

Cinema For All AGM 2019 – Minutes

1. Welcome

Gemma Bird (GB) welcomed the AGM attendees and introduced the board: Becky Ellis (BE); Peter Mitchell (PM); Graham Hill (GH); Jane Mehta (JM); and Sukayna Najmudin (SN). GB noted that Katherine Sellars (KS) would shortly be joining the AGM.

2. Apologies

None.

3. Adopt the minutes of the 2018 AGM

Proposed: Aysegul Epengin, Portsmouth; seconded: Brian Clay, South West group

4. Matters arising from the minutes

None

5. Chair's report 2017/18

GB thanked Tim Swanwick for his three years of leadership of the Cinema for All board of trustees. GB summarised his trustee's report, including that: Cinema For All's membership is at an all-time high; that Cinema For All's membership represents 95% of all identified community cinema groups and film societies in the UK; that an increase in equipment hire brought cinema to an additional 14,000 people across the UK during 2017/18; and that many groups have been successfully supported through initiatives such as Sustain and Launchpad. GB also singled out the praise of the release of *Born A Rebel* and the debut of the Cinema For All podcast from the Chair's report.

6. Statement of financial activities 2017/18

GH commented on the key findings of a recent report he had read, detailing the impacts the current economic and political climate may have on charities.

GH detailed Cinema For All's annual financial activity report, noting that Cinema For All has maintained financial stability during the previous economic year. The organisation's biggest income stream remains the British Film Institute. GH noted the organisation's reserve policy, which suggests that the organisation should keep six months' of operational costs – currently, this is around £90K – in reserve. Currently the reserves are over £200K, and the trustees will consider their policy and strategy in relation to this.

Adopted by: Ian Hamerton, Pitshanger Pictures; seconded by: Richard Clesham, Deptford.

7. Appointment of the examiner for the 2018/19 accounts

GH recommends that the accountants BHP continue to be used as Cinema For All's examining partner.

Adopted by: Brian Clay, South West; Ian Hamerton, Pitshanger.

8. Approve the annual subscriptions for 2018/19

GB proposed that the subscriptions remain at the same rates as in 2017/18.

Adopted by: Maureen England, Ballyclare; seconded by: Ian Hamerton, Pitshanger.

9. Election of trustees

Prior to the opening of nominations, SN spoke about the benefits of being a trustee for Cinema For All and encouraged more people to nominate themselves, or nominate others, to be elected trustees of Cinema For All. SN stressed the importance of a diverse board that reflects the diversity of the community cinema sector.

Victoria Grace Walden (VGW) from Deptford Cinema spoke about why she wished to be a member of the Cinema For All board, and the experiences that made her suitable for this role. These included her two years of volunteering at Deptford Cinema, her passion for accessibility and inclusivity, her background in media and film education, and her knowledge of engagement and outreach.

VGW left the room whilst a vote was taken on whether she should join the board. The results were:

16 votes for VGW

1 for abstain

Ayse from Portsmouth Film Society noted that her group did nominate her as a trustee, but as she felt the timing for submitting nominations was not clear on social media she missed the cut off point.

VGW returned to the room, and was congratulated on her nomination to the board of trustees.

GB noted that the elected trustees would share an inbox, with the email address yourtrustee@cinemaforall.org.uk, which members could use to contact the trustees with issues, comments, and questions. GB also encouraged members to contact her at chair@cinemaforall.org.uk if they wished, with the aim of keeping the organisation's board as representative as possible.

END OF FORMAL MEETING – GENERAL DISCUSSION

Political groups as members of Cinema For All

KS explained that in Cinema For All's articles of association, Article 5.1 states that only non-political organisations may be admitted as full members of the organisation. As such, groups who are a branch of a political party could not be members of the organisation. She opened this issue up to the membership for discussion.

Simon Knight, Portsmouth Film Society, noted that this was a very difficult, emotive, and complex subject.

Paul Costello, Leigh Film Society, said that he was quite nervous about political screenings, and that Leigh stay quite neutral. Cinema For All could get bad publicity from being associated with political groups who have extreme or polarised positions. As such he was quite worried about the impact of welcoming political groups to the organisation, and would rather stay neutral.

