

MINUTES OF CAMPAIGN CHOIRS NETWORK (CCN) ANNUAL MEETING

01 JULY 2019 MANCHESTER

Chair: Kelvin Mason Côr Gobaith

Minutes: Nest Howells Côr Gobaith

Present:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Adey Rees | Red Leicester Choir |
| Andy Dykes | Sheffield Socialist Choir |
| Barry Johnson | Open Voice, Manchester |
| Bronwyn Westacott | Nottingham Clarion Choir |
| Carol Sullivan | Protest in Harmony, Edinburgh |
| Chris Morley | Red Leicester Choir |
| Dave Fogg | Bolton Clarion Choir |
| Diana Robin | Red and Green Voices, London |
| Dodie Ritman | Open Voice, Manchester |
| Glenys Mulvaney | Red Leicester Choir |
| Gro-Mette Gulbrandsen | Côr Gobaith, Aberystwyth |
| Helen Casey | Protest in Harmony, Edinburgh |
| Jane Barley | Nottingham Clarion Choir |
| Janet Russell | East Lancs Clarion Choir |
| Joan West | East Lancs Clarion Choir |
| John Hamilton | Strawberry Thieves, London |
| Joy Mills | Calder Valley Voices |
| Judith Verreschi | Nottingham Clarion Choir |
| Kelvin Mason | Côr Gobaith, Aberystwyth |
| Kirsty Martin | Hullabaloo, Brighton |
| Lili Roseveare | Hullabaloo, Brighton |
| Lotte Reimer | Côr Gobaith, Aberystwyth |
| Martin Pennington | Red Leicester Choir |
| Maxine Beahan | San Ghanny, Edinburgh |
| Nest Howells | Côr Gobaith, Aberystwyth |
| Pauline Hammerton | Open Voice, Manchester |
| Rosemary Snelgar | Raised Voices, London |
| Ziba Nadimi | Raised Voices, London |

Apologies:

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Anni Tracey | RabbleRousers, Lancaster |
| Hilary Wilson | Canwyr Stryd Bangor Street Singers |
| Jenny Patient | Sheffield Socialist Choir |
| Rebecca Denniff | Whitby Community Choir |

Agenda:

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|----------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Welcome | Lotte Reimer |
| 2 | 2018 minutes | Matters Arising / Action Points |
| 3 | Proposal documents | Adey Rees - Discussion |
| 4 | Any Other Business | |

2 Matters Arising / Action Points

(a) Admin/Communications Group

- Need to confirm/select members for 2019-2020 aiming for 4 to 6 people to share the responsibility and work, and representing different regions.
- Membership could be rotational - e.g. for a year at a time - and different people encouraged to join.
- Facilitate communication through use of Skype, emails etc.
- The group is a loose affiliation, not constituted, needs to be kept as simple as possible.

Currently:

- Website is organised by Martin Pennington who has taken over from Alan McDonald. Many thanks to Alan for all the work undertaken.
- Facebook is overseen by Chris Green. *Another person is needed to support Chris.*
- Treasurer - David Fogg (happy to continue).
- Email list – Lotte (happy to continue).

Other members:

Lily Greenan, Alan McDonald, Jenny Patient (wish to withdraw).
Rosemary Snelgar and Ziba Nadima (happy to continue as shared London reps).

New members:

- Adey Rees
- Andy Dykes - will help with Facebook.
- Kirsty Martin – SCF liaison
- Reps needed for Scotland. Maxine Beahan will discuss with Protest in Harmony.

Action:

- Admin/Communications Group to inform members of their existence, send reminders regarding finances and other issues.
- Some disliked the large numbers of emails received, others felt this the best way to communicate with large numbers of people.
- Emails should be kept to a minimum through judicious use, and where possible replies to avoid *'Reply All'* for responses to comments made by a sender.
- Having two lists might be useful- one for 'business matters' and one for general information.

