

Annual General Meeting

MINUTES

7 December 2020 at 19:00 hrs
via Zoom

Attended by:

Philippe Bonnet (Chair)	Grant Henderson	Mercy Nimako
Adele Phillips	Helen Wilks	Nigel Brunsdon
Amanda Wilson	James Pierce	Peter Furlong
Andrea Mulligan	Jamie Bridge	Robert Csak
Andrew Preston	John Fox	Sue Reilly
Andria Efthimiou-Mordaunt	John Hamilton	Tim Gluckman
Chris Paling	Karen Angier-Brown	Zlatko Chulev
Craig Hazlett	Lidia Woods	
David Estabrook	Lisa Byrne	

1. Welcome

Philippe Bonnet, chairing the meeting, welcomed the participants and explained that the AGM was being held online this year due to there not being an NNEF All-Day Meeting in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

2. Confirmation of minutes of the last AGM

Minutes from the previous AGM on 6th December 2019 had been shared in advance. Only one suggested edit was raised – to add that Philippe Bonnet would continue as a co-Deputy Chair alongside Nigel Brunsdon for 2020. The minutes were approved as amended.

Philippe reviewed some of the open actions and discussion points from 2019:

- Email groups: Yahoo announced last month that all of their email groups would be closed from 15th December. Jamie has created new groups for the [NNEF Planning Group](#), the [“needle-x-discussion” forum](#), and for [UKHRA](#). [Participants were encouraged to sign-up to these new ‘Google Groups’ as soon as possible.](#) It was not possible to automatically transfer people’s emails from one platform to another due to data protection etc.
- Lisa Byrne and Cliff Askey remain the NNEF focal points for the London-based “UK Harm Reduction Group” and PHE “National Intelligence Network” meetings, although no face-to-face meetings have taken place due to COVID-19.
- Jamie Bridge noted that there was no update on the proposal to advocate for the legal mandating of drug services at the local level, using a similar legal instrument as currently exists for sexual and reproductive health services. However, NNEF should remain supportive of this idea if it develops any further.

3. Review of the NNEF accounts and finances

Helen Wilks (Treasurer) presented the latest NNEF financial report and accounts. There were very few transactions in 2020 – with only some final income and expenditure related to the December 2019 event (which ended with an £8 profit), and the annual costs for web-hosting. Overall, therefore, the financial situation remains much the same as it did at the last AGM. The NNEF has enough in reserves to deliver one year's event without any income (although this is an unlikely scenario). There also remains £500 committed for the website redesign, which is an ongoing project and will be invoiced by Nigel Brunsdon once complete.

4. Discussion on the future of NNEF – activities and priorities

NNEF Website

As soon as the new website is up and running, we will notify members.

'Mystery Shopping'

The 'mystery shopper' scheme was raised again as a project in which there is a lot of interest, but currently not enough capacity within NNEF alone to run it meaningfully. There have been good discussions with the Hepatitis C Trust, who may be well placed to support a wider roll-out of the idea now that they have a network of peer coordinators in place – several of whom were on the call. The resources already exist, and the hope is that by having a standard methodology and approach up and down the country, we can collate and use the data to have an impact. Other organisations and partners are interested in this work too, and some participants shared local experiences they have had with mystery shopping – in fixed-site and pharmacy exchanges. In many cases, the results have shown a real lack of knowledge and best practice in sites. **It was agreed that Philippe would liaise again with Hepatitis C Trust colleagues to agree the next steps for this project.**

2021 Event

It was proposed that we aim, tentatively, for an NNEF All Day Meeting at the end of 2021, and start the planning and discussions in the summer when we have a better idea of the emerging situation with COVID-19 etc. As discussed at the last AGM, the meeting should be held outside of Birmingham (and possibly in London), and a small cover charge could be levied as a deposit to cover the catering costs. This would be waived for those unable to pay it.

Online Trainings

James Pierce raised the idea of NNEF hosting virtual trainings or webinars in 2021, to plug the training gap for many newcomers to needle exchange work (and to help promote NNEF membership to this new audience). Such webinars require little funding, and could use the same Zoom account as this meeting – but they do require an investment of time. **James agreed to write-up a short proposal for consideration by the Planning Group.**

Data Collection

It was highlighted that the UK still does not have any data on the numbers of needle exchanges, let alone the current levels of provision and what services are offered. This is a huge gap in knowledge, and one which NNEF has been acutely aware of for many years – but unable to satisfactorily resolve. Previous attempts to use Freedom of Information requests, in partnership with Release, gathered some data but the coverage was incomplete. It was suggested that the needle exchange suppliers could be the best source of this information, but such data may be commercially sensitive. Any proposals to upload the data to the NNEF website have fallen short, due to concerns about keeping the database updated in the face of regular recommissioning, service changes, etc. This is an ongoing need to be discussed further.

5. Volunteers for the NNEF Planning Group

Volunteers were sought to join the NNEF Planning Group – a smaller group of between 6 and 12 people who help steer the work and plan the NNEF meetings, etc. The time commitments depend on what individuals can do, and there is a separate email discussion list for this group to connect. Craig Hazlett and John Fox volunteered to join the group, and several existing members re-committed as well.

6. Election of New Officers

Proposals and nominations were sought for the positions of Chair(s), Deputy Chair(s) and Treasurer. Philippe offered to step back in as Chair for the coming year – he was nominated by Nigel Brunsdon, seconded by Mercy Nimako, and supported unanimously by participants.

Nigel Brunsdon and Jamie Bridge confirmed their willingness to continue as Deputy Chairs, as did Helen Wilks as Treasurer, and this was also supported by the participants.

7. Updates / Any Other Business from NNEF Members

Jamie proposed that the NNEF joins the [Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs](#) – a broad network that supports civil society engagement with the United Nations in Vienna (where the discussions on drug policy take place). Jamie is currently the Chair of this Committee. Membership would not cost the NNEF anything due to our income level, and does not require NNEF to be formally registered. All we need to do is register a profile with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), which takes about five minutes. The proposal was agreed. **Jamie will manage the application process.**

Participants were also invited to provide reflections or updates on how services have responded so far to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported that an initial sense of panic, and a loosening of methadone pick-up restrictions, have subsided and in many cases any increased flexibility has been taken back by prescribers. However, other participants noted that pick-ups had remained flexible for many clients. Most client contact has become remote, via phone etc, with reduced opening hours. Colleagues from the Hepatitis C Trust commented that the pandemic had actually improved engagement in some areas – with dozens of new treatments started during this period.

Philippe Bonnet thanked participants for attending and engaging.

Meeting closed at 20:15.