Annual General Meeting

The National Childbirth Trust

Charity number: 801395 (England and Wales) & SC041592 (Scotland)

Saturday 08 October 2016 at 10:00am

DRAFT MINUTES

Minutes of the 28th Annual General Meeting of NCT held at Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham, West Midlands B4 7ET

Panel

- Helen Stephenson – Chair of Trustees
- Amber Foster – Vice Chair
- Richard Smothers – Honorary Treasurer
- Nick Wilkie – Chief Executive
- Sam Grimstone – Executive Director for Communications and Development

1) Introduction

Helen Stephenson, Chair of the NCT Board, addressed the delegates and welcomed them to the AGM.

2) NCT in 2016

The Chair presented a summary of NCT’s key achievements throughout 2015/16. Notable achievements include:

- 98,778 people attended an NCT course.
- 114,000 people took out or renewed their NCT membership.
- 5,686 volunteers spread over 325 branches.
- 546 Nearly New Sales hosted by NCT volunteers, raising over £860,000.
- 1,059 practitioners led our courses.
- 184 students trained to become practitioners.
- 3.6 million users made over 6.6 million visits to our website.

The Chair asked the volunteers, followed by practitioners and then by staff to stand and led the attendees in a round of applause, thanking them for all their work to help parents.

The Chair stated that this has been a year for listening and learning at NCT. Volunteers, staff and practitioners have shared a wealth of incredibly useful feedback, which has helped shape NCT’s evolving strategy.
The Chair shared NCT’s new **Vision Statement**:

Our vision is of a world where no parent is isolated and all parents are supported to build a strong society.

The Chair presented the 5 core goals that underpin the charity’s strategic direction:

- **Strengthening** our work in antenatal education and infant feeding.
- **Expanding** the support we provide to parents postnatally.
- **Increasing** our reach into less affluent communities and to parents at greater risk of isolation.
- **Modernising** our public image to ensure we are seen as relevant and trusted.
- **Being the best we can be** – building a brilliant organisation to support our incredible movement of volunteers and practitioners.

The Chair spoke to the fact we have a **new Executive Team**, led by Nick Wilkie who joined as chief executive in July 2015. The team is comprised of Juliet Mountford as Director for Parent Services, Sam Grimstone as Director for Communications and Development, and Rui Domingues as Director for Organisational Services.

The Chair thanked former Directors and the Interim Executive Team, Jeremy Payne and Chris Taylor for their support during this year of change and transition, and thanked Jill Creese, who has done a brilliant job as HR director for the past 7 years.

The Chair highlighted **key achievements** in 2015/16 –

Some of the amazing activities undertaken by branches in the past year include:

- Setting up of a new branch in Northern Ireland covering Tyrone, Armagh and Down.
- A volunteer in Wolverhampton set up a NCT coffee morning group aimed at supporting refugee and migrant new parents based at the local refugee and migrant Centre.
- Cardiff branch run a monthly ‘dads night out’ to bring new fathers together.
- A volunteer in West Cumbria successfully campaigned for the reinstatement of the local Maternity Services Liaison Committee.
- Newham branch ran the hugely successful East London Big Push which raises money for awareness of maternal mental health issues.
- A growing number of branches are running the Little Bundles scheme which provides a box of essentials for labour and the first few days for expectant mothers who find themselves in need.

The Chair thanked all volunteers for the tremendous work that they do.

The Chair also thanked the team of 1,059 practitioners, who have supported over 98,000 parents this year – 13,000 more than last year. It was noted that the majority of practitioners have also used their skills in voluntary activities which aim to support all parents, contributing to NCT’s goal to continuously reach more people.

It was noted that in the past year we have trained 184 students in antenatal or postnatal education to become practitioners and 238 mothers as breastfeeding peer supporters.

The Chair congratulated everyone who gained their qualifications, and thanked the practitioners for their fantastic work.
Peer Support

The Chair highlighted NCT’s Maternity Champions project: a peer support programme to support parents in the Queen’s Park and Old Oak areas in London, which are amongst the capital’s most deprived wards. Evaluation of the project has shown that parents have benefitted considerably from the support provided – 85% said that felt more positive as a result of the support received, 92% said that they had benefitted and 77% said that they felt more confident. This is just one fantastic example of using new models of peer support to increase our reach to more parents.

Commissioned Services

The Chair explained that NCT also supports parents through commissions, where parents can access NCT services free of charge.

Pregnancy Birth and Beyond classes were delivered in 3 NHS Trusts, with every first time parent in Hampshire, Walsall and Chester offered these classes – reaching over 4,000 parents-to-be.

Leeds City Council commissioned NCT to provide this service exclusively for women seeking refugee or asylum seeker status in the city.

Eight CCGs commissioned training of breastfeeding peer supporters in their local area, and we supported 236 people to gain a qualification.

