



## **Reading Advice Network (RAN) Minutes of the Tenth Annual General Meeting Wednesday 5th November 2025**

### **Attendees:**

Richard Harrison, RAN Chair  
Hazel Wright, RAN Deputy Chair  
Peter Kayes, RAN Treasurer  
Rachel Eden, RAN Trustee  
Francesca Yates, RAN Trustee and CommuniCare  
Tina Stevenson, Citizens Advice Reading  
Su Hamblyn, Launchpad  
Clare Hepburn, Graft  
Mike Edwards, ABC to read  
Helen Warren, Age UK Berkshire  
Alyson Wylding, No 5  
Sophie Choudhry, Reading Students Union Advice Service  
Ruth Pearse, Parenting Special Children  
Matt Taylor, Age UK Reading  
Louise White, Dingley's Promise  
Clarie Lewis, Christian Community Action  
Mark Redfearn, Reading Borough Council  
Lydia Woodage, Reading Borough Council  
Callum Flynn, Compass Recovery College  
Zahra Akhtar, Together UK  
Nagina Batool, Together UK  
Miriam Barry, Olivia Bailey MP's Office  
Annex Leotta, Yuan Yang MP's Office

### **Apologies:**

Rachel Spencer, RVA  
Rhiannon Stocking-Williams, RVA  
Alix Simpson, BWA  
Nick Harborne, Refugee Support Group  
Fiona Price, Age UK Berkshire  
Katherine Shepherd, The Mustard Tree  
Catherine Wade, Red Cross  
Sarah del Tufo, RCLC

George Mathew, Acre  
Janice Haynes, RAN Independent Assessor

The AGM commenced at 9.35.

## **Opening remarks**

Richard Harrison, RAN Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular welcomed the Deputy Mayor of Reading, Councillor Paul Gittings. He then explained that as RAN would be 10 years old next February he would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on RAN's progress to date and how it might develop over the next few years.

RAN grew out of a Big Lottery project which had already run several Advice Forums and begun work on a Quality Standard. It was about to run its 25th Forum, and supporting member organisations to achieve its Quality Standard had become an integral part of its work. Over the past ten years it had gradually developed other activities or services - the CEOs' and HR Groups, the Booklets for Councillors and GPs, and access to the Council's Employee Assistance Programme for members' staff and volunteers - either to meet needs identified by members or to do something that would be of value to Reading more generally.

In the summer three international students on the University of Reading's Masters programme had reviewed RAN's progress - sending questionnaires to members and interviewing a number of the CEOs. Their report had made four main points:

- RAN was generally doing well - members liked what it did and how it did it and wanted it to continue
- But members wanted RAN to involve them more, particularly in the Advice Forums
- RAN needed to strengthen its capacity, to ensure its continuity
- RAN had now developed the potential to have a bigger impact and needed to exploit it.

In October the RAN Trustee Board had met to consider the report. It had concluded it would:

- keep doing what it was doing, unless and until its members said they no longer wanted or needed it
- involve its members more in designing and leading the Advice Forums
- keep its operating structure, but would recruit more trustees to strengthen the Board, and to replace three, including himself, who were planning to stand down in the next two years
- explore various ways in which it might exploit its new potential:
  - Possibly developing and sharing a regular overview of local training opportunities

- Looking for Boards to sit on, or meetings to attend, to represent its members' views and report back to them on developments
- Strengthening its links with the University to promote the advice sector to students as a volunteering opportunity and a possible career
- Publicising its operation in other localities to encourage other 'RANs' to develop.

Richard then invited Francesca Yates to talk about recruiting new Trustees.

Fran drew everyone's attention to the role descriptions for a RAN Trustee and the Chair of Trustees in their AGM papers. She made it clear that there would be work involved, particularly as the Board wanted to exploit RAN's new potential and share its work more evenly between the different Trustees, but that the Board worked flexibly and the workload would be manageable. She urged everyone to read the role descriptions and consider whether they, or someone they knew, could be a good RAN Trustee. It was essential to recruit additional Trustees if RAN was to be able to continue its work.

### **RAN 2023 AGM Minutes**

Richard thanked Fran and then moved to the normal business of the AGM, by introducing the RAN 2024 AGM minutes. The motion that the minutes be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings of the AGM was proposed by Hazel Wright, seconded by Rachel Eden, and carried unanimously.

### **RAN Report and Accounts for 2023-2024**

Peter Kayes introduced the RAN Report and Accounts for 2024-2025. He explained that the accounts were very straightforward since RAN had no staff and was just run by its volunteer trustees. Over the year there had been a marginal increase in total funds to £8504, but these had been at around £8000 for the last few years.

There were no questions. The motion that the Report and Accounts be approved was proposed by Matt Taylor, seconded by Tina Stevenson, and carried unanimously.

### **Election of Trustees**

Richard reminded those present that under the RAN Constitution one third of the Trustee Board had to retire each year but could stand for re-election. This year Andrea Ekpenyong and Rachel Eden were due to retire but both wished to stand for re-election. With the meeting's agreement, he proposed that both nominees be re-elected, and this was carried unanimously.

### **Closing remarks**

Richard then invited the Deputy Mayor of Reading, Councillor Paul Gittings, to give the closing remarks. The Deputy Mayor said that as he was also the Lead

Councillor for Adult Social Care he was well aware of, and very grateful for, the invaluable work that RAN's member organisations did. He praised their resilience and ingenuity, and the deep commitment their staff and volunteers had to the welfare of the people of Reading. Local government funding had been severely restricted in recent years, and without the support provided by the voluntary sector, the Council would have found it much harder to provide the level of services Reading's residents needed.

He said that one of the pleasures of being Deputy Mayor was learning, as he attended different events, about the wonderful work organisations across Reading were doing, which was rarely highlighted and publicly applauded. He was very impressed with what RAN had achieved, particularly as he understood that it was pretty much unique in the UK. He added his support to the campaign to find new Trustees, saying that it would be an awful shame if RAN had to close. He hoped very much that one of his successors would be able to attend RAN's AGM in ten years' time and celebrate its 20th anniversary.

### **Close**

Richard thanked the Deputy Mayor for coming to the AGM and for his kind words about RAN and its member organisations. Before closing the AGM he also thanked his Trustee Board colleagues - Andrea Ekpenyong, Francesca Yates, Hazel Wright, Peter Kayes and Rachel Eden - for their help and support over the past year which had been, as always, invaluable and much appreciated. The members presented applauded them, and Richard, for their work over the year.

The AGM concluded at 09.55