

Minutes of the 15th Annual General Meeting of The Guildford Institute

Thursday 29 February 2024, 3.15pm, Assembly Room, The Guildford Institute

Welcome and Introductions

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Brian Creese, welcomed those present.

AGENDA ITEM 1: Approval of Minutes of the 14th AGM held on Thursday 2 March 2023 and matters arising

The minutes of the last annual general meeting held on Thursday 2 March 2023 were approved. There were no matters arising.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Report of Annual Report

The Chairperson presented highlights of the Annual Report August 2022 – July 2023, as follows:

The Chairperson explained that August 2022 saw GI at the start of the process of marketing the ground floor in the hope of finding a new tenant, and so secure long-term sustainability. It soon became apparent that even with a new tenant the financial problems would not be solved, and there would be a need to explore new directions and look at innovative solutions. In March 2023 the services of fundraising professionals Competitive Solutions (CSL) were engaged. With their help a new business model was developed aiming to position GI as a grant-led charity.

CSL felt that GI should shout louder about their charitable contributions in Guildford. During this reporting period, Guildford Institute:

- Offered free spaces on talks via social prescribing
- Supported our charitable mission with 500 memberships
- Engaged 20 volunteers who provided 2,000 hours of support
- Provided work for 3 interns
- Facilitated 545 charity and community group meetings and a further 122 NHS meetings
- Provided a venue for free young musician's recitals and partnered with Guildford Arts to provide free exhibitions promoting local artists
- Joined the community foodbank programme.

- Introduced groups to combat loneliness
- Joined the Safe Places National Network, facilitated over 3500 hours of counselling and staff received Dementia Friendly training from Alzheimer's Society

In our more traditional areas of work, in this reporting period we:

- Provided over 200 courses with 1200 hours of teaching for 2,279 students
- Delivered 50 hours of Wednesday afternoon talks for 900 attendees & a further 150 on Zoom
- Ran 10 special events, including a Community Street Party for The King's Coronation
- Organised 10 visits to events, stately homes, and other places of interest
- Provided free access to the Library and Archives
- Delivered over 200 hours of Tai Chi – promoting good health, balance, and wellbeing
- Ran Turkish cooking workshops on Zoom
- Ran Family History workshops, both in person and via Zoom
- Conducted practical Craft courses
- Introduced Fashion History and Garden History to the course programme
- Hosted conversation groups for German, French and Italian students
- Room hire has continued to grow after the pandemic and we hosted a wide range of Guildford community clubs and societies, including 250 hours of chess run by Guildford Chess Club
- Hosted our inaugural Open Mic night with performing artists including some of our Trustees, singers, musicians, comedians, and poets.

During this reporting year, two of our Trustees resigned. Sadly, Rachel Pirovano stepped down, but with two very young children and in full time work she felt unable to give the level of commitment she wanted to. Lisa Taylor also resigned from the Board in March 2023, who stepped in to cover the Institute Manager position whilst Amy Rice is on maternity leave.

The Guildford Institute is fortunate to have a tremendous group of Trustees who between them cover a wide range of business, education, and charitable sectors. All go way beyond the call of duty and may be found painting walls as well as attending meetings.

We have several trustees with us today:

- Mike Kirby (Treasurer)
- David Cheeseman
- Phil Davies

Phil Davies then shared some thoughts on being a Trustee:

“It is a common adage that you should always be wary of buying anything from a man in a pub. And if you do, you shouldn't be surprised if it turns out to be nothing like you expected!

“But, I have to confess, that is just how I ended up here as a trustee of this wonderful charity!

“It was during a conversation I was having with Brian in a local hostelry that I let slip that, having recently retired, I was looking for new challenges to exercise my brain. And as I recall Brian just smiled and said something like “leave it with me....”

“And before I knew it, a few weeks later I was sitting at my first meeting of the Guildford Institute Trustee Board. And no, it hasn’t been anything like I expected!

“To be honest I had anticipated sitting through series of rather dull meetings, looking at an endless succession of incomprehensible spreadsheets. Challenging yes, but not exactly exciting. But it’s not been a bit like that (except for the spreadsheets of course...)

“What I had not envisaged was:

- Getting involved in running, and even performing at, the Institute’s first Open Mic night
- Discovering a book that I’d spent years searching for in the Institute’s amazing library
- facilitating a valuable link between the GI and another charity I had previously been involved with
- Meeting an amazing group of wonderful people

“And I had not anticipated learning so much about GI’s:

- Long and fascinating history
- The breadth and variety of its work
- Its genuine importance in the lives of so many local people, including some of the most socially vulnerable, particularly with its new “chatty café” initiative

“On the other hand, as someone who ran a large local charity for nearly 15 years, something that did not come as a surprise to me were the challenges that the GI now faces. These are not easy times for any charity. People have less money to spare, grant funders are over-subscribed, and the ever-increasing regulatory demands on charities mean our small staff team is often stretched to the limit.

