

**SCN Chairs Meeting**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2026 10am**

**Attendees**

Kevin Stock	SCN Manager	
Sue Derrick	Chair	Botley HE & District
Peter Newman	Chair	Havant
Graham Sheppard	Chair	Locks Heath
Mandy Richards	Chair	Portsmouth
Lyn Moore	Vice-Chair	Waterlooville

**Apologies from:** Gosport, Horndean, IOW, Solent

**1. Welcome** by Kevin Stock, SCN Manager

Permission was received to record the meeting for the purpose of producing this report.

**2. Introductions** All attendees introduced themselves and said which role(s) they performed.

For this meeting I turned on Zoom's AI Transcribing facility, and this is the report that it produced (after minor corrections by myself).

**Quick recap**

This meeting was a U3A network discussion focused on various operational topics across different U3A groups. The participants discussed implementing an annual health check for U3As, with Sue confirming that Botley U3A now completes this assessment at March committee meetings. The group explored charity donation practices, with consensus that U3As typically pay speakers directly rather than making direct charity donations. There was significant discussion about the u3a Matters magazine, with participants sharing different models including opt-in/opt-out systems and charging structures. The group discussed the Beacon portal implementation, with Kevin noting that only Chichester and Guernsey currently use it, and Waterloovill U3A was planning to set it up before renewals. The meeting

covered challenges with South Region network engagement, with Graham expressing concerns about low participation. Participants shared approaches to handling non-email members, with Peter's group requiring email addresses for new members while others used postal options. The discussion concluded with strategies for recruiting new members, including open days and social events, with Sue sharing success from hosting a committee recruitment evening at the Masonic Hall.

### **Next steps**

- Lynda & Kevin: Recommend to Waterlooville U3A committee that they conduct the annual U3A health check and add it to the agenda
- Kevin: Attend training course for Beacon portal on Thursday
- Mandy: Discuss with Portsmouth U3A committee the possibility of implementing online membership renewals via Beacon portal
- Mandy: Take back to committee the suggestion of using social media (Nextdoor and/or Facebook) for monthly meeting promotion
- Mandy: Consider organizing future coach trips following successful Mottisfont Abbey trip in June
- Mandy: Discuss with Portsmouth U3A committee the possibility of extending committee member term limits from 3 to 6 years

### **Summary**

#### **U3A Volunteer Recruitment Challenges**

Mandy and Peter discussed the challenges of recruiting committee members and helpers for their U3A, noting that Haven U3A had recently reached 380 members close to their capacity. Peter mentioned they had overcome initial struggles to find volunteers.

#### **U3A Membership Systems Discussion**

The meeting began with introductions, where participants shared their roles in various U3As. Kevin mentioned his temporary role as membership secretary and discussed plans to implement online renewals through the Beacon portal by the end of June. Mandy and Peter discussed the challenges and preferences of members regarding electronic payments versus other methods, noting a mixed response. The group agreed to consider discussing electronic options further at upcoming membership meetings. The conversation ended with plans to address a U3A health check, though details were not fully discussed.

## **U3A Health Check Implementation Discussion**

The group discussed implementing an annual health check for their U3A, which Sue confirmed has been added to the March Committee meeting agenda following a previous discussion with membership secretaries. All participants agreed the 10-question health check was a useful exercise, with Kevin expressing confidence that SCN U3As would perform well. The conversation then shifted to charity donations, where Graham raised questions about procedures when speakers request donations for charities, leading to a discussion about payment processes and charity alignment requirements.

## **U3A Donation and Gift Aid Practices**

The group discussed donation practices for U3As, confirming that speakers are typically paid directly and then choose to donate to charities themselves rather than U3As making direct donations to other charities. Mandy shared an example of a speaker who collected donations from members and distributed them to two charities. The discussion also covered Gift Aid requirements. Portsmouth U3A is the only SCN member that include room hire in their fees. Finally, Graham raised questions about the u3a Matters magazine subscription model, comparing opt-in versus opt-out approaches, with Kevin sharing that Waterlooville U3A recently switched to an opt-in model with a £5 annual fee for hard copy delivery.

