

**From: Henu**

**To:** Elisabeth, Chair North London LETS

**Sent:** Friday, 13 March 2015, 19:20

**Subject:** MOTIONS

Dear Chair of NLETS,

RE. MOTIONS FOR THE AGM **Background**

There are a few procedural and policy issues with which there is no generally accepted and well understood clarity at the moment in NLETS. It would not be possible to trash these out on the spot in the AGM as they all need a bit of thought. There has been some noises among the leading lights that

they will work on these - however, no reports have been received by the old MG; so all this must be passed to the new MG.

Some of these issues concern members rights and obligations as well as the powers exercised by the Management Group during the periods between the members' General Meetings (i.e. Annual General Meetings and Extraordinary General Meetings) as well as decisions taken by the admin workers ("the Office") in day to day running of the scheme.

As office workers and co-ordinators have (and sometimes indeed must) take decisions 'on the hoof' in responding to the situations as they find them, sometimes (quite rightly to solve situations) workers have assumed the powers properly belonging to the MG (it being the legal "Administrators" of the scheme) as the body where the members authority is invested as per the Constitution - or possibly even powers belonging to the members' general meeting (there is no clear information recorded how all decisions have been taken). This has left a little raggedy trail of policies, rules, codes, form templates and 'custom and practice' precedents - so now we cannot be quite sure what has and what has not the support of membership at large or what is currently properly approved and thus enforceable. It may be that these issues should be re-visited at a general meeting of members and definitive versions approved and the rest repudiated.

### **Membership agreement**

- it appears that this has always contained some wordings not recognised by the Constitution (e.g. "members' committee" instead of Management Group) - it appears some new versions have been generated and distributed without the matter being brought to the attention of the general meeting or even to the members who handle the signing up of new members - i.e. who are responsible to explaining it to the new joiners.

## **Constitution**

The Constitution was changed properly by majority vote in 2010 1. NLLETS leaving Letslink and subscribing to CES instead the on-line trading system provider, 2. making it more challenging for members to demand a general meeting thus tipping the power in favour of the sitting MG and against members demanding change. However, it is not absolutely clear if the members' blessing was given to other changes published after the meeting. Also, one issue we never thought about was how in practice to replace the function previously exercised by (originally) the Trustees and later (2002-2010) by Letslink - though the CES Terms and Conditions do refer to these functions e.g. with regards to conflict resolution.

## **Rights and obligations of members on joining, remaining member and on leaving the scheme**

'On paper' there seems to be a consensus that members are responsible of keeping their record (their contact details etc.) and offers and wants up to date either by accessing the system themselves or having their chosen individual buddy, area buddy or the Admin enter the information according to their instructions. Also, at the moment - after a period of transgressing after 2010 (when everyone's information was first published without consent even before the AGM's decision to change the on-line provider) and accompanying technical issues - there is no quarrel by anyone with the data protection legislation that prohibits publishing personal information without consent.

Members self-managing / delegating the management of their on-line information a trusted buddy or the Admin (using the 'tick to hide' options) provides for an easy way to ensure that only 'consented' information appears to audience of choice (members may choose 'local only' or standard trading). However, by now the system has been almost comprehensively sabotaged - even the parts only accessible to the Admin (by person unknown during 2010 -2014 ) stripping the system of vital information that should be visible to admin (while it need not be visible to other members), while members have also neglected to update e.g. their email addresses - making it impossible to ensure that all members receive necessary information from the MG and the Office or that trading can happen easily. Also, the sabotage has caused considerable difficulties when members - after an agreed break - have returned to find their account 'closed' (rather than just suspended as agreed) and their name completely unnecessarily (vindictively?) deleted (thus necessitating admin going through all closed account finding a possible match to re-activate - enormous amount of extra work that we could well

do without!). We would need to think seriously how can we tackle this issue successfully.

Especially in the current acute financial difficulty, receiving the subs (pound sterling membership fees) on time is vital. With the small membership numbers it does not amount to fortunes, but every little helps... If members wish to keep the scheme running so others may join (and thus ease the pressure with their subs) then it necessary to for all of us to pay the fees. The subs remains the stable (though slender) backbone of the finance - of course supplemented from time to time by income from the Workers' Beer Company and The Phone Co-op and fundraising initiatives that all yield unpredictable amounts, but paying our fees is a basic responsibility of every member. Has anyone good ideas how to make the paying easy so it will not be just forgotten or pushed to the eternal 'manana' as the ways are too impractical?

The total balance on the system of all members' (at least all individual and organisation members - we have chosen for some time to ignore the mega commitment of NLETS itself that was built up couple of years ago without regard to implications - that is another discussion) pledge credits and pledge commitment should be zero. There are good reasons why we do not call 'minus' balance 'debt' but commitment in LET schemes. In crediting pledges to others we are pledging to make our own contribution at future date (or calling in our previous contribution) to the common good, we are making a commitment to the group.

