



Minutes of AGM: 7th November 2023.

Present: (6) Chris Davies, Robert Forshaw, Zoe Hudson (secretary), Gail Lowe, Laura Reid, Mat Webster (Chair).

Members of the Public: (12) Wilma Beaton, Jo Harris, Martin Lowe, Phil Reid, Lis Broome, Marianne Duncan, Sheila Bates, Les Bates, Alpin Stewart, Stewart Macpherson, Kirsty Mackenzie, Ruth Davies.

1. Apologies

Karen Starr

2. Approval of minutes of last meeting (17.11.22)

Proposed: CD Seconded: ZH

3. Matters arising

None

4. TDCA Annual chairs report - review of the year

I took over as chair of TDCA at last years AGM, and would like to thank former chair Kevin Wood for helping me settle into this position by always being available if I have a question. It does take time to build up knowledge about how things operate, what the challenges are and to work effectively with the other directors to plan the way ahead. I would like to thank the other directors and all staff (Wilma, Hannah, Em & Karen) for their hard work and commitment during the past year. And an extra thank you to Karen our book keeper who has completed her first set of our accounts for the year ending April 2023 but does so much more than the book keeping to help ensure the smooth running of the association.

The previous 12 month have been challenging on many fronts. Costs continue to escalate at an alarming rate, this is evidenced by the increase in fuel bills, staff costs and prices from suppliers. But this also has a large knock-on effect on what contractors are charging as they look to pass on their own cost increases to us as the customer.

On the plus side I am pleased to say that we have kept up with the increases in the living wage, paying more than the recommended amount and have ensured our team are fairly paid at what is also a difficult time for household costs. But at the same time, we have struggled to recruit an additional cleaner and would ideally like to spread the workload at events around more. It has been a busy year and the Directors have put in hundreds of hours of work on a voluntary basis. This has been spent dealing with HR matters, legal

contracts, IT issues, marketing and the promotion of the centre. Not everyone in our community may want to become a full-time director but we would really welcome additional support even if on an occasional basis. What do I mean by this? Just as examples, it could mean undertaking a wee office based project for us or offering a few hours a month to do some gardening or light maintenance. Or alternatively you may be interested in helping to run the cinema nights. Some of these things can be done remotely, so may be suitable for part time residents, or those renovating houses with a view to moving here. The more support we can get the better we can make the centre, let's think Team Torridon.

Costs

At a time when costs are under the spotlight, I feel it is important to go into a bit of detail on the challenges we face when operating the centre.

This is a large building which must be safe and compliant. As you walk around look at how many emergency lights you can see.....These don't last forever and need checking, maintaining or replacing. That's just the tip of the compliance iceberg.....

Fire risk assessment, fire alarm, lighting and extinguishers

Electrical PAT and fixed wire testing

Water / legionella risk assessment

Heating and stairlift servicing

Insurance costs almost £2500, Licences to hold events and play music about £1500

Rates and waste uplift about £3500

So that's a total pushing £10k which we have to pay out each year just to open the doors. Not an insubstantial amount. And that's before we even start to pay for electricity, staff wages, wear and tear on fixtures and fittings and making improvements.

We do our best to obtain lower prices and I would like to thank Wilma for doing most of this work and saving us almost £2k by shopping around.

Income

Our income streams are basically renting our hall space, weddings, events, bar sales, café and office rent, gallery sales and Celtman.

Last year (which we are reporting on now) our income from weddings was over £10k and we had very popular gig nights with incredible bar sales. We have had no weddings this current year so that's a concern and we need to promote these more as they are a significant income stream. The large increases last year were partly due to a bounce back after Covid restrictions were lifted but no weddings is unusual.

Gallery sales are down slightly in the reporting year and again further so in the current year - people have less disposable income and the footfall is resetting itself after covid.

Celtman brings in enough money to cover our compliance costs. But it is a lot of work to earn this amount of money and it is why we need the community to continue to get behind the event, and helping on the race days is the best way

of doing this. This can be paid help but we do physically need people to deliver the event.

In terms of income, it is clear that we need to continue and even expand our commercial activities, just to pay for keeping the centre running. It's important that we don't have all our eggs in one or two baskets. As directors we are ever mindful that we are not a simple village hall. We have a large building to maintain, staff to pay, leases to negotiate but also that our reason for existing is to provide affordable facilities for local residents and a place to gather - either at formal events and experiences or a space to drop in for a chinwag. We are regularly reviewing how we operate in order to achieve these goals

Achievements in year 2022-23

There have been a number of key achievements over the last year, but these achievements do seem to perhaps have been hard won victories, often taking much more time than necessary and despite the homework being done beforehand, hidden costs popping up late in the day.

We have hosted live music, talks, cinema nights and in 2023 comedy with Rich Hall. I feel these are a very important part of what we offer to the community -both here and in the wider local area. Feedback has been excellent, with the Peat and Diesel sell-out a highlight. With the screen machine no longer visiting Torridon we see the cinema as an important activity for the community and it is relatively easy to manage. Live music is however quite challenging to put on. In general people don't book until the last minute and this leads to a lot of uncertainty around the financial viability of an event.

