

ST. CATHERINE'S COLLEGE MIDDLE COMMON ROOM OPEN MEETING MINUTES

28 February, 7pm, Zoom

5 mail in votes; 25 MCR members present

Meeting called to order 19:12

ELECTIONS:

IV: the treasurer election is now unopposed so AA can just share a bit about herself.

AA: Been part of the Catz community for 2 years, under the pandemic, nearing the end of the studies, want to contribute to MCR in a larger capacity. Past experience as treasurer for an Oxford Society. President of Oxford Women in Science & Tech.

Unopposed, no objections, Aditi elected as new treasurer

IV: Second election for IT officer

KW: Master's in mathematics; run for IT officer because enjoyed MCR committee events and IT officer is a nice way to give something back and help MCR run smoothly

IV: Any questions?

SS: Can you tell us about IT experience and what you can bring?

KW: pretty good with computers, know programming languages. Did a student job as a systems administrator during undergrad. Main goal is to continue to run IT smoothly. Want to update the committee section of the website to match with the social media.

GO: Catz house has been plagued with problems with wifi speeds. Maybe that can be on your list of things to work with IT?

KW: Will be serving on a college committee concerning IT issues.

IV: Generalized problem so college will be involved. MCR can support.

Unopposed, no objections, Karl elected as IT officer

MOTIONS:

IV: Catz house motions proposed by Gabriel.

GO: Motion 1: Catz house rent reduction. The MCR does have the power to reduce the rent, but want MCR approval to advocate to the college to discuss it further. Several

bases: Catz employs equal rent policy for all students BUT, Catz house has several key disparities from on site accommodation: see table in agenda. Receiving less in terms of facilities, location, student welfare/security issues (unmanned), less access to all the things on site, shared bathrooms vs en suite rooms. Rent reduction is justifiable. Don't want to grade all rooms, just on site vs catz house prices. Hope for MCR to approve the motion to enable committee to take it up with college.

PP: I agree. This is not just an issue for those who live at Catz house, but there is a sep graduate area with very poor rooms (shared bathrooms, poor kitchen). Not sure if students are still housed there this year.

CC: Graduates are not still living in those staircases. 9 and 10 have been repurposed as undergrads. College's stance is equal price across the board, but it's more luck of the draw for grad students. Stronger argument for Catz house as separate building. May be a harder argument for differentials across the on-site accommodation.

PP: MCR members shouldn't be subject to same rules as JCR members

CS: Is there a way of improving overall condition at Catz House than looking for a way to reduce rent?

GO: College does promise things, but don't want to muddy the waters with adding in Staircase 9 and 10. They are on site so have those added benefits. If it is not up to standard, the proposition to college would be to refurbish it. If you changed superficial elements of Catz house, you can't change the fact that it's a different site, which would be the principal argument for rent reductions.

IV: They are trying to improve the situation by building common rooms. College did not say anything about enhancing security.

EL: Can add on, but en suite bathrooms, etc, cannot be fixed. Inherently cannot be improved on.

TH: Would be a greater expense to college to bring up security to standard vs giving rent reductions. Most effective, plausible solution (and likely the cheapest).

CC: the issue is that College has been aware of the problems and has claimed they are doing things. But nothing has changed. College is instead delaying taking action that is expensive.

TH: There are things outside of the college's control: evident that there are certain neighborhood conditions near Catz house. College really cannot make up for that in any other way that to reduce rent.

FC: Another point in support of the motion: no mail service, no printer, no libraries

Poll & 5 email votes in favour; Motion passed with majority in favour

IV: second motion about 2nd year grad students

GO: the proposal is to give 2nd year grad students who have been at Catz house priority in on-site accommodation (temporary exception to current policy for this academic year

only). Lack of connections/ social opportunities more keenly felt by those off of college site. Proposal to take to SLC to ask college to make this exception

NW: Wanted to ask what about students who didn't get any college accommodation at all, as opposed to those who had a year in Catz house.

GO: if you found private already, more likely to have already found a group of people to find a place to move to. Household bubbles have been only sources of socialization.

Poll & email votes in favour; Motion passed with majority in favour

IV: Third motion

GO: Rent a bike scheme. Something that came up in Catz house survey—idea to have college bikes to rent with priority to students living at Catz house or off site. Some sort of subsidies. Initial proposal to have something like the graduate expenses fund? Better idea is that college buys a number of bikes for rental income. Bikes more easily available to students.

CJ: Wondering if anyone knows if other colleges do something similar? Could support a proposal to the college.

EB: Colleges tend to promote ways to buy bikes and external rental from existing policies. Advertise bikes from leavers to incoming freshers—a readily available source of bikes in Oxford. Maybe making sure that that info is readily accessible within the MCR? It is super easy. Do we have a Catz bike rep? talk about how to get and maintain a bike, with shared maintenance tools—college pays for supplies.

CC: Not aware of a scheme like that being run by Catz. Once per year they do a bike cleanse, and then open it up to grab. Mainly run by the JCR, advertised and prioritized to be JCR. No info is published during freshers week.

EB: most colleges don't do this due to safety/liability issues. They might think worst case scenario. Could get funding to run through the MCR, but not from the college directly so they can be hands off.

TH: MCR would have to run it probably—scheme like you are able to get a small amount of money from the college to buy a bike, then rented or given to someone—a deposit scheme to ensure interest in keeping the bike in good condition.

GO: mostly a discussion, motion to bring it to college in some form. Funding would be good.