Baby Cafes continue to be a fantastic point of support for new parents, supporting over 20,000 women in the past year.

Research

The Chair explained that NCT continues to be involved in a range of research collaborations, with a focus on improving support, services and outcomes for all women.

In early 2016, NCT partnered with the Institute of Health Visiting and secured funding from the Department of Health to develop a safe, effective and sustainable model of peer support to improve women’s mental health around the time of pregnancy. This project is called ‘Parents in Mind’. The project will be embedded within NCT branches, with a strong focus on local partnership working and supporting diverse communities. We hope that the shared learning from this project will help break the stigma that surrounds perinatal mental health. We aim to help women to access the support they need, and improve outcomes for women experiencing perinatal mental health illness.

Campaigning on behalf of parents

The Chair explained that NCT continues to campaign on behalf of parents everywhere.

An NCT Senior Policy Adviser was invited to join the national maternity review team in England in April 2015. The team published the final report, Better Births, in February 2016 and attracted considerable media attention. The views contributed by NCT included calls to strengthen services in the postnatal period, in breastfeeding support, in improving continuity and in enhanced care for more vulnerable groups of women who are at risk of poorer outcomes at birth. Another NCT Senior Policy Advisor has been working on the national maternity review team for Scotland, which is expected to report in the Autumn of 2016.

In November 2015 NCT met with Ben Gummer, the new minister responsible for maternity services. We spoke to him about the need for improvements to new parent support and the various changes we hoped to see.
A group of NCT mothers met with a committee of MPs at NCT Portsmouth and Southsea Branch’s regular Bumps and Babies group. They discussed experiences of pregnancy and maternity discrimination in the workplace.

In the media

The Chair explained that NCT has continued to generate media attention. In June 2015 the release of our ‘Dads in distress’ research about new fathers’ mental health concerns made a splash in the media. NCT appeared on Sky News, ITV’s This Morning, ITV’s Good Morning Britain, BBC Breakfast and BBC News 24. We were also on hundreds of regional radio stations’ and a number of online and print articles, including The Daily Mirror, The Guardian, The Times, Yahoo News and the Huffington Post.

The highlight of the year was the launch of our #BeyondBabyBlues campaign which gained national and regional media coverage including double page spreads in New! and Woman magazine. This campaign was the first time NCT had brought together traditional media, social media and public affairs work in order to push for change.

Fundraising and Partnerships

The Chair announced that in 2015/16 NCT made deals with a number of commercial partners.

We launched a new initiative, Parent Friendly Places, with the inaugural partner Starbucks, and we have partnered with M&S, Pampers and Piccolo.

NCT’s branches have continued to fundraise through Nearly New Sales, Tea Parties and First Aid courses. Income from Baby First Aid increased 55% compared to the previous year, and further growth is anticipated.

In 2015, the Newham branch ran our inaugural Big Push event.

Challenges

The Chair explained that NCT has also faced a number of challenges:

Cyber Security
As you may know, we did have a data breach this year, and making sure that we have all the systems and processes in place to ensure our cyber security is up-to-date is a key priority for the team.

Membership
The Chair explained that at the end of 15-16 we made a decision to shift to an opt-in system for membership, which was strongly felt to be the right thing to do for parents. Nonetheless this shift will likely lead to a significant drop in income from membership in the current financial year and ongoing. The team are working hard now to mitigate this.
Bednest
On 22 April 2015, NCT was informed of the tragic death of a baby in a Bednest crib, which had been co-branded by NCT. We immediately suspended the sale and hire of the crib, both new and secondhand and wrote to all customers who had recently purchased or rented a Bednest from NCT.

We commissioned an expert report from a leading paediatrician in order to establish any possible safety concerns. Although the crib had passed European and US safety standards, this expert report concluded that if the folding side of the crib is in the half-raised position, it could pose a small but plausible safety risk to a baby. We therefore communicated this risk extensively and also supported a manufacturer’s modification eliminating the risk.

The welfare of parents and babies is, and always will be, at the heart of NCT and we take our responsibility very seriously. Throughout this tragic case we have given the matter the highest possible attention and offered all the assistance we can to the investigating authorities, keeping them continually informed of the actions we have taken. The Coroner’s Inquest will be heard in December 2016 and the matter continues to be the subject of extensive focus for the chief executive, chair and trustees.

3) Announcement of the new trustee
The Chair welcomed Jessica Figueras who joins as Trustee and begins her term with us at the close of this AGM.

With 3128 members voting, the Chair also thanked Elaine Lamb for standing and making the election so competitive.

4) Minutes
The minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting of NCT held on Saturday 26 September 2015 were formally accepted.