## **Magazine Distribution and Costs Discussion**

Waterlooville u3a is now charging for a printed version and noted that it has been reduced from over 800 copies to 63 hard copies among their 1,000+ members. They clarified that while the magazine is funded through membership fees, members can opt out without additional cost, and over 75% of their members still choose to receive it

## **Beacon Portal and Membership Engagement**

The group discussed implementing the Beacon portal system for online membership management, with Kevin explaining that it allows members to update their details and renew memberships themselves. While only a few U3As currently use the portal, Waterlooville U3A is planning to set it up with PayPal integration.

Graham raised concerns about low participation in South Region council network meetings, noting only 10-15 U3As are actively involved despite 194 total U3As in the network. The group attributed the low engagement to time constraints and relevance of meeting agendas, with Mandy suggesting the content and leadership might not appeal to current members.

## **Communicating with Non-Email Members**

The group discussed approaches to communicating with members who don't have email access. Graham noted that Locks Heath has a small percentage of non-email users and sends monthly newsletters by post. Peter shared that their organization now only accepts new members with email addresses, as they have reduced to just 11 non-email members. Mandy explained their approach of including program cards in termly newsletters and handling AGM communications through group leaders when needed.

## **Program Information Distribution Methods**

The group discussed their approach to distributing program information. Portsmouth u3a members can collect it in person at the hub or access it online, though email access presents a challenge for some older members.

Waterlooville u3a noted that out of 1,061 total members, only 29 currently lack email access, primarily affecting members in their 80s. The discussion concluded with a debate about contact cards, with Graham expressing resistance to their use due to outdated information and high printing costs, while others noted they haven't been used in recent years.

## **U3A Member Recruitment Strategies**

The group discussed strategies for recruiting new members to their U3A. Mandy inquired about different approaches, and participants shared that most new members typically come through word of mouth rather than formal advertising. Peter suggested an annual open day as an effective recruitment method, sharing that their previous open day resulted in nearly 20 new members. The discussion highlighted a common challenge of having limited meeting space capacity, with Sue mentioning their group's hall has a membership limit, and noting they struggle to find leaders for new groups despite having available spaces.

## **Membership Strategy Discussion Meeting**

The group discussed membership strategies and current challenges. Mandy shared that their membership stands at about 195, with Portsmouth's 60-plus magazine being a fruitful source of new members last year. Graham suggested using social media effectively, including posting on Nextdoor and local Facebook groups about a week before monthly meetings, which he noted helps reach both potential members and the broader community. Lynda mentioned their upcoming open day in August, which will coincide with their 20th anniversary event, and raised concerns about whether the membership team could handle increased numbers given their current 1,000+ membership. The discussion concluded with Mandy agreeing to take these suggestions back to her committee for consideration.

## **U3A Governance and Activities Discussion**

The group discussed several topics including Charity Commission guidelines about Gift Aid and teaching, with Kevin noting they should avoid using the word "teaching" in their materials. They debated whether to maintain twice-yearly SCN chair meetings, with low initial attendance but increasing to five attendees after sending the agenda, and decided to continue holding them twice yearly. Graham inquired about organizing coach trips, and Peter and Mandy shared positive experiences with their own U3A's coach trip programs, with Peter noting their organizer had only made a loss once in many years of trips. Sue also shared their successful approach to recruiting new committee members through an evening event at the Masonic Hall.

## **U3A Constitution Changes Meeting**

Sue reported on a recent social event that lasted about two hours and went well with good participation from members. The main discussion centred on changes to their U3A constitution, where Sue explained they successfully moved from a 3-year to 6-year committee term after consulting with Barbara from the trust. The change was approved unanimously by membership to prevent potential folding of the group, which currently has around 200 members.

SCN Website: <https://scn.u3asite.uk>

SE Region Website: <https://southeast.u3asite.uk/>

For the meeting, please have your name and your u3a showing:

- With a mouse, right click your own picture and select 'Rename'
- With a touch screen, tap your own picture, tap the 3 dots and select 'Rename'