

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF EDGWARE & HENDON REFORM SYNAGOGUE
HELD ON SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER 2023 AT 118 STONEGROVE, HA8 8AB

There were EHRs members present

Apologies: Michael Lerman, Kito [Daniel] Holtz, Bradley Trainis and Sharon Price

The Chairman Jeremy Harrod welcomed all those attending and thanked the Catering Team for providing such a wonderful Israeli style breakfast this morning.

- 1. Adoption of Minutes** - The minutes of the AGM held 16 October 2022 as approved by Council on 13 December 2022 were adopted. There were no comments or amendments.
- 2. Trustees Report** -The Chairman introduced the Trustees Report on activities held during 2022. It was reported that Perry Newton had now left EHRs and a reminder given that there will be a special kiddush held in his honour on October 28th. An invitation was extended for questions but none were tabled.

Chairman's Address - It would be easy for me just to re-read my address from Yom Kippur – and believe me I thought of it, but I did think that that would be cheating you out of another speech so I've done something different!

But no joke to start this time.

So this AGM is all about 2022 but as we are literally three quarters of the way through 2023 I thought I'd cover a bit of both.

Janet was chair for the first part of 2022 and I only came on board in October. As was previously stated 2022 finally saw the end of Covid restrictions as EHRs was able to get back to functioning as it should.

2023 continued that with Rabbi Tanya joining us in a full time role and Debbie Drapkin also joining us. They have made a huge impact on our shul and I thank them for their efforts. A reminder about Rabbi Tanya's induction on November 4th. We also said goodbye to Perry this week and we wish him well for the future. Remember October 28th for a kiddish in his honour.

As you will hear from our treasurer we are being bold but careful with our finances and really investing in the future for our shul. You will have seen the plans for the outside of the building which we hope to have completed by this time next year.

I would like to remind you (or as my mother would have preferred, nag you) about thinking about leaving a legacy in your will for EHRs. Many more people than at anytime are on concessions for membership and being a membership based community that relies on subscriptions, the loss of income through concessions means we do struggle financially.

Right, does anyone have any questions on the trustees report. Don't feel obligated to, but please ask. We shall deal with this page by page.....

None were tabled.

Rabbi's Address:

Rabbi Mark opened his presentation by saying we want to open doors to 2024 with our extended clergy team of himself, Rabbi Debbi, Rabbi Tanya and Cantor Tamara.

The Bet Tefila as our House of Prayer to introduce an EHRS Fringe and build on it, to have a Musical Synagogue in all directions, bring back a Youth Choir and train more Lay Leaders and the introduction of a new High Holy Day Machzor. Also to have a geographic and diverse synagogue, going out to hold services in different areas, training the youth to be able to sake services – to have Diversity, Tradition and Excellence in our Bet Tefila.

The Bet Midrash – our Learning Community to have a huge focus on our children, not just about attending Orot [from which we receive wonderful feedback from our parents], but as these days, so many attend Jewish schools we have to look at giving more, such as returning to immersive experiences abroad plus camping which requires time and energy from our clergy and to ensure that learning continues after the age of 13. We run adult B'nei Mitvot and Wedding courses as well as the Cornerstone Programme and some of the classes or on Pod Cast which can be listened back on. Rabbi Debbie said that we hope that Tamara by bringing her musical skills it will make music part of our learning and spirituality. Having a bigger team will enable more people to take part.

The Bet Knesset – our House of Meeting allows us to investigate how our Jewish values manifest themselves, where we have a say on subjects that matter. It is all about how much we as individuals bring to our community. Rabbi Tanya said that at present our three Rabbis are in and out of hospitals visiting members and providing pastoral support but would like to be available for everyone. She said that on the second day of Rosh Hashanah she visited a member who needed support in a central London hospital.

The Rabbis hope to increase hospitality, to get to know more members individually, do more for social care, social justice and to encourage new members to make the most of their membership, hoping, caring and growing.

Rabbi Mark concluded with a blessing on our houses of Prayer, Meeting and Learning.

In response to Brian's comment about interfaith groups, Rabbi Mark said that our interfaith group are meeting after the AGM and that this subject requires a great deal of dedication and work.

The Chairman introduced Debbie Drapkin, the Membership Engagement Lead for EHRS.

Debbie introduced herself and said that her part time role is to offer members the opportunity to engage with and form different social groups recognising and embracing the diversity that we all have to encourage friendship in small groups so that no one is left unheard. She encouraged members to keep up to date of the activities being held through LeDor VaDor, Our Week Ahead and Facebook. She said that her role was created at the start of 2023, to encourage and support both our membership, and our onsite team to achieve the following values and vision

We offer a variety of activities, which are aimed at meeting the diverse needs of our members.