3 Discussions, inc. two Proposal Documents

(a) Finances (Adey, Red Leicester) (See Attachment 2)

- Treasurer David Fogg informed meeting that the CCN account stands at £242.01p.
- Not all choirs make an annual contribution. The suggested amount is £20 p.a., but must reinforce its voluntary basis.
- Funds are required for admin, website costs, etc. Other possible uses include to facilitate/organise events such as hosting weekend meetings and workshops, help groups attend Street Choirs Festival. (At least one choir was prohibited by costs this year).
- It is important that money is put to good purpose but few requests received thus far. Both payments and requests to go through the treasurer. Contributions are currently made by cheque to Bolton Clarion choir. BACS is also possible. See website for details. The accounts are available for viewing.

Action:

Admin/Communications Group to be responsible for-

- Sending contribution reminders, (whilst reinforcing that they are 'voluntary') and information about the current balance.
- Reviewing funds annually and examining if not being utilised.

David was thanked for maintaining Accounts.

(b) Website (Martin, Red Leicester)

- Website aims to be user-friendly, simple, informative, up to date and attractive; maintain an archive of historical material; have a Home page that constantly changes and containing a news section.
- Relevant links and events should be submitted to Martin for publicising.
- Choirs should check that they are listed, with accurate up to date information.
- Photos, ideas, changes etc. can be sent to Martin.
- Suggestion that a password-protected '*Member Choirs Only*' page could be considered.
- Songs, music and sound file resources need developing further. Copyright issues need to be sorted before submitting to Martin.

Suggestions / comments:

- Copyright concerns. Often not an issue as song writers keen for songs to be used.
- Many choirs offer open access to their songs.
- Listing songs in categories may make finding songs easier.
- We need a song list rather than the actual songs, which would be too large a task. Links to Choir websites may serve this aim.

Action:

- Admin/Communications Group to remind people of above.

Martin was thanked for the work he has already undertaken on the Website.

(c) SCF / Other Gatherings (Adey, Red Leicester) (*See Attachment 3*)

Adey - summarised his proposal document which aims to trigger discussion, and outlined:

- background and history of SCF and how it became generic choirs;
- how hosts have their own ideas and themes which has led to some disaffection with the event;
- proposal that CCN needs to take over SCF, if SCF is to regain its roots.

Discussion Comments (*see also Attachment 3 'Points from flipchart'*):

- Accepting the situation and exploring the possibility of another or alternative event (with choirs choosing to go to one or both).
- An alternative Event (Peace News Summer Camp) was mentioned in 2015 but did not materialize.
- We need to decide what we want out of SCF and /or a separate event.
- CCN should not try to 'take over' SCF.
- SCF seen by many as a 'brilliant way' for CCN to spread the message to the unaware/unconverted and it would be sad to break away although it was questioned whether SCF works as a forum for such communication.
- Strawberry Thieves would favour an event facilitating meeting of similar choirs, political workshops, sharing songs, ideas, networking, whilst also keeping costs low.
- SCF now amorphous, no control over who is hosting it on and where. In the recent

past, location has been down to whoever offers to host, with resulting uncertainty. However, locations apparently now identified until 2023 – no transparent process of host selection.

- SCF has no constitution or rules.
- Consider registering the name - how and what implications.
- A need for open access to financial aspects, auditing etc.
- Need for transparency in organisation, and in workshops.
- Lack of SCF choir reps feedback meetings (mostly absent since 2014) is undemocratic.
- A need for a new model? Are the mass sing and busking of value considering the general lack of public audience? Should the Friday evening concert be rethought to avoid choirs singing in parallel sessions for Saturday choir concert?
- The attendance of generic community choirs has reduced the political and meaningful content of the songs presented.
- Need to give newer choirs more background/historical information and more direction.
- Kirsty noted the importance of not undervaluing the contributions of 'non-political' choirs, the danger of creating a hierarchy, soft politics vs **Politics** (e.g. re Palestine) and stated that most choirs are political in their own way.
- SCF needs to be more proactive re workshops, songs for demos / outdoors etc.

