separate organisations could be developed following the breakdown of SPIRIT, but still requires people to volunteer and take charge of each. Issue with separating - people with learning disabilities can experience mental health problems and vice versa. Bringing the projects together is the way forward. There's lots of crossover between the 2 groups, e.g. sex and relationships, medications etc.

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Sue - Today, if we decide SPIRIT no longer exists, staff are made redundant and the organisation winds up. So there's no reason they couldn't join together if they wanted, but both still exist without SPIRIT.

Emma - Bringing HUG and PF Highland could be difficult; for example many have confidence issues and we need something in place for PFH members to be listened to and supported.

Mairi - What will happen with people in other areas if SPIRIT cease. People up north may need help and it will impact their mental health.

BD - anyone want to express interest? If no one is interested then the question is purely academic.

Emma - I don't have the qualifications.

(Alan Bithell left zoom at 14.45)

Levanah - Curious about the board but would like more information.

JB - Board members don't need qualifications, but do need to be confident to talk to partners such as the NHS, its usually not so difficult to be a board member, it just sounds harder at this meeting and keep in mind there are only 2 remaining members of staff.

DB - Do we have interest in a board position?

Marina - I know its confusing, the board meets monthly to discuss issues and current work. As a board member, there's a leaflet about roles and responsibilities, you'd be added to companies house. I can meet with new board members to explain what it means and answer your questions. Life experience is good as you know what is needed. We've never been in this situation before. I think the membership should elect at least 3 members to look at the situation and decide what we want to do.

DB - Would NHS have claim to some of the remaining money if SPIRIT stop?

Marina - I would need to look into it, some funds would be unrestricted.

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DB - We can't make a decision until a board is in place. If SPIRIT fold, you would still need a board for HUG and PFH and they would be dead in the water with no staff and no funds.

John - If we can't establish 3 people here today then it should be thrown open.

Tina - I think it's important board members have the right skills eg, Jamie's example of employment law, HUG could start its own board, get consultation and funding. Other suggestion, the discovery college.

Mags - You make it sound really complicated to register as a charity.

Marina - If a board are elected myself and Jamie will go through the finances with them and explain it all but if SPIRIT were to close it would not happen overnight.

Levanah - I'm interested but want more info.

Joanna - The contracts, could the money left be recouped? For not fulfilling the contract?

Marina - Only had April to September funding paid so far; accountant would look to see if any money would need to be paid back.

6. Election of Board of Directors

DB - we are going round in circles here. Back to the point. Any nominations for the board?

- Levanah - volunteered
- Marianne Morrith - Nominated Bill Cook
- Gill Terry - Nominated Sue Lyons
- Sue Lyons - Nominated Gill Terry
- Mairi Hill - Volunteered
- Emma Grant - Volunteered

John - We should send a letter to all members seeking new board members and include a form for nominations.

7. AOCB

There was no other current business and the meeting closed.

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