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Devon and Exeter Spastics Society (Vranch House)

Annual General Meeting

24th November 2020

DUE TO COVID 19 RESTRICTIONS THIS MEETING WAS NOT HELD IN PERSON, BUT REMOTELY VIA VIDEO-CONFERENCING (ZOOM). ALL MEMBERS WERE INVITED. PRIOR TO THE ARRANGEMENT THE MEMBERS WERE ASKED WHETHER THEY WISHED TO HOLD THE MEETING REMOTELY OR POSTPONE IT UNTIL THE NEW YEAR (IN THE HOPES THAT GUIDELINES WOULD ALLOW IT TO BE HELD IN PERSON AT THAT STAGE); THE MEMBERS WHO RESPONDED REQUESTED THAT THE MEETING BE HELD ON THE DATE PLANNED, REMOTELY.

In attendance:

Chairperson: Julia Tolman-May (JTM)
Vice-chairman: Rebecca Neary (RN)
Charity Secretary
(Chief Executive): Kate Moss (KM)
Head of Therapies: Kate Moss (KM)
Head of Education: Ian Norton (IN)
Business Manager: Rebecca Wheeler (RW) - *taking the minutes*

Members: Alice Tolman-May (ATM), Rosemary Pavitt (RP), Ken and Nola Thompson (KT and NT), Ruth Bradley (RB), Penny Hale (PH)

Apologies sent in advance:

Clive Dickson Tolman, Miriam Tolman.

Meeting started at 19:00

Point	Speaker	Discussion
1.0 INTRODUCTION AND APROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE LAST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING		
1.0	KM	Thank you very much to the members joining the meeting tonight, and apologies that due to the pandemic the meeting is having to be held remotely. The staff and chairman are attending the meeting from the boardroom at Vbranch House, and we are all socially-distanced according to the current government guidelines.
1.1	JTM	Welcome to all members joining us, and thank you for giving up your time to attend.
1.2	JTM	Is anyone aware of any apologies this evening? <i>None given</i>
1.3	JTM	The minutes from the last AGM [2019] are being put up on the Vbranch House website, if there are no objections or corrections raised by 1st December 2020 then I will sign them off as accurate. <i>No issues with the minutes were raised so they were approved as being accurate.</i>
2. REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF THE SOCIETY		
2.0	JTM	The financial year under audit ran from the 1st of April 2019-31st March 2020. It has been a difficult year with the Coronavirus pandemic arriving towards the end of the financial year. I would like to welcome Kate Moss to her first AGM as Chief Executive.
2.0.1		Colonel Wheeler retired at the end of July with an informal gathering in the garden of staff and pupils before he left. Graeme's leadership over the last 27 years has left the charity in a robust position, able to offer 33 school places as well as providing a first-class Therapy service to around 2,000 outpatients.
2.0.2		Building began on an extension to house the Innowalk machines and an equipment store during the financial year in question, and was completed over the summer. Changes to the building over the summer allowed us to increase the number of classroom spaces, and each child continues to receive a personalised education programme.
2.0.3		Throughout the pandemic Vbranch House has remained open, continuing to provide education and therapy services. It is difficult to find the words

2.0.4		<p>to thank the management team for all they've done to make Vbranch House a safe environment for the staff and children. I offer my heartfelt thanks to each member of staff for their continuing commitment and hard work that enables this charity to continue its work on a daily basis. You are exceptional people and it is truly a privilege to support you as your chairman, thank you.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No questions raised.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[Penny Hale joined the meeting at this point]</i></p>
3. REPORTS BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, HEAD OF THERAPIES AND HEAD OF EDUCATION		
3.0	KM	<p>CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT</p> <p>I would like to thank Julia for her speech, and to support her thanks to the staff, and thank you for the support of JTM and the Trustees this year.</p>
3.1	RP	<p>I would like to share JTM's comment giving thanks to the staff for keeping the school open.</p>
3.2	KM	<p>During the first lockdown we offered staff to the RD&E to deal with the pandemic; the hospital said that they would rather that we continued to use our staff to support the children on our caseload. We had Management Team meetings everyday during this period, and we felt such pride to work here and remain open at such a challenging time.</p>
3.2.1		<p>Our staff have gone above and beyond; they have delivered equipment to children's homes, brought children in for one-to-one hydrotherapy sessions, and delivered orthotics. The staff really pulled together, and the staff absence rate dropped from an average of 2.6 days <i>per year</i> to 1.6 days <i>per year</i> during the first lockdown.</p>
3.2.2		<p>This report covers the financial year 2019/2020. Slide two shows our Statement of Financial Activities from the Auditor's report. Our charitable donations were down on the previous year (annual total of £135,199 for the financial year 2018/2019, compared to £114,668 for the financial year 2019/2020, and this has not been a good time for charities. The decreasing number of charitable contributions to our finances meant that we could no longer justify the post of Marketing Manager. The post has now been split between several of the staff. Donations have picked up a little since the start of the year, with our re-launched Facebook page attracting donations of money and goods from people and companies such as Dunelm Mill.</p>