TH: More grad students are here for a year, so a short lease scheme makes more sense for the college

PP: a few bike giveaways last year. People have had bikes stolen, so they are asking about a college bike giveaway. Lodge manager is responsible so would be helpful.

TH: tool kit in the lodge that isn't advertised.

AS: a bike cull will not likely happen this year because the undergrads aren't here to reclaim their bikes. Maybe next term when people return, but would be unfair for college to do that.

SS: on the website, we could put more info and advice; facilitate exchanges, selling the bike on (the MCR could help people pass their bikes along)

GO: is it worth advertising for a bike rep to step forward to deal with this?

CC: not a bad idea. But, we do already struggle to fill most committee positions. Would have to find someone who is here in September. May not be able to keep it regularly. Support more info. Finding out who is leaving, who has a bike to give to MCR to pass down to a future fresher. (as well as advice as to how to judge if a bike is any good)

CC: the motion as it stands has changed from its original proposal. Petition college to extend tool kit and advertise it. The rest would be something we organize within the MCR. Voting what we want to ask college—a tool kit. Could do that without MCR approval

Living wage motion:

EL: See Cherwell article. Catz found to not be paying staff living wage. Not sure if workers are casual vs formal workers. College has not given a formal comment to journalist. We want to get a formal comment from college about who these workers are and how many staff there are. Ask college to respond. Then given their response, pressure college. College should not be able to say “cost will be borne by students in their fees”.

IV: have there been any dialogues within the other colleges that are listed

EL: don't think so. Pretty sure that other JCRs may be proposing motions.

IV: if the motion passes, we could have some more transparency and then begin a collective movement

EB: where did the author get their info from/ source?

EL: freedom of info request. The questions may not have been drafted very precisely. Still a good idea to approach College for a more formal compressive response

EB: has college ever made a commitment to paying living wage? Student employees for example. Would an angle to approach college be talking about students?

M: the university doesn't want students to support themselves through work, so may not be the strongest argument.

PP: the university has specific requirements on international students on proving you have enough money to complete studies.

AS: That's not relevant. It's more based on the fact that people need a living wage, workers are workers

TH: want to be sure we do get all the info clearly. Looking at furloughed workers, the breakdown might show they have below living wage payments. Need to be very careful about the nature of the argument and we have all the details.

CC: The motion is to enquire of the college about more details about the workers not being paid the wage. If it turns out they are doing nothing wrong, we can move on. Next moves depend on what is discovered.

EL: From what I know from the article/author—Catz has not responded to approaches for clarification yet.

Poll & email votes in favour; Motion passed with majority in favour

UPDATES:

IV: compensation proposal: we have drafted a proposal with the JCR jointly to suggest for the about 2 weeks + extra days (16 days total) there is compensation relative to the disruption suffered: moving (15%), heating/water problems (22.5%), moved + problem (30%) compensation on the rent over that period. Submitted to finance bursar and it was suggested to finance committee this past week. Waiting to hear back on whether it has been suggested.

CC: any questions about the proposal?

IV: if no one has anything else to add, new updates on selection of a charity. It has been brought to our attention that there is some money raised from previous mcrcs. Suggestion that the MCR should select a charity to invest this money. Open suggestions to mcr about charities

CC: the idea would be we are opening an official call for nominations that the mcr can vote on. Up to the MCR to vote for the charity to support for the year. Choose one every year. We currently don't have any that we support. This money was raised for something related to Refugee Scholarships. We don't actually know what it was meant to go towards. Would be great to support a charity that deals with refugee issues, add that money to what charities we are supporting

TH: effective use of the money as a raffle instead of straight up giving to the charity—using it to generate more money

CS: the Oxford Hub is a local charity that might be nice to support. Supports various groups and local residents of oxford. Runs eco friendly shops, comprehensive, helps with different communities in oxford—students, enterprise incubator, etc...

LB: like the idea to multiply the money that we have to give and have it double as an event the MCR puts on.

SS: also supports

IV: discussion of movie night tech has been postponed

AOB:

AA: motion proposed about international students unable to go home at Christmas, but had to go home in January. College has not extended rent waiver to those students who vacated after the 4th of Jan even though it was due to the pandemic. "because you chose to go" you should pay rent.

CC: Have people contacted college and has the waiver been refused.

AA: College didn't get back for months. Then said we give you permission to come back and you have to pay the rent. Completely vacated room but still asked to pay.

CC: Left for coronavirus reasons?

AA: College was late in getting back to us in what to do. Dept informed that it was closing. College library had not said they were opening. Did not want to live in college alone, so moved in with friend for mental health reasons. Not sure why Edward left.

CC: College has said that everyone who left college when lockdown was announced will be considered on a case by case basis. College is aware that there are many reasons people might have left. The problem is that many chose to come back but not in college accommodation

AA: asking that current waiver through hilary; not going forward.

CC: I support your motion. But we have to word carefully who fits in your description.

AA: college didn't get back at all. Told there was one student who came back and then later chose to leave when things got worse. Because it is case-by-case, not clear what benefits are extended to whom.

CC: we just need to be clear about which students we are considering.

IV: students who cannot return?

CC: the difference is the students who chose to leave after the Jan 4 deadline

AA: I know this won't make a difference; college is very concerned about money

CC: unfortunately, it is business and that is where they are coming from. Lack of transparency of the impact of finances on college. But there is a category that should have a rent waiver, so may be worth bringing up the point.

Poll: Motion passed with majority in favour