- We aim to be an anchoring institution, providing personal and spiritual support and social connections.
- We can, and should, be a true campus community.
- We embrace our unique multi-generational membership, our different family structures; and our mix of ethnicities, sexual orientations, and genders.
- We wholeheartedly believe that improved membership engagement leads to membership retention, which leads to positive referral and ultimately to membership satisfaction and growth.

- And, whilst the professional and lay leadership of the community are entrusted with leading this vision, it takes all of us, to choose to build the future together.

We are indeed very fortunate to have such a large and thriving membership base, but, for some of our members who currently do not have an established friendship group within the synagogue, at times this can feel a bit overwhelming. Finding ways to bring together smaller groups of members, who share common interests, has been one of our most successful mechanisms' in enabling our members to feel that this is truly a place where they belong.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, has a rule that no meeting should be so large that two pizzas can't feed the whole group. This is, of course, a shorthand method for ensuring that, as is often the case with big groups, that no one's ideas get drowned out, and everyone gets to have a slice of the action.

Run by our members, for our members, and supported by myself, the continuing growth of our Together Groups is something we should be very proud of. We are kickstarting this New Year off with the launch of 4 new groups -, 6-a-side football, Art Appreciation, Interfaith and Stonegrove Players Amateur Dramatics, and we have plans for even more in the future. If you haven't yet tried out one of these, then do come along and give it a go. Of course, if you have great idea about a new group, and want to chat with me about how to get the ball rolling then do come and find me after the AGM.

Alongside our Together Groups we also put on a huge range of events and activities throughout the year, encouraging the whole community to come together. Keep an eye on your in-box and do make time to read LaDor VaDor, and follow us on Facebook, so that you can keep up to date with all our forthcoming services and events. From outings to quizzes, communal dinners to live sculpting, political debate to donut tasting, book launches to film shows, Mitzvah Day and much more, there really is something for everyone.

Acting as a bridge builder between members and staff, and within the different staff teams, I work tirelessly to increase our connections, build our volunteering base, and engage with members through targeted newsletters and social media posts. I support the rabbinical and other staff members, creating exciting and innovative opportunities, and ensuring that at the heart of everything we do, we always remember to reach out, welcome in and engage.

These past 9 months have been exhausting, exhilarating, and hugely enjoyable and I am excited to continue working in this very special synagogue – EHRIS truly is a Beit Knesset, a community centre for all ages, a place of prayer, a place of learning and above all a place to connect with and meet great people !!

On inviting questions Sue Casale remarked how terrific it is that so many new groups have been started and have proven to be really popular.

Jonathan referred to the Choir and said that they often present themselves as giving a recital rather than making it more congregational and felt that they should consider their content.

Rabbi Mark responded by saying that the Choir have now returned to their original position in the synagogue which has made a big difference and they are now looking at their music content and are excited at welcoming Cantor Tamara and her expertise to lead them.

The Chairman thanked Paul for leading the Choir since Ann Sadan has left.

Linda said that she did not like the voice of the Cantor at the High Holy Day services and felt that she was too shrill and opera based. She added that she hopes that Cantor Tamara will bring some soul back into services.

Membership: Cornerstone Membership was queried and Rabbi Debbie responded by saying that Cornerstone is a year long programme for those wishing to study Judaism and learning Hebrew, open to everyone including synagogue members as well as those having an aim of conversion with the Bet Din.

3. The Election of Council for 2023/24 -The Chairman read out the names of the proposed Honorary Officers and additional Council Members as follows:

Chair – Jeremy Harrod

Joint Vice Chair – Jo Sigalov & Andrew Woolstone

Honorary Treasurer – Kevin Maddison **Assistant Honorary Treasurer** – Michael Lerman

Honorary Secretary – Michael Weber

Honorary Officers [without Portfolio] - Robert Brand Daniel Mitchell

Additional Council Members - Donna Bryk Kevin Darvill Neil Flash

 Sharon Garson Alex Hirsh Ben Konyn

 Rob Koster Eric Sander Daniel Stiassny

 Bradley Trainis Gideon Wittenberg Nick Mailer

 David Mendoza-Wolfson

The Chairman reported that the following were stepping down from Council and thanked them for their service over the past years - Jo Weber Fiona Aitman
 Elliott Allen

Janet Brand queried why there are not many women as Honorary Officers or on Council. JH said it is because not many women have come forward to which Rabbi Mark added that he would like to see a campaign to have a more gender balanced Council.

All voted in favour of the above proposals.

4. Election of Junior Warden -The Chairman announced that Kito [Daniel] Holtz's position had been proposed and seconded. All voted in favour. The Chairman thanked Steven Gilbert for his input in this role over the past three year, the last year in particular.