“Addressing these challenges is not going to be easy. It takes imagination, effort and, dare I say, some bravery. It means embracing change, even when it is uncomfortable. It means ensuring all our assets, in this case our wonderful building, are used to the full, and that all our processes and procedures are fit for purpose and as efficient and effective as possible. It also means ensuring that we are making the best possible use of the skills and talents of our staff and volunteers.

“But for us, most importantly, it will mean creating and delivering a new and exciting vision for the future of The Guildford Institute, one that:

- Attracts a new and diverse audience for our courses, a new generation of service users and clients

- Actively promotes our positive value to the lives of local people, including the vulnerable and disadvantaged
- Will move the GI from being “one of Guildford’s best kept secrets” (a phrase I heard used when I first came across this charity) to “one of Guildford’s best known and best loved assets” - a unique place where you can feed your mind as well as your stomach!

“All whilst retaining the best features of our long and proud history, whilst respecting and valuing the interests of our current members.

“The one thing that has made the greatest impression on me during my time here, and that has made being a Trustee so enjoyable, has been the passion, dedication, and genuine engagement that I have witnesses in each and every staff member, Trustee, volunteer, and member. A real determination to see this wonderful charity succeed and thrive, so that i can be enjoyed by future generations, as much as it has been by so many people up until now.

“And let me tell you, those are things that you can’t buy from a man in the pub!

“But before I finish there is just one final thing I want to say. Brian, you still owe me a pint!”

AGENDA ITEM 3: The Financial Report of 2022-23

Treasurer Mike Kirby delivered the Financial Report of 2022 – 2023:

At first glance our income looks quite respectable, and there are some very creditable success stories. However, we must emphasise that the 57% increase in overall revenues is very misleading, owing to the receipt of £165,000 from The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) in settlement of their dilapidations responsibilities after 60 years of occupation of the ground floor space.

Without that income, our ongoing revenues were 7% down at £264,000. This included a 77% fall in rental income, due entirely to the absence of any revenue from the ground floor following RBS’s departure. The success stories are that:

- Donations were up by over £30,000 following an appeal to Members last spring.
- Room hire was up 56% to pre-pandemic levels
- Institute activities almost doubled at £17,500, with courses revenue increased by 5% to match pre-pandemic levels

We owe a great deal of gratitude to our staff for achieving these successes; thanks to the staff for working so hard to produce these results.

Unfortunately, in the current year, where once we had every reason to believe that we would have started to receive rental income from a new ground floor tenant, there is going to be a second full year with no such income.

With regards to our costs, our total spend was 57% higher than the previous year, but this included £124,000 that we had to spend out of the dilapidations settlement in preparing the ground floor and basement for reletting. We also spent over £17,000 in the year on fundraising consultancy fees, as well as £37,000 on legal, accountancy, and similar fees for professional services, much of which has proved abortive due to the withdrawal of the prospective ground floor tenant (Chairperson will go on to cover in the next section). On a like-for-like basis, our overall costs have increased more or less in with, or slightly better than, inflation at under 10%. As usual, staffing is our largest cost centre. At £160,000 in total, they represent approximately 50% of our total cost base, but there would be no Guildford Institute without them.

With regards to our cash balances, three years ago we had almost £450,000 total cash spread across various accounts, with around £85,000 in each account. Today, despite the receipt of the dilapidations funds of £165,000, we are down to around £260,000 in reserves. We are currently spending around £10,000 every month, with plans to spend a significant amount converting the ground floor (Chairperson will go on to cover in the next section). It will be a challenge to replace the revenues we used to receive from RBS.



The above graph illustrates what has happened over the last three years. The final rent from RBS was received in March 2022. We spent funds on dilapidations work from late 2022 until spring 2023, before receiving the agreed settlement from RBS in March 2023 and the balance has been steadily going down ever since.

We hope you can all appreciate the challenge we have before us and we trust that we will receive your full support in our efforts to get the Institute’s finances back onto a solid foundation. We need to find more avenues from raising funds; any suggestions are welcome.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Update on GI Plans

The Chairperson provided an update on future plans, as follows:

“At last year’s AGM we were confident that the situation was under control. We had a prospective tenant, an up-market dentist and although they were quite difficult to deal with, we were making progress. We continued to make progress until we had drawn up a lease, which they were due to sign in July. Unexpectedly, however, they did not sign the lease as agreed, but instead put in a planning application for changes to the outside branding of the building. They were quite slow in drawing up the plans for approval and when they – predictably in our view - failed to gain approval for the changes, they simply walked away from the tenancy.

“This meant that after 18 months of receiving no rental income from the space and having incurred the many and various expenses from solicitors, surveyors, agents and so on, we were back at square one.

“The GI had followed the ‘safe’ option and it had cost around £150,000 in lost revenue. Another 18 months with a new potential tenant would see us drain our reserves entirely and with no guarantees that we would find the right tenant within that time.