It obviously follows that on leaving the group that commitment (if any remain) must be realised in one way or another; the member has taken x amount of benefit out of the group, that had given the benefit in good faith, expecting every member to honour their commitment. However, there has been several individuals who have either not understood or consciously chosen to ignore the seriousness of their contract with our group and treated as a 'free for all'

expecting no penalties. This is abuse of fellow members. What makes it even more serious that most individuals join for the very reason that they are vulnerable in a way or another, marginalised, unemployed or unemployable in the current economic circumstances and are seeking outlet for their talents and energy as well as benefits that they simply cannot access in the conventional money economy.

LETS is not a joke (or a wee little hobby for the Hampstead bourgeoisie or any of the other things we have been called e.g. 'North London elderly lesbians' pick-up joint') but a much needed - nay! revolutionary - and beneficial facility to the marginalised in this society and thus we should not allow it to be abused.

What are your views and ideas about procedures and their enforcement with members who run up commitment and then leave? Some do so without any intention to settle their commitment.

This can happen after sabotage of the CES database (that took place during the last couple of years), i.e. the most up-to-date record (making themselves more difficult, if not impossible, to find), declining to respond to communications or cheerfully simply declaring that they are "no longer a member" or in other words 'yes I stole from you but now I skipped the country - so there!'. (Obviously members who face illness or other misfortune and thus are not instantly able to settle their commitment as they themselves expected and contact NLLETS with view of solving the issue, are a different matter entirely - we can work with them.)

The last known approved version of the membership agreement as well as CES T&Cs provide for settling the commitment in pounds sterling on leaving the group. For some reason this has not been as vigorously applied hitherto as it could have - thus allowing and encouraging abuse. Anyone knows any reason for this? We have no choice but to apply it now as we literally run out of money. Of course there are difficulties with the ones who have done a very 'good' runner and successfully disappeared altogether, but this is not the issue in every case. The responsible, honest leavers recognise the commitment owed without the need to bring it to their attentions and the less responsible who have not covered their tracks can be easily 'hassled' to pay up (just like our utility providers etc do successfully in most cases...).

These issues will not be conclusively solved in an instance, but we should be make some start somewhere. Are there any volunteers who would like to form themselves (recruit more ordinary members to join them) into a working party to come up with some sensible proposals to put in front of a general meeting at a later date so all members can have their say?

### **Remaining a member: members' rights to contribute decision making**

Traditionally all MG meetings have been open to any member to speak. In the latest published version of the Constitution the word 'most' has been inserted in front of the sentence - so no longer 'all'.

In the past (as an exception in 2008) as well as during the later "wars" the MG held closed meetings - with the view of excluding specific members, but with the effect of excluding all. This was probably felt to be the most 'diplomatic' way of handling the situation; however it was not open and honest and hampered the involvement of the vast majority.

## **So, what should we do with the "problem children"?**

Is it better

1. to be open and honest, tell to the face of the "problem" individual 'we, the majority of the MG feel that you are a disruptive and distracting influence on the meetings, therefore we have chosen to exclude you from the meetings and will only entertain written submissions from you as we have limited time to get through important business, we simply do not have time for you', or
2. spend time and energy in engaging in a procedural wrangle with aim to 'prove' that the individual has broken some obscure clause or sub-clause of some code and thus merits a sanction of exclusion, or
3. duck and dive holding secret meetings that not only exclude the individual who is felt to be problematic but everyone else as well?

The first option is brutal and no doubt would feel unfair and high-handed to the individual. The second sends friendly little NLLETS into same camp with big corporations with their time-honoured bags of tricks to get rid of the rebel employees when the 'face does not fit' though the poor employee seldom has done anything actually wrong. The third one destroys the relationship (that should be open and interactive/responsive ) between the members at large and the MG.

What do you think ?

## **Motions**

**My motion 1.** is that AGM direct the new MG to recruit and form a POLICY WORKING GROUP that will look at all the policy, procedure and constitutional issues that require clarification and when they are ready to report back, MG can call an EGM so members have opportunity to decide on these matters.

**My motion 2.** is that AGM direct the new MG to specifically look at the issue of TRUSTEES within the Policy Working Group's remit.

**Rationale:** There is wealth of talent and experience in the older or long standing members of the NLLETS whose membership in the MG or among active workers is not desired by themselves or others at large, but who, nevertheless, could benefit the organisation by engaging in advisory capacity and as a group one step removed from the sharp end of action to take a dispassionate look at any conflicts that may arise.

Henu member 773