5. Approval of the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022 – Although there was some discomfort that the audited accounts were not to hand at the meeting, The Chairman said that they had been available on the EHRS website for some time [Copies were then made available]. The Treasurer thanked Michael Lerman who had prepared the data and slides for the presentation.

Stewart Abbey remarked that the pie chart showed human resources costs running at 36% and that a new Cantor would substantially increase this. Kevin responded by saying that they anticipate a break even situation with an increase of income.

Jonathan said he did not think it fair to be asked to approve accounts if being unable to view them. The Chairman responded by saying that the synagogue Council had already discussed and recommended the accounts and that this meeting is for members to ask questions, not

to approve them and apologised if it had not been made clear enough that the accounts were available on line. The Treasurer added that "Approval of Accounts" is on the agenda is a formality to comply with Company Law.

Stewart Abbey added that our figures are now ten months in arrears of holding an AGM and asked that a date be set earlier in the year going forward. He also said that he believes that at least 60% of the membership are on reduced subscriptions and whilst we should be sympathetic to people's circumstances are any checks done to see if individuals can manage an increase. The Chairman said that the Membership Secretary monitors this.

The drop in income was queried to which the Treasurer responded by saying that at the end of last year, market investment was very strong but it has now gone the other way and is volatile. He added that initially we used our investment income that comes from Capital Funds to "balance the books".

Keith Price asked if funding for the proposed site works was coming from the merger capital. This was confirmed with the addition of grants. It was thought that if looking at approx. £800,000 to create a new image for EHRS there is no guarantee to make up the deficit without hard evidence that this kind of money will create a secure income. The Chairman responded by saying that this point had been discussed thoroughly by the Council who had thought that it was better long term to make this investment rather than spending just £400,000 for repairs/improvements and are convinced that this project will work for the future of EHRS.

Lisa Denning asked if £5m - £6m funds were from the merger. The Chairman confirmed that this is right and that there is approximately £5m left.

Linda wanted to refresh people's memories that when the synagogue was rebuilt there were no funds and it had to be done by borrowing and raising money. The rebuild made it a far more valuable and viable site and hopefully this project will do the same.

Steven Gilbert expressed his concerns on these figures and wonders if it will be an HS2 situation.

Melvyn queried how much is held in the Special Project Fund which the Treasurer confirmed as being £4.5m and that this fund is built into each member subscription. Janet Brand added that we have already completed the kitchen, the lounge and the air conditioning projects which were covered by this fund. The Chairman added that the House Committee is looking at the building as a whole for long term renewals which includes the roof, the hall, a Bimah lift and air conditioning around the building. Melvyn suggested that the PA system should be included in this.

Bernie asked how much is paid annually to the Reform Movement to which the Treasurer replied £125,000.

- 6. Re-appointment of the Auditors** -The Treasurer proposed that Gerald Edelman are reappointed as they are reasonably priced for the amount of work undertaken and their advice given. This was seconded by Stewart Abbey and all voted in favour.

- 7. Subscription Proposal** – The Treasurer proposed an increase on subscriptions of less than 8% which Janet Brand seconded. One voted against and there were two abstentions. Everyone else voted in favour. In response the Chairman said that we will find a way to make an announcement on the increase once we know what the RPI is doing as it is so volatile at present.
- 8. Any Other Business** – The Chairman reported that Janet Brand will become Vice President of EHRS.

Stephen Gilbert said that he had received a great deal of help in his role as Warden and expressed his thanks to Anitta Tischler, Andie Lucas and Keith Price.

Linda said that she had observed that the magazine being sent out by post twice a year was not keeping those members not able to use a computer informed. It was confirmed that there is a choice for members to be able to receive it either by post or on line. Val Joseph added that all members should have received the HHD edition by post.

Jonathan Kramer queried the Board of Deputy donation of £15 per person added to the subscription notice. David Mendoza-Wolfson expressed how important it is for each individual member to support the Board of Deputies.

It was reported that Zoom does not seem to work properly on a Friday evening. This to be followed up.

Steven Gilbert said that having taken a brief look at plans for the building project, he felt that the finished idea does not look much like a synagogue! Anna Flash added that she is excited to see plans for the future and said that it is very good to see the work that both Sarah Koster and the Stonegrove Life Committee have done.

In response to Joan Altman's query on the progress of the Liberal and Reform movements the Chairman stressed that it would not be a merger and that consultation is continuing with Keith Price having been invited to join the advisory board.

The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking the Rabbis, Wardens, Welfare, Technical, Admin and Caretaking Teams, Committees and Volunteers for their input and support over the past year and thanked Members for attending.