“We have therefore decided to embark on a slightly different approach. Since last summer we have been in discussion with a local company called m:tech, who deliver music training for schools. They were not interested in the vacant ground floor space, but really loved the second floor (where our counsellors are based), an area of the building that is in desperate need of some TLC. We feel that m:tech are a great fit with Guildford Institute. Although a private company they work in a sector which is in line with our aims and there are countless areas where we think we can work together. We have therefore decided to let the second floor – with the exception of The Judith Whitaker Studio – to m:tech and they will start work on adapting the office space in the near future.”

Company director Khaled Abdullah was invited to speak to the Members:

“At m:tech we offer creative music making courses, focusing on music theory and technology. Activities are aimed at children of all abilities, from those who already play an instrument, to those just starting their musical journey. We teach young learners how to create their own soundtracks for engaging and exciting projects like movie trailers, TV adverts and radio shows. We work with around 3,000 children every week across Surrey and Sussex, working in and with local schools and teachers. I was born and educated in Guildford, and I am passionate about m:tech being established in the town as part of something bigger. m:tech’s values feel aligned with the GI. m:tech hope to work collaboratively with the GI on events, maybe even offer opportunities for SEN students and possibly even a sensory classroom. m:tech have been made to feel very welcome by the Institute and we are looking forward to moving our offices to the GI.”

The Chairperson continued:

“This decision means that we will lose the rooms occupied by our long-standing counsellors. We approached our architect and asked how much it would cost to install temporary office structures in the ground floor space for the counsellors. The answer was yes, quite a lot, we produced a scheme that is something that we could just about afford to fund from our reserves.

“This will be a challenge for our counsellors, as there will be a period when they will need to vacate the premises, but we believe that it will provide better facilities, allowing them to extend their practises and further develop their services.

“The plan also means that the Institute will gain a North Street frontage – something we have wanted for years. We will also knock through to the current ground floor space that we currently occupy, and we will finally become one building. All of which means that rather than letting out a large chunk of our building for an extended period, we are aiming to maintain control of all of it. We will hear back from GBC within the next 6 weeks regarding our listed building consent, so our hope is that we can progress these plans quickly.

“A further update concerns CSL, our fundraisers. Our experience of working with them has been very mixed. Without doubt they have proved to be great consultants and made us really focus on our charitable aims and how we present ourselves to the wider community. However, in raising money they proved disappointing, and raised less than they charged us in fees. We have therefore decided not to renew our contract with them and instead concentrate on generating funds and applying for grants in-house.

“Another change in the building concerns our much-loved Library and local archive. The Library has not made a financial contribution to the GI for a long time and its current usage is minimal. To maximise the use of this space and reinvigorate use as a library we have agreed some new arrangements with our valued library volunteers. We will use the library as a meeting room on four days each week and the library will be open all day on Thursdays and Saturdays - weekend opening of the whole building is part of our long-term goal to be open 6 days a week.

“Since May 2023 Lisa Taylor has been acting Institute Manager whilst Amy Rice has been on maternity leave, and we can't thank Lisa enough for her extraordinary work during this difficult period. Lisa and Amy are already planning Amy's return to the helm, but we are hoping to hang onto Lisa in other capacities for a little while yet.”

The Chair then appealed for more supporters of the GI to become members and for those using the GI to donate money on a regular basis to keep the organisation afloat during this difficult time.

Questions were left until the Q&A session.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Any other business

There had been no items of business submitted by the deadline.

Trustees in attendance

Phil Davies (Trustee)	Brian Creese (Chairperson)	Mike Kirby (Treasurer)
	David Cheeseman (Trustee)	

Members in attendance

Mike Adams	Neil Chambers	Stephanie Chambers
David Cheeseman	Margaret Clements	Brian Creese
Phil Davies	Sue Dragon	Rob Durham
Ann Fearey	Barbara Ford	Tony Ford
Harold Trevor Jones	Michael Kirby	Mary Korndorffer
Anthony Marsom	Veronica Persey	John Redpath
Doreen Shaw	Belinda Singleton	Joan Smith
Peter Smith	Linda Stevens	Martin Taylor
Rhona Thomson	Graham Thorp	Julie Verity
Jan Wilkinson	Philip Wilkinson	

Non-members known to be in attendance

Lisa Taylor (Institute Manager)	Chelsea Eves (Programme Manager)	Emma Wilkinson (Marketing & Communications Officer)
Vicky Pursey (Finance & Projects Assistant)	Amy Mason (Events Assistant)	Khaled Abdullah (Director, m:tech)
	David Rose (GI Tutor)	

Apologies

Jenny Austin	Sophie Chapman	Janet Crowe
Tom Heasman	Lesley Myles	Margaret Westwood
Harry Wickens	Jean Wickens	Sue Yearley

The meeting closed at 4.13pm

Copies of these minutes are available in large font on request