

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

Sunday June 4th, 2023, 7 pm, Ainsworth Graduate Center Top Floor

Committee Members Present:

Co-President: Felice Wallner

Co-President: Jeremy Sontchi

Secretary: Laurence Peinturier

Treasurer: Maximilian Langefeld

Social Secretary: Katy Degtiareva

Digital Officer: Arunima Cheruvathoor

Assistant Bar Manager: Hannah Geddes

Academic Officer: Joanna Kramer

LGBTQIA+ Welfare Rep: Sunny Pydugadu

Environmental Rep: William Walker

Minutes taken by Laurence Peinturier

A. AGENDA

1. Approval of minutes from previous meeting

Meeting of May 24: <https://mcr.stcatz.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Extraordinary-Open-Meeting-Minutes-24-05-2023-3.pdf>

Minutes approved.

2. Updates from MCR Committee

1. *Catz MCR Garden Party*

- Katy: June 18th, dress code: flowers. Lots of entertainment, drinks, food planned! Tickets are out now!

2. *Updates on Gym Equipment*

- Felice: New equipment to be purchased soon, and safety checks twice a year from now on.

3. MCR Freshers Week Committee Elections

- Felice: This is not something that was done last year. Catz is built mostly on one year master students, so it is usually hard to keep students to take care of freshers week. A good compromise we found is to create a freshers week committee for students staying next year to get a taste of committee or just get involved for a week. It is NOT an official committee role. You would not have access to email etc.

1. *Freshers Social Secretary*

Vivek Kothari

Seconders: Paul Schmitt and Mirbek Sydygaliev

Discussion:

- Vivek: I have a lot of experience in college, I served as social sec, and president of the MCR. Freshers week is special, it is the first week where you have when new students come in. Students are very new to this whole Oxford experience. What we should do is make sure students are aware of how to find the information. If we could find a mechanism to ensure students know where to find info (example: guest dinners), it would be great. Second, you want to make sure students are comfortable with this new experience. And lastly, freshers week is about giving them the sense of community/culture. Making sure we can address any issues and making sure we can direct people to the right things. One thing I will do as a social sec is making sure freshers week is inclusive. Maybe some people do not want to go to BOPs etc.
- Katy: suggestion: it would be really nice to engage catz house people during freshers week.
- Vivek: Indeed, there is a great diversity in students' location. We need to make sure that events are accessible to all these people. It is a good thing that now catz house has a common room. Something we can do for example is locate the pub crawl more around Cowley.
- Isavella: Can you give us an indication of the events you want to plan?
- Vivek: I will try to do both (BOPs and non-drinking events). Generally, in freshers week, we have 2-3 bops, biggest one being sexy sub fusc. I will try to make sure catz can get ticket to that. I have very good relationships with people from different college for BOPS. On the other hand, we can introduce art activities during nighttime for example. And a mixology class during that week would be great. Also, we can aim at increasing connections among colleges. We could also have board games night at catz house. And something we can do is try to get some events during early mornings.
- Jeremy: the college gives us a schedule where we are allowed to organize events; so that freshers week does not interfere with departmental events. So we will have to organize the schedule around this.
- Vivek: Also, we can send out tips to freshers for things that are more related to day-to-day life (banks, shops etc). And when freshers week ends, we can make sure we keep the momentum and ensure students are ready to explore.

- Felice: this is stuff we have already included. Welfare brunch is an example; it is a way to end the freshers week and kick off the start of the year.
- Isavella: also, you don't have to put too much pressure on yourself.
- Jeremy: how do you see your time commitment for that week?
- Vivek: planning session in July/august: full disclosure, I might have to leave the country in July for a few weeks. But I am happy to join via teams etc. I plan to be back around August hopefully.
- Felice: theoretically timetable must be sent by July. We can send a draft of the timetable in July, but they don't send it out before September. August is relaxed but freshers week is pretty much 8 hours a day.
- Felice: Lots of what you mentioned seemed more like welfare/academic stuff etc. Social sec is being able to stay up late for BOPs for example. Are you ready for that?
- Vivek: Yes.

2. Freshers Bar Manager

Juan Sandoval-Valencia

Seconders: Paula Dornbusch and Hannah Geddes

Discussion:

- Juan: I really like Catz, getting to know other people etc. Freshers week was really fun for me so I want to do something nice as a way to give back. Hard for me to get time during the day but I will be available at night for the bar. I will be behind the bar, I love meeting people, I will try to be creative with drinks; I love mixology.
- Illia: Drinking culture can be irresponsible. How will you make sure consumption of alcohol remains responsible?
- Juan: No free alcohol for that week for sure. I agree with you, we can have that in mind when deciding drinking events. Also make sure we have more variety in drinks to reduce alcohol consumption. Cocktails that are less dosed for example. I would not promise there would be any incidents but as a committee, we can talk about strategies on how to prevent this.
- Felice: Do you feel you would be successful in making a Catz MCR drink that stays in people's minds?
 - Juan: We can have a collection of 5 drinks. Also at the beginning of year, we can do an inventory of the bar to ensure smooth transition for future bar managers. We can have an excel sheet or something so that if a bar officer runs out of something, they can write it down.
- Vivek: Do you know many nonalcoholic alternatives? Do you have any experiences with mocktails?
- Juan: not really, but I can learn.

The votes were counted by secret ballot by Laurence Peinturier and Felice Wallner, online. Both candidates have been elected with a majority.

4. Motion: Rent increases in College accommodation for the 23/24 academic year

Motion proposed by: Felice Wallner (MCR Co-President)

Motion seconded by: Jeremy Sontchi (MCR Co-President)

Discussion:

- Jeremy: I have handed out an early draft version of the letter we will be voting on today to be sent to the governing body. This is not the final version.
- Felice: *reads the motion* (refer to agenda for details)
- Jeremy: Basically, rent will be around 800 a month next year.
- Felice: It is also a welfare matter because students will have to budget differently, which will impact their welfare life. That is why we are also bringing it up to the Dean.
- Jeremy: The academic exchange that happens in College, meeting with fellows, going to