

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF EDGWARE &
HENDON REFORM SYNAGOGUE

HELD MONDAY 28 OCTOBER 2019

AT 118 STONEGROVE, EDGWARE, HA8 8AB

PRESENT: 44 Members Rabbi Emily Jurman

APOLOGIES: R. Mark Goldsmith R. Neil Kraft Annita Tischler Ed Shirman
 Sharon Garson Alan Sears Howard Moss Don Glazer
 Manfred Kalb Joan Kalb

Janet Brand Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for the delay whilst we waited for the minutes of the AGM held on 10 June 2019 to be circulated.

Rabbi Emily Jurman thanked everyone for being here and pointed out that Synagogue meetings can provoke a sense of drudgery but hoped that people will leave this meeting with a sense of optimism and renewed hope for the future as in the last few months we have begun a new chapter full of promise. She said that the rabbinical team together with several committed volunteers have been part of a listening campaign supported by MRJ to learn how to re-invigorate and re-energise, to reach out effectively to the membership by offering exciting and dynamic programmes, worship services with the aim to move every member in a step, make service users part of the core community and potential members into Shul supporters and so breathe new life into this kehila. She asked that everyone joins in this process to enable the next generations to be served and supported.

Kevin Maddison referred to the accounts that accompanied the EGM notice and the fact that the budget for 2020 shows a projected deficit of some £144,000.

As to what is going to be done he continued by saying that with Rabbi Mark Goldsmith joining us as new senior rabbi in May of this year we have found him to be exceptionally focussed on putting the mission and values of this Synagogue into action using appropriate techniques of marketing and organisation and his guidance has been outstanding and he has undertaken to lead a detailed review by looking at the needs of different age groups, the activities of the synagogues including mechanisms and events to attract new members plus activities and events to help ensure that as many congregants as possible become and continue to be engaged with the synagogue to make it as vibrant as possible. To this end we are planning a vision meeting early next year to help crystallise our visions for the future.

Looking at the subscription income we can see that over 50% of members pay a reduced subscription many of whom have requested a reduction due to their financial circumstances at that time. As concessions have not been reviewed for many years we will shortly be sending a letter to all members advising them that all concessions (except for those in the 21 to 35 age group and elderly congregants in care homes) are to be reviewed inviting them to contact the office to discuss a concessionary rate. The aim is to ensure that the cost of being the best that EHRS can be for our members and the wider community is shared fairly whilst ensuring that those who cannot afford the full membership commitment fee set by council in order to achieve this have no embarrassment in asking for a discount appropriate to their needs.

Kevin reported that the first floor has been refurbished to a high standard and very suitable to market together with other areas of the synagogue which will significantly increase the rental income stream. He pointed out that the majority of synagogues have significant income from fund raising events and this is an area that should be improved upon as not only would this create a valuable income stream, but also help to engage members and non-members to create a vibrant synagogue, to enjoy social time together and many memorable events.

Kevin added that EHRS is an exceptional Jewish charity doing great work but that we would also benefit from our members considering the impact that a making a legacy to the Synagogue [and perhaps saving inheritance tax by doing so] can make in continuing Judaism from generation to generation.

Kevin reported that Cazenove [our investment managers], have confirmed that our investment income of £200k a year, which goes into our special project fund, is sustainable without eating into the capital of the fund.

He said that we are about to do a gift aid drive, asking congregants who have not signed gift aid certificates, to do so providing they pay sufficient UK tax. Going forward this will enable us to claim an additional 25% of their voluntary payments to the synagogue from HM Revenue and Customs, and as a one-off exercise making a claim for the 4 back years which would be of great benefit to the Synagogue and can be achieved at no cost at all to members.

He added that we will be looking at our cost structure to ensure we are maximising savings without reducing the level of service although we are finding there are increasing demands on the services we provide. A good example of this is our welfare department, which is a result of both the local Council's lack of funding and also the natural aging of the congregation and our aim to reach out to our younger members who need the care of our community.