EV chargers were finally installed and went live. This was a very frustrating process with many delays, mostly caused by internal departments of energy companies not talking to each other. The actual charger units were fully funded by HIE (£10k) as were the supply upgrades which were needed to give them power. But there were unseen additional costs of around £1k which we had to pay from TDCA funds. It is good to see the chargers being used and we do get a small income from them, I am sure usage will increase.

We are delighted that Lis continues to run the WWS café. The café brings so much to the atmosphere and feel of the centre, in fact it could be said that this is the main reason for leasing the café space, but of course we won't turn down the valuable rental income.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months we need to review our policies and procedures, including our articles of association, which are not up to modern day standard, as they are around 15 years old and legislation has moved on. We also intend to review our membership categories and what membership means to those who join. Supporting and managing our team of staff is also an area where we would like to improve. We are ever mindful that we can't stand still so need to be looking at our 2,5 and perhaps 10 year vision so that we make sure TDCA is sustainable for future generations. This may or may not include TDCA's further involvement with the Community development plan

and in particular the repurposing of Torridon primary school and the opportunities and benefits which this could bring to TDCA and to the community as a whole. This discussion is ongoing.

To ensure the Centre continues to thrive we do need people to come forward to support the Centre and the single best way of doing that is by using the centre on a regular basis. But we also need to hear what you want to be able to see and do at the centre. What we are doing right and positive feedback about what we can improve on. And from the directors and staff side we will continue to work hard to make the centre the best we can with the resources we have available. And we will do that for everyone.

Feedback from user groups

Free Church of Scotland: Rev Colin Macleod sent an email thanking the TDCA for the use of the hall free of charge for their services. A couple of issues with the AV equipment were also pointed out.

Feedback from all user groups will be undertaken in the following year.

5. Treasurer's report

The statutory accounts have been independently examined and are offered for approval, copies will be available on our website or at Companies House in due course.

Income for the year totalled £108,784 (2022 - £65,840) which included North Highland Initiative (energy support) and Energy Savings Trust (EV Charger funding) restricted grants of £11,185 (2022 - £14,029).

Significant increases in income arise from greater use of the centre for short lets, weddings, fitness centre memberships, catering (including the Celtman weekends) and concerts. Bar sales also increased with these social occasions.

It was pleasing to see that the clubs, workshops, markets, and cinema all showed healthy results for 2023. Commission on Arts and Crafts showed a slight decrease compared with 2022, which had been a particularly strong year following the covid lockdowns.

The Wee Whistle Stop Café remained a significant and important contributor to our funds and to footfall within the Centre.

Two EV charging points have been installed and commissioned, offering charging for electric vehicles coming into the area.

Expenses for the year totalled £103,245 but after taking out the expenditure covered by grants, the operating expenses were £85,260 compared to £86,106 the previous year. Significant increases in rates and water charges (an approximately 50% increase), and electricity charges (almost three times the figure in the previous year) were offset by a large reduction in repairs and renewals. However, from 2023, an expanded programme of repairs and

renewals has been put in place as the building requires maintenance and upgrades.

Cash in the bank on 30 April 2023 was £38,820 (2022: £50,644).

Current year - Five months ended 30 September 2023

Gallery sales have fallen back a further 18% this year as increases in the cost of living has impacted people's disposable income.

The Centre has hosted concerts by Rich Hall and Manran, along with the continued rent from the Wee Whistle Stop, community interest talks and a Scottish Opera evening.

In June, the Celtman organisers repeated the main event and the smaller mini Celtman the following weekend, having had a successful pilot event last year. Once again, a large debt of thanks goes to all those in the community who supported these weekends.

Cash in the bank at the end of September totalled £38,645 (2022: £40,687; 2021: £47,175; 2020: £52,248).

6. Elections for the Torridon District Community Association directors

There were no applications for new directors this year. Directors are appointed for a 3 year term, and can serve a maximum of 2 terms before needing to take a 1 year break. Directors stand down in rotation.

Existing directors:

Gail, Laura and Chris are in their first term; Zoe is in her second term

Bobby and Mat have now ended their first term but agreed to continue for a second.

All directors agreed to continue for next year.

Karen Starr agreed to continue as Treasurer

Zoe Hudson agreed to continue as Secretary

Mat Webster agreed to continue as Chair

7. AOB

7.1 Kirsty Mackenzie raised the issue that the nurses were asked to clear the small store cupboard which had Zimmers and an inflatable bed. MW explained that the use of this cupboard for storage was not compliant with fire risk assessment. They will be moved to somewhere else in the centre which is accessible.

7.2 The issue of membership was raised. MW said the membership process was up for review.

8. Date of next meeting: Provisional date 11th November 2023