Alan Foale, Films At Heart – Yorkshire Group, echoed these comments.

Rachel Cross, Chester Film Society, commented that constitution of her society says it can't be political. However, they – and, she assumed, many other film societies – do show films

that are political in nature and/or highlight social issues, though not movies that have a political party stance. If the organisation is to be truly cinema for all, it could be very divisive to admit and support groups that have a particular political stance.

Aysegul, from Portsmouth Film Society, said that the organisation needs to be open to all, but shouldn't particularly support or give priority to one case or cause. Doing this could isolate others, and as such staying independent allows the organisation to engage with more of the community.

Victoria, from Deptford Cinema, suggested that admission to membership should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Some very extreme groups aren't allowed to be official political parties, but *could* form a film group – and as such this would need to be monitored.

GB noted that Cinema For All is governed by the terms of the charity commission, and as such would never admit a member who advocates hate or participates in hate speech

Richard Clesham from Deptford Cinema noted that this issue is referenced within both the articles and the shared values of Cinema For All. He mentioned the challenge of lobbying groups: though not directly affiliated to a political party per se, there is a risk that they could use their position as Cinema For All members to drive their stated political aims. To be a politically minded group is not an issue – but to use the status and platform of being part of Cinema For All and receiving their organisational support in order to advance an ideology would be a problem.

Maureen England, from Ballyclare, said it would be good to have a clear sense of what 'political' means. What is considered a 'political' group can vary in different contexts; specifically, the context within Northern Ireland is potentially something of a different situation to the rest of the UK. As such it may be useful to have some clarity around a definition of what being political or political group means.

PM stated that if there was ever any doubt over whether a group should be a member or not, the board would ask to see the constitution of that society and then make a collective decision as to whether they should be a member. PM noted that it could be difficult to define what a political society is, and that he would personally prefer to use the judgment of the board on a case-by-case basis when there is a question mark.

The recent impact study: a review

KS gave an overview of the summary of findings of the recently commissioned Cinema For All impact report, which include:

- Cinema For All offers motivational and practical support that is not replicated elsewhere
- It's becoming more inclusive, with its service users more representative of the community cinema sector and wider society
- Cinema For All's coaching programmes are successfully addressing diversity in different ways, from coaching to help more established groups widen their audiences, to encouraging new groups as they start their community cinema journeys
- Cinema For All's activities targeting young people provided a valued experience for those who engage. However, all of these initiatives have struggled to an extent to maintain engagement across their duration. Where this hurdle has been overcome it has had very valuable impacts. Young people and students are supported through Cinema For All, including to network from and learn from/with more established group.
- Cinema For All needs to give more support for programming

- The equipment hire scheme was commended as providing particular valued practical support
- The importance of peer-to-peer networking and sharing, facilitated through Cinema For All at events such as the annual conference, was highly commended. A number of service users wished for this to be grown further, for example through online resources or more of a “member’s voice” in newsletters and other communications
- Some more established groups felt that Cinema For All was focused particularly on new and younger groups, and felt like they were less supported in contrast
- There was a perception shift around cinema for all, with the sense that the organisation’s content, image, and tone, especially in its external communications, was focused on a younger audience
- The report suggested there may be a feeling of some groups being left behind following the organisation’s trading name change; conversely, the report suggested that some groups may have not adapted to a new and broader outlook, or are not engaging with the organisation’s wider online content.

Actions arising from the report were focused around Cinema For All’s messaging; measurability of activities; its scalability, including increasing future reach; and its sustainability.

Ultimately, the impact report showed that the organisation’s delivery was effective and in accordance with its core values with practical and motivation support that was particularly valued, including its offer of equipment hire, the annual conference, and its various coaching programmes.

Cinema vs. All: future directions of Cinema For All

GB opened up a discussion as to how the debate about *cinema* for all vs. cinema for *all* can influence the strategic direction of Cinema For All; how Cinema For All can better help members’ to communicate the vision of Cinema For All; and what the members’ own vision for community cinema is.