Proposed by Susy Broekhuizen
Seconded by Deborah Stone
Carried by a show of hands

5) Annual Report and Accounts
Richard Smothers, Honorary Treasurer, presented the Annual Report and Accounts and 2015/16.

Richard explained that NCT adopted FRS 102 for the first time this year, leading to some small changes to the presentation of the accounts – most visibly, Governance Costs are now allocated across all NCT’s activities rather than separately identified.

Total Income was 17.3m, raised through Courses, Membership Fees, Shop, branch fundraising, sponsorship and donations – this is comparable with the prior year (£17.3m).

Total Expenditure, which combines the costs of raising these funds and of delivering NCT’s aims has fallen from 17.3m to £17.1m.

Richard noted a total unrestricted surplus of £279,000 vs an unrestricted deficit of £44,000 in the prior year - an increase of £323,000.
This represents a considerable achievement in a year in which the NCT has faced a number of cost pressures, including:

1. The move out of Alexandra House in to Brunel House and Euston offices
2. Further losses incurred in the NCT Shop

Despite this, course income growth has been 3% ahead of budget and significant savings from central support functions has produced a surplus.

Richard explained that the Charity has net assets of £7.4m comprising:

Fixed Assets (including Brunel House) of £1.7m
Investment Assets (2 portfolios of bonds and shares) £4.2m
Net current assets (Our cash and debtors less our short term obligations) £1.5m

This provides a strong basis as the charity moves to strengthen its charitable purpose under the Forward Agenda programme.

Looking ahead, Richard explained that 16-17 is a more challenging year financially. As already mentioned, we are forecasting a deficit owing primarily to a significant drop in income from membership. To mitigate this loss we are working hard to build an improved membership proposition, and reducing NCT’s support and infrastructure costs this year.

This will also allow us, in time, to spend more on supporting more parents and for a longer period of time – increasing our reach and extending our scope, which are two of our five core goals.

Richard thanked everyone for their financial contributions and fundraising support.

6) Questions to the Trustees

The Chair invited the chief executive and executive director for communications and development to join the panel.

Questions to the Trustees were submitted in advance of the meeting, with key questions summarised below.

- Kayleigh Walker, Southampton NCT Branch Coordinator, informed the panel that since January a lot of online criticism around infant feeding support not including bottle-feeding has been levelled at Branches, and asked how Branches might be better supported to deal with this criticism.

Nick Wilkie responded that he was aware of challenging situation faced by the Southampton Branch in relation to perceptions of our position on breastfeeding and thanked the branch for all that they do. He felt that NCT can be mis-perceived and commended the excellent document ‘NCT values and approaches to infant feeding support: A message framework’, which is available on the Babble intranet. He suggested that as this document was written in 2011 perhaps more work now needs to be done to ensure that it is more widely communicated. He thanked those who had worked on it.

- Kate Hayes asked about branch fundraising and whether branches can help in light of this year’s membership income shortfall.

Sam Grimstone responded that there are two key aspects – making savings, and income generation. The brand team are working on how to make NCT’s membership proposition more attractive, and the Partnerships team are working hard on Corporate and Trust fundraising. With regards to whether branches can help – the answer is unequivocally yes! We are also looking at ways to help better support branches with fundraising.
Morwenna Carrington commented that she feels much more confident than in previous years with regards to NCT’s future and congratulated the Executive Team on their robust financial management and clear strategic plan.

Kelly Drake commented that there is a lack of clarity and understanding around membership. Leaflets state that there is no need to become an NCT member, and there is a challenge around presenting NCT as a charity that is accessible for all.

Nick Wilkie responded that the changes to how we sell NCT membership, ensuring we come fully in line with best practice, will have a material cost to the charity. Equally as one of our core goals is to increase our reach into less affluent neighbourhoods the principle of open access to branch events such as bumps and babies is understood and valued.

Bronwen Rashad asked whether members, volunteers and practitioners can have a say in which corporate partnerships NCT deems acceptable.

Nick Wilkie responded that he understood that the question of corporate partnerships is one that has historically and will continue to excite sincerely held disagreements and debate. He felt that social movements such as NCT should be passionate and that not always agreeing isn’t something to run away from. Realistically he felt it would be hard to determine each individual partnership through repeated consultation. However the Trading Company, executive team and Board do work within a clear framework as set out in the commercial activities policy which has benefited from further clarification and dissemination in the past year.

A question was submitted in writing relating to only one copy of NCT Matters being sent per household, i.e. secondary members not receiving a copy.

It was noted that testing around the financial and administrative implications of sending NCT Matters to both primary and secondary members is underway between October – November.

Helen Stephenson offered a huge thank you to Stephanie Darroch, Greg Hall and Maral Mesrobian whose term as Trustees has now ended. Gifts were distributed to each of the outgoing Trustees with a round of applause.

There were no other items of business.

The AGM was formally closed at 10.45am.