It was proposed that CCN engages with Sam (Pocklington) as CC collective for next year.

Lili (Hullabaloo) suggested that CCN could focus on campaigning and demonstrations. Individuals and groups could meet at demos rather than a particular venue.

General consensus on the value of regional CCN meetings/events; the disadvantage being lack of contact with more distant choirs. Annual CCN meeting would be pursued.

Format for the future:

(i) SCF

- The SCF is a victim of own success, stuck with a format, with little public audience for some events and very little learning about campaigns and struggles that other choirs are involved with.
- It was generally agreed to stay in SCF, try to work from within, try to cut down on 'pop songs' and rushed workshops. Also consider financial accessibility.
- We need to decide on what we want it to be; need to avoid alienation or 'coup'; don't want to take over or displace, as we can have CCN gatherings as well. Rather, to sow seeds and set a clear foundation; involve other choirs, get them on board.
- Next year, Pocklington, a small community in Tory heartland, could be an ideal place for (political) busking. Could replace Friday concert with choirs, thus eliminating need for two venues or marathon concert. A small town would be easier to engage with as opposed to a large city where difficult to create awareness.

(ii) CCN

- An alternative or second gathering could consider more rural location, reconsider mass sing and busking, be cheap, accessible (middle England) and away from outside world. Lotte suggested venue such as National Forest, Derbyshire is central. Camping not accessible for many. A CCN weekend / gathering - 'transnational', would probably involve a more manageable number of choirs (about 20)?
- Adey remarked that we need something solid to put out for choirs to consider with their members, and Kelvin stated that this meeting not enough to discuss all the issues, but emails and Website can be used.

Summary:

- Keep working with /on SCF.
- Feedback on transparency.
- Make future events more political.
- Have our own gathering.

Final Observations:

- CCN meeting at SCF event could be held on Friday evening and then more follow up over the weekend.
- Good that the protest about one of the mass sing songs worked and was acted on by the organisers.
- That the CCN meeting is open to all needs to be clarified and emphasised so that others may attend/show interest.
- Need to share future events - publicise them.
- Pocklington already has a theme - '*Why we sing*'. Kirsty will liaise with Sam (Pocklington).

4 Any Other Business

None discussed, as meeting had run out of time.

[Attachments follow]:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Attachment 1 | Points from Flipchart at Annual Meeting 2019 |
| Attachment 2 | Finances: Voluntary Contributions |
| Attachment 3 | The Future of Street Choirs Festival |

Attachment 1

Points from Flipchart

Question: What do we (CCN) want from SCF?

| Point | Details |
|--|--|
| Total transparency | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial report• Decision making clarity, e.g. who decides the next host• Feedback meeting at end of each SCF where issues are raised directly and lessons learned passed on |
| Get to know other campaigning choirs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• network and cooperate• learn new songs |
| Honouring the roots of the festival | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pass on guidelines/info, incl. SCF radical history, to hosting choirs, so new participants are made aware of the kind of Festival they are attending• Some 'action' workshops, e.g. protest songs, organising...• Mass songs reflecting the movement |
| Perform to each other (see also point below) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about issues and struggles of localities/engagements of other choirs through the songs they present• Less marathon choir concert, consider Brighton model of Fri-Sat concert |
| Preach to the non-converted | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Busking in useful places (e.g. lots of by-passers, places of special meaning, busking with a message...)• Singing and engaging with 'non-political' choirs• External performers related to the roots/spirit of the SCF |
| Inclusivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep the cost down |

Question: How else do we want CCN to meet?

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| CCN special gathering | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collective organisation• Different time to SCF• Choir reps annual meeting |
| Regional CCN gatherings | |

Attachment 2

Finances: Voluntary Contributions – Proposal by Adey Rees, Red Leicester Choir

Background

Having joined the Campaign Choirs Network (CCN), member choirs are invited to make a voluntary annual donation to cover CCN running costs, largely printing, banners and the website, but also to build up its resources to organise larger events in the future.

