Meeting of: CUSU Trustee Board
Location: CUSU Offices, 17 Mill Lane
Date and Time: 25 January 2015, 18:00-20:30
In Attendance: Trustees: Jemma Stewart, Jon Wall, Rob Cashman, Priscilla Mensa PM (Chair), Charlie C, William Marks, Gareth Marlow, Alex, Helena (Late), Poppy, Mark McCormack
Minutes: Dora Dixon
Apologies: Helena sends apologies for being late
Staff: Mark McCormack (MM) and Jemma Stewart (JS)

Board Administration:

1. Conflicts of Interest

Poppy and Rob have signed up for YES campaign for Disabled Students Officer (DSO) Referendum.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Decision: The Board approved the minutes of the last meeting as correct with a number of amendments.

Matters arising:

Alex re referendum, how likely to get students involved? Jemma answers: more interest in press, already debate piece released from newspaper. Debate to be livestreamed. Flyers to be handed out from next week. Voting people now open for week: enough time. Voting terminals in colleges on Tues 2nd Feb to encourage people to vote. PM clarifies she did not resign from election committee based on personal views on referendum but for other reasons. JCRs and MCRs to receive information tomorrow. Tablets to be provided for localised voting.

Prevent legislation: The Board discussed the union’s responsibilities as a charity and up-coming responsibilities under Higher Education legislation as a students’ union. The Officers updated on their discussions with senior University personnel and efforts and plans to engage students. MM will work with GU Manager to draft a policy on use of space, which will ensure the minimum required by law is undertaken by the union. This will include looking at a speaker’s policy, such as that proposed by NUS.

Affiliation fees: PM noted some positive approaches to the union’s efforts to have affiliation fees paid for by the institution and/or colleges.
**Organisation Updates:**

**3i. Staffing and Operations Update**

MM gave overview: Pensions work ongoing, costings will take longer as have to get in touch with providers, the deadline for this - March board meeting. This concerns auto-enrolment in July, have asked Uni for support, need to choose provider, Mark will leave open for a bit longer but by March we will have feedback [from staff and officers affected].

Vacant position in commercial services manager, have bid to uni for funds rather than seconded position as this would make it difficult to amend and match uni benefits to staff. Gamble in delaying has not paid off; last week said would not happen for month so Mark has decided to initiate recruitment of university employee as cannot wait any longer.

Board discussed need to clarify arrangements for recruitment of student trustees. RC to bring a paper to the next Board.

**3ii. Financial performance and management accounts**

MM gave overview: notes we are not running to budget. MM suggests board considers lowering income values, which would mean reducing expenditure. Still generating a lot of income, but not enough for increasing costs. Poor Michaelmas term. Second year in a row struggling. University cannot support. There are options to develop in order to alleviate pressures and risks, before March.

The Board discussed the commercial performance in depth, considering the overall costs of the commercial work to the organisation and related benefits to members. Fundraising processes were discussed, and the Board noted that bringing these to an earlier point in the calendar would be helpful. Board members discussed areas where the union could look to save on expenditure, and discussed whether stronger, more intent budget-cutting exercises needed to take place with proposals drawn up.

In relation to University attitudes to funding the union, PM noted the University wanted CUSU to distinguish between ‘core work’- this may be a broader discussion that needs to be had.

The Board discussed re-evaluating the extent the commercial services manager could understand the bigger picture re university etc, and work closer with the General Manager on these matters.
Board agreed that strategic decisions should occur before the next budget to ensure significant variances to budget did not happen again as had done the previous two years.

Action: MM to produce paper on different options for March meeting that would highlight areas where savings could be made in response to the shortfall in income. Board recognised that current projected deficit did not compromise viability of organisation, yet sensible steps now needed to be taken to contain deficit, which also sends appropriate signal to the university regarding the union's general funding dependencies.

**For Decision:**

4. Affiliated bodies

CUSU’s attachment to affiliated bodies. Board heard from PM about incident involving a CUSU-endorsed Facebook page that promoted illegal activity.

Board discussed the nature of affiliation by CUSU groups and those that initiate organically from the union's member-led structure. Board discussed the risk attached to these groups and affiliations and the extent to which individual Board members would become liable.

A suggestion was made that affiliations should meet a code of conduct and a database of affiliated groups maintained by the union. A code of conduct may include: don't abuse, no illegal activity, report incidents. Any processes implemented would need to also include induction on what the union could do for groups to support their activity. Board suggested any decision to establish processes would need to distinguished social media platforms and web platforms.

Board noted that, at other students’ unions, SU trustees became responsible for such activity and dealt with risk through top down processes. E.g. every year society has to submit constitution, and other papers. Board noted that Cambridge operated differently to other unions due to the history and structure of the institution and student group activity. The Board considered and agreed that risk and affiliation could both be compartmentalised in different ways and that CUSU could not be responsible for everything its members sought to do, especially without notice of the union more formally.

The Board discussed a improving induction of elected officials and networked groups operating within the membership under CUSU’s identity, with a view to offering a disclaimer to distinguish what is officially endorsed and what is not for which the trustees can be held liable for. The Board noted the limited capacity of
CUSU to oversee any processes, and rather agreed that the union could make clear what the union is and is not liable for, with clearer guidelines about what is and is not officially affiliated.

The Board agreed that consultation with autonomous campaigns was important and that after this had occurred the Board could further discuss at a future meeting.

5. Student Press Guidelines

PM brings up student press guidance. Board were concerned at the extent to which CUSU was targeted by student press and that constant negative stories had the potential to harm the union’s reputation.

Guidance for press was introduced. Guidance aims to tackle historic and consistent problem; the Board felt important that an active student press could hold the union to account, yet was keen for the officers not to be subjected to abuse, harassment, or the constant need for local journalists to find or create stories to the hindering of the union’s top-level objectives as such as was counter-intuitive.

Board offered their support to the guidance.

PM closes board. End of meeting