He said that we now have a strong accounts team made up of two accountants as joint treasurers plus two good and experienced staff members who together will be able to plan and monitor the financial aspects of the Synagogue on a timely basis and that if everyone work together, Council and members, on the revenue raising points just set out we will have a thriving synagogue where subscriptions and other ancillary income cover the daily running costs, leaving us both time and money to invest for future generations. This will not happen overnight but our aim could be achieved within the next 2 to 3 years.

The Chairman invited questions from the floor.

Q The Budget shows a £146,000 loss but the actual 6 months figures show a £243,000 profit.

A The loss relates to the change in investment valuations.

Q What percentage of members have been lost since the merger

A Approximately 10%. The latest member statistics show that member losses apart from death has decreased more recently.

Q Why does the value of investments on the balance not reconcile with the change in valuation.

A Because there are realised profits in the Income and Expenditure account as well

Q Why are the subscription rates going up

A Although we are currently not in a good place we are on track for the future. The Council had believed it not to be consumer friendly to increase subscription rates at the time of the merger but that it is now time to do so and send a letter to every members advising that they will be billed at the full subscription rate [£960 gross for family and £480 gross for single] but that the trustees of the synagogue would be open to review concessions on merit.

Q The budget figure for 2020 subscriptions does not project correctly

A The current projected figures are based on the concessions and therefore would not be 3% across the board. The synagogue needs to actively encourage will changes and to have more synagogue fund raising events.

Q The difference between family and single subscription rates

A The single subscription rate is half the Family subscription rate [which including children under age 21]

Q It is understood that special arrangements will be made for wealthy people who are not able to get tax relief and is it appropriate for the synagogue to know what tax bracket members are in

A People who are higher rate tax payers who are invited to pay more are able to claim back tax relief at 20% on their charitable donations through their tax return

Stewart Abbey proposed the increase in membership subscriptions by £30 per annum for the Family rate bringing it to £960 and £15 for the Single rate bringing it to £480. The proposal was seconded by Keith Price, 42 members voted for with two members voting against the proposal.

Janet Brand proposed that the minutes of the AGM held 10 June 2019 [circulated in July] were adopted. All present voted in agreement.

Jeffrey Fisher proposed that section 16 of the Synagogue Bye Laws are amended to read that the Chair of each synagogue sub committees holds their chairmanship for a maximum four years. The proposal was seconded by Sidney Baginsky, 43members voted for with one member abstaining.

Andrew Woolstone reported that he had been working with MRJ on a “Listening” campaign on membership and how the synagogue can engage and encourage new members, trying to improve and to have more people involved. He said that he is beginning to implement the

training he has received and hopes to be able to expand his team to take this initiative further. Rabbi Emily added that membership is now growing and that all of the Rabbis are committed to having a conversation with a new member within 24 hours of them joining plus if anyone including non members wanted a form signed by a Rabbi they needed to have a meeting with them first.

Stuart Winton said that this had been a very interesting summary of the positive action taken by MRJ and Janet Brand said that an article could be written for the shul magazine so that members can see the support given by them.

Amit [from MRJ] introduced himself and said that he has been working with different communities encouraging them to have a different approach thinking about caring issues, finance – value for money and looking at the experience of new members over the last two years trying to get a picture of what happens from the first call of enquiry to actually taking membership. He asked that Council think about the impact that a letter regarding full fees will have on members who are unable to afford them as many communities have found younger families/people have left if they feel that they cannot afford to pay full fees.

Any Other Business:

Janet Brand said that as it is Sharon Price's synagogue meeting as Chairman of Services she would like to thank her on behalf of Council and members for all her work.

Jeremy Harrod reported that a number of applications for the Rabbinical post has been received from which three, all excellent candidates, had been recommended to Council and the first interviews will have taken place by Chanukah. He added that Rabbi Neil's last Shabbat weekend was 5 and 6 April 2020.

Keith Price reported that the synagogue's Chevra Kaddisha group is getting older and that they would like to recruit volunteers to join in order to continue to give the mitzvah of preparing a body for burial. He asked that if anyone is interested to contact himself, Jonathan Kramer or Jeff Bard.

Linda Baginsky asked if the two meetings [the AGM and the EGM] could be held together which may encourage more members to attend. Janet Brand responded by saying that Council felt that June would be too soon to make the decisions that needed to be made at this time of year regarding finance, but that HO's would discuss this.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.