A suggested sum of £20 per year was proposed and agreed by a past AGM, and choirs were left to decide what sum to donate, less or more, according to their individual choir circumstances.

Because CCN is not a formally constituted organisation, it does not operate its own separate Bank Account. Thus donations are hosted by Bolton Clarion Community Choir, which holds separate CCN accounting within its own choir Bank Account.

Up to now, the number of member choirs actually making an annual donation is very small. A number of explanations might apply, but I do not think that explanations would include choirs proactively choosing not to donate. Rather, I believe the subject does not enter the consciousness of the choirs because we have not promoted well enough the request for annual donations, and reminded of the means to pay into the hosted account.

If all 45 member choirs donated just the suggested £20, **it would raise £900 p/a!** Enough to begin to help pump-prime organising CCN choir events/workshops.

Solution?

A first step has already been taken by Martin Pennington, our new Website manager, by publicising the information more up-front on the CCN Website. It now appears under the '*Member Choirs*' heading, as well as under '*Join us*' where it had solely resided.

I propose that in order to help choirs build into their routine annual accounts a consideration of (& hopefully making) a CCN donation, we set a specific date in the Calendar when we annually send out a polite email reminding about the requested donation, and inviting choirs to do so by a specified date thereafter, to allow CCN accounts to be reconciled in time for the subsequent CCN AGM.

If agreed, the effectiveness can be reviewed at subsequent AGMs, where we can see if there has been a reasonable growth in funds, that can be effectively utilised by CCN.

In comradeship & respect
Adey.

09/07/2019.

Attachment 3

The Future of Street Choirs Festival – Proposal by Adey Rees, Red Leicester Choir

The following proposal is set down as a line for potential discussion, not an end in itself, so is not a formal Motion to AGM.

I propose that if we are to remain engaged with SCF, the Campaign Choirs Network (CCN) needs to take ownership.

Background

There has for some time been a disquiet within CCN that SCF has lost its 'political' credentials.

In this proposal, I use '*political*' in its broad sense that defines our *collective* identity in CCN, i.e. that our choirs campaign for causes such as peace, social justice, environmental and humanitarian concerns. As a collective, whilst being apolitical, we take a broadly Left (socialist) position. By definition of our title, we are *Campaigning* choirs.

As Kirsty Martin eloquently put it in our CCN email exchanges of February this year-

The SCF community has developed over the years to nurture a broad church of different yet complimentary movements and issues within the Festival, one such being the merging of 'political' choirs with 'community' choirs. I understand that the 'singing for change' movement is non-partisan, and would not expect to experience an overt or covert allegiance to a single party of any persuasion at SCF.

However, the SCF is not a politically neutral festival (small p intended) - the SCF's background is very firmly rooted in the socialist/ protest choral tradition. While not everything relating to the Festival has to carry an overtly political message, I feel that what we choose to sing together needs to be fundamentally aligned to the heart of the Festival.

In contrast, the Raise Your Banners festival (RYB) was clearly a Socialist choirs festival, i.e. for choirs like my own, that clearly defined their politically Socialist credentials as part or all of their being.

RYB was therefore not defined broadly enough to embrace the wider identity of the campaigning choirs that make up our CCN, and if RYB was to be reawakened, it would serve a smaller constituency than the whole CCN. (Some Socialist choirs would align to RYB but perhaps not SCF, unless SCF became much more overtly a Socialist event at the expense of excluding the wider campaigning choir movement).

The excellent *Singing For Our Lives* research raised the perspective that SCF allows those of us who are political to build bridges with other choirs who are not 'political'. However, this has not prevented certain host choirs still turning SCF into a general festival of song, welcoming disproportionate numbers of local community choirs (that are also not committed to taking a message onto the streets), and hence have moved the 'campaigning' ethos to the margin.