3.2.3		Total income is up on last year (by an increase of £279,699), but this is mainly due to an increase in pupils to 44, with Ofsted having given approval for the school to take up to 55 pupils. the income is looking healthy, but we don't want to decrease the quality of our services, so an increase in pupil numbers means an increase in staff, and therefore staff costs. The total number of pupils per class still doesn't exceed 6, so the ratio of staff to pupils is still high.
3.2.4		The financial surplus at the end of the financial year 2019/2020 was £398,372; some of the surplus was used to fund the build of the Innowalk Suite, although the cost (and construction) of this has been spread across two financial years.
3.2.5		The cost of the Innowalk build in the financial year was only what was spent on the project up to the end of March; the total Innowalk cost was nearer to £400,000. Even with this project the income was still higher than expenditure. The cash reserves at the end of March 2020 were £1,840,791 (compared to £1,633,246 at the end of March 2019).
3.2.6		The contract income increased in 2019/2020 due to the increase in pupil numbers. The Health contract has not increased for 13 years, but we have a meeting coming up with the NHS in the new year to discuss this. We recognise. however, that the NHS is under huge financial pressure due to the pandemic, so a rise is unlikely.
3.2.7		Looking at the financial forecasts for the coming financial year (2020/2021) the total costs over the year are likely to be around £2,160,000, and the total income £2,520,000. The net cash is currently around £1,900,000, so we are looking at, hopefully, another financially healthy year.
3.3	KM	Since the end of the 2019/2020 financial year we have seen several more developments including the completion of the Innowalk Suite, an increase in staff numbers to 89, two extra classes and the granting of a Material Change from Ofsted to increase pupil numbers.
3.3.1		The Innowalk suite is sited outside the back of the hall, and the completed building is stunning. The bi-fold doors have been open this term; the design reflects that of the pool, and it has lovely views of the garden. Two new Innowalks were purchased thanks to a donation, and they join our original one; we have been seeing amazing results from using these pieces of equipment, and the orthopaedic surgeons have also given positive feedback regarding the impact on their patients. The linking space between the Innowalk Suite and the new equipment store is currently being used as a workspace as staff need to space out more than usual due to the pandemic. The play room has been reinstated after being used for storage during the Innowalk build.

3.3.2		The kitchen spaces between the classes were upgraded last year, and Simon also made a beautiful pergola which is now in the garden.
3.4	PH	Will the new pupils increasing Vbranch's secondary school numbers be new to the school, or pupils moving up from the primary school to the secondary?
3.4.1	IN	Dame Hannah's school closed earlier in the year which has contributed to Devon County Council's [DCC] problem of 10-12 children that they have no special school spaces available for, so there is now approximately 19-20 children with no available school space. The increase in Vbranch numbers is a spread, two will be joining us from other special schools, there will be four or five South Devon children, and we also have more children joining us at nursery age. We have taken on some pupils who wouldn't previously have been seen as 'typical' Vbranch House pupils, but they all have some degree of physical disability.
	KM	
3.5	KT	What happened to Andrew Barge [<i>previous Marketing Manager</i>]?
3.5.1	KM	Andrew was offered a generous redundancy package as the amount his role was bringing in to the charity couldn't justify his role. He already worked for the NHS several days a week- he was working for VH two days a week- and has now started in a new role in NHS Information Governance. The redundancy was amicable; Andrew had taken a three month break from VH earlier in the year to carry out a package of paid work for the NHS, so he had been less involved with VH.
3.6	KT	I don't see Beverley at this meeting?
3.6.1	KM	Beverley Simcox [<i>previous School Secretary</i>] has retired, but she had been unwell for the last year so had already handed over some of her role to RW and Tracey Ward [<i>VH Receptionist and PA to the CE</i>]. We are recruiting internally for more administration support.
4.0	IN	EDUCATION REPORT
4.1	IN	We applied to Ofsted for a Material Change to our registration to allow us to take up to 55 pupils, 36 in the lower school and 12 in the secondary school; we were registered for 33 pupils. We had a 'virtual' one-day Ofsted inspection to check that VH would be able to safely accommodate an increase in pupils. As a result Ofsted have supported our application and have advised the Department for Education to grant the application.
4.1.1		We don't intend to fill the remaining places immediately, we are planning to allow enough spaces in the secondary school to enable out lower

		school pupils to move up through the school.
4.2	IN	We are looking to gain accreditation through the nationally-recognised exam board AQA. VH wrote our own curriculum that was passed by Ofsted, so we thought that it would be beneficial to recognise our pupil's achievements via qualifications, for example independent wheelchair skills, or communication. It would enable us to credit the pupils' achievements. We are still awaiting AQA's approval.
4.3	IN	We now have two senior teachers; Dee Bradshaw is the Early Years lead teacher and Zoe Gilbert is the lead teacher of the secondary school, helping pupils with their transition out of education.
4.3.1		Our classes within the lower and upper schools have been formulated around creating cohorts with similar abilities and communication needs, rather than being strictly chronological; significant age differences aren't seen between pupils in any individual class though.
4.4	IN	Our other areas of development include looking at our IT in school and ensuring that it is fit for purpose, and we are also planning to build a mud kitchen and play area outside, but this has been put on hold due to the pandemic lockdowns.
4.5	IN	We currently have 44 pupils, with the full-time equivalent of 41. We have been updating our school policies to ensure that they remain compliant with all current safeguarding legislation.
4.6	RP	It is interesting to hear that the classes aren't strictly chronological, I am encouraged by that.
4.6.1	IN	We try to keep the peer groups similar in needs and abilities, and now that there are more pupils than there were a few years ago we can do this without stretching the age ranges too much. We re-named the classes after trees so that children can be moved to a more appropriate class without appearing to move up or down within the school. There are no more than four age groups per class, and everyone seems to have settled into the new classes very well.
5.0	KM	THERAPY REPORT
5.1	KM	There were some changes to the management structure when Graeme [<i>Wheeler, previous Chief Executive</i>] retired in July. As well as myself becoming Chief Executive RW was internally appointed as Business Manager to take on some of the business part of Graeme's role to enable me to continue also as Head of Therapy for now. The Management now consists of four: JTM, KM, IN and RW.

5.2	KM	There have also been a few changes to the staffing in the Therapy Department. We have more therapy going into the school now with a new Therapy Assistants.
5.2.1		Michelle Weick [<i>previous Speech and Language Therapist</i>] returned to Australia and will not be returning to work at VH when her maternity leave ends; Elle Sparks is continuing in the role having started at Vbranch House last year to cover Michelle's maternity leave.
5.2.2		The OT Janelle Penfold returned to VH at the beginning of this summer, and two new Band 5 OTs started at the end of the summer.
5.3	KM	The therapists have worked very hard to keep serving the children and families who access VH, during a time when many other children's services shut completely. For example we had premature twins born to a teenage mother join our caseload; the VH PT assigned to her was the only professional that the mother was able to get support from during the first lockdown.
5.3.1		The therapists have adapted their ways of working to fit within the constraints of the pandemic, particularly during the first lockdown. Appointments have been held via telephone and Zoom [<i>internet video conferencing</i>], with face-to-face appointments on site being reserved for patients in pain and/or post-surgery.
5.3.2		Since the summer we have been seeing more patients on site, but taking care to only have two booked in at once so that we can ensure they are always socially-distanced in the waiting area. Time has been allowed between appointments for the therapists to clean the rooms and equipment.
5.3.3		The waiting times went up a bit over the first lockdown, but are now coming back down. We also put information and resources online for our parents, such as exercise programmes and worksheets.
5.4	KM	Outpatient hydrotherapy has started again this term, but we have reduced the number of slots to enable social-distancing and extra cleaning; this is the same with Innwalk sessions.
5.5	PH	Well done, you've done a brilliant job.
5.5.1	RP	You really have done an amazing job, it is very praiseworthy.
5.5.2	KT	I knew Charles and Kay Vbranch [<i>the founders of the charity</i>] from the start and I'm sure they would be pleased.
5.5.3	PH	I don't think Charles would believe it.

4.0 ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD		
4.0	KM	We now need to elect our officers. The Chairwoman is currently Julia Tolman-May, and our Deputy Chairman is Rebecca Neary, both have agreed to stand for re-election.
4.0.1		Julia Tolman May's re-election was proposed by Rosemary Pavitt (Trustee) and seconded by Ruth Bradley (Member).
4.0.2		Rebecca Neary's re-election was proposed by Penny Hale (Trustee) and seconded by Ken Thompson (Member).
4.0.3		Both offices were approved by all members in attendance.
4.1	KM	Sadly Maureen Boon has decided to retire from her post as a Trustee after many years of service to the charity, for which we thank her. We have a parent [<i>of a current VH school pupil</i>] who would like to stand for election as a Trustee, Sandra Tutinas.
4.1.1		Sandra Tutinas' election as a Trustee was proposed by Rebecca Neary (Trustee) and seconded by Ruth Bradley (Member). All other members attending the meeting approved this election.
4.2	KM	We need to ask the Trustees and Members present whether they are happy for VH to continue to use Foot Anstey as the charity's solicitors, and Kirk Hills as the charity's accountants; all present at the meeting voted unanimously for these appointments to continue.
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
5.0	RN	I would like to give a huge thank you to everybody, they have been courageous in continuing to keep VH open during the pandemic and it has made a huge difference to the families who use it's services.
5.1	KM	In the future we are hoping to make the charity's AGM more of a social occasion, and possibly to move it being held at the weekend during the day time. We are aware that it is often difficult for members to attend on a weekday evening, particularly as at this time of year it means driving in the dark.
5.1.1	KT	We would love to attend the meetings again and that would make it possible for us.
5.2	KM	We are also trying to bring back the publication date for the Yearbook and make it more relevant to members as you are valued by all of us. Please feel free to contact any of us [<i>KM, IN or RW</i>] at any time if you

5.3	JTM	have questions or suggestions that you would like to raise. Thank you to all of you for taking the time to attend this meeting.
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Meeting ended at 20:55