Michael Pierce, Toxteth Community Cinema, discussed the importance of Cinema For All supporting and representing its older and more established member groups. He also talked about how, when the organisation supports such a huge variety of film societies, there is a question for Cinema For All around how to champion films that reflect the very different needs and focus of its various members. He noted that film societies that operate in different settings (e.g. city vs. rural) have a very different concept and sense of community; furthermore, he noted that newer groups by necessity often need to be more risk averse, as they do not have a reserve of funds and reputation to fall back on when programming films. He concluded by suggesting that the organisation’s members themselves have a key role to play in sharing ideas and working with each other, and positively challenging each other around their diversity, inclusion, and direction.

VGW, Deptford Cinema, asked if Cinema For All can better facilitate sharing among different groups; if there is work to be done around breaking down notion of film societies as elitist or linked to “high art”; and talked about how social media can be a method of reaching different audiences (but noted that it is not accessible to all).

Alan Foale asked about how Cinema For All can reconnect with older, established societies? He suggested rethinking and reforming the organisation’s regional groups, with a renewed focus on localised networks and connections. As BFI is the main funder for Cinema For All, its focuses around diversity have been in line with the BFI’s. However, he suggested it is also important to think about inclusion in relation to older people and to rural isolation.

GB notes that reconnecting with older groups is a key learning point for the organisation from the impact case study.

Deborah Parker notes that Cinema For All's current On the Ground project is part of is focused on running regional networks. She asked if there were volunteers among the organisation's members who have the time and the desire to help Cinema For All run their regional groups; who could be community cinema champions, and support Cinema For All with this work.

Ayse from Portsmouth noted that it can be difficult for groups who are based further away to attend the Friday networking, even though this is an essential opportunity to share knowledge and build relationships. As such, can Cinema For All facilitate more opportunities for networking?

In summary, GB noted that the relationship between cinema and community is cyclical: community and film are interlinked, and feed into one another. GB said that the organisation will start to think about how to make regional groups work better, and encouraged members to get in touch with the Cinema For All staff regarding this – especially as it seems that the most effective groups are those that come from a grassroots (rather than top down) approach. GB also said that trustee visits to member societies will be continuing this year, and asked members to get in touch if they would like a trustee to visit them or one of their events.

Members' open forum

Maureen England asked if Cinema For All has an official sustainability line or stance, and if they will offer any training around sustainability?

GB stated that Cinema For All are currently reworking their policies regarding this. Jaq Chell said the organisation need to put their internal strategies and structures in place, and will then look at providing guidance to members.

Aysegul asked if Cinema For All could share information on statutory regulations and guidance regarding environmental sustainability, and training on what sustainability strategies should be used in community cinemas.

Deborah Parker noted that the BFI have introduced a requirement around their fundees needing to have a sustainability policy in place. As such Cinema For All is currently revamping their environmental policy in order to accommodate requirements. She suggested that members can look at what the BFI have already done on the BFI website. She said that Cinema For All will be looking at outside agencies to bring in better practice and knowledge around this.

Paul Costello praised *Born A Rebel* as a film and a project, and suggested the organisation's reserves could be used to carry on that project's legacy, including building on the representation of women in the archive.

GB suggested that having strong reserves is particularly important in the current turbulent political climate. She thanked Paul Costello for his praise and said she would like to do more archive work.

Claire, from a group in north Northumberland, said she really liked the suggestion of pairing small organisations in their early days with older, more established organisations. She said she thought was a really useful aspect of the conference, with as much information picked up anecdotally as through the formal workshop sessions.

GB says the Cinema For All staff team can and will set up these kinds of pairings, and urged members to get in touch if that is something they want.

David Saitch, Hurst Village Cinema, recommended the film society Facebook group as a source of conversation, connection, and troubleshooting.

Brian Clay said he was feeling a disconnect with his own executive, many of whom would not attend the conference. He explained that others in the executive had articulated a sense of “what has Cinema For All ever done for us?” As such he stressed the key importance of the organisation tackling its disconnect from older and more established groups, as this disconnect is becoming more and more clear to him. Brian Clay said the onus was partly upon the members themselves, and that they should ask Cinema For All staff and trustees to visit and support them.

Ayse suggested that groups that feel they are not being represented or supported by the organisation in the way they would like need to nominate a trustee to sit on the board to give them a voice. It was stressed that this is why elected trustees are important.