I suspect that just like at Kendal, Pocklington SCF is more likely to be an 'anyone welcome' general community choirs festival, primarily as a way to tap into a ready-made customer base, with absolutely no connection to the SCF's historical roots that define its identity from the very many other general community choirs events.

The experience of Kendal has most recently highlighted just how far SCF has drifted by being open to anyone to host. Coupled with SCF having grown so sizeable, it perhaps now feels too big a burden for historically associated choirs to risk taking it on for future years, allowing general choirs like Lakeland Voices to get a look in *. (We've been grateful for anyone saying they will host, rather than have a fallow year). Ownership, in some way would appear the only way to save it from forever becoming nothing more than another annual community choirs festival.

* [N.b Within context of a general community choirs event, Kendal was fine, just not street-choirs].

Many of us have justifiably complained about the ways in which SCF has lost its identity. So, if we want it to be what we want, we have to do something about it – complaining alone will not change anything.

Solution?

I wish to try sowing a seed about CCN taking collective ownership of SCF in the future. I know this might sound a bit subversive to some, but legitimacy for this line of reasoning is that it would be taking back what is ours. I present some personal views, in support for this course of action:

The key to legitimising CCN taking ownership is in the title's name- '*street choirs*', which term historically, contemporarily & globally defines campaigning choirs. So, it becomes not unreasonable to reclaim the SCF for our shared community.

For CCN to take it on would be no less 'open' than the basis that applies now... Currently ownership is shared by all and no-one, insofar as there is no single legal entity controlling it or personally profiting by it. Instead, anyone can take it on, and one host is presumed to pass on a surplus money to the next choir who has offered to host. No rules apply, and the money could severely deplete or disappear. Agreement to accept the invitation to host is loosely agreed through nods and smiles at an announcement within the main hall of a current SCF!

The difference with CCN taking it on is that all core participating choirs would be part of the CCN, which by definition would keep it steered the way we want it to be. In other words, stop it being everything we have complained about!

To collectively reclaim SCF under the umbrella of the choirs that make up CCN could enable it to be scaled back to a manageable size, thus reducing the pressures on the event as a whole and notably the Saturday evening concert. The cost of organising & running the Festival would become far less onerous.

It could rebalance the emphasis on going out onto the streets to perform, and make organisation for the w/e more doable, hence potentially increasing the number of CCN choirs offering to take it on.

It would ensure that future choirs who offer to host are aligned with the CCN collective ethos, and not just choirs wanting to run a generalist community choirs festival on the back of 'SCF'.

Subject to numbers, choirs outside of CCN could still be invited, where they demonstrate values and practice that do not contradict with CCN SCF ethos. As far as a single weekend festival might achieve, this would go a long way to meet the aspirations to build bridges with other choirs who are not 'political'. (Individual choirs may also choose to build bridges the other 362 days of the year). Furthermore, a CCN SCF would still connect with others - the broader public, through our singing on the streets.

Additionally, CCN could define the parameters of what SCF should embrace, and create clear transparency on what happens to the money passed from one host choir to the next.... effectively it would be loaned by the network, insofar as the host choir could be expected to present back to CCN audited accounts showing how the received money was spent, in the responsible endeavour to leave a like balance to pass on the next year, and thus ensure the host choir applies the money to run a festival in line with our common purpose.

SCF has always been at an ideal time of year - before Summer holidays, when there's more chance of good weather. Other choir festivals don't routinely compete for the same time of year, as SCF has defined this point in the calendar. Conversely, other good times of year are already taken up with other community choirs events. There's no reason why CCN organised SCF's shouldn't take place at this time of year. All it requires is the commitment of CCN choirs to participate.

The above does not preclude any other type of event that CCN might also wish to hold, such as workshops, organised collectively or by a host CCN choir.

And finally, there is nothing wrong with *celebrating* our commonality through our chosen songs that we perform in the evening at *our* SCF, affirming good feelings about our campaigning endeavours that we undertake throughout the rest of the year.

In comradeship & respect
Adey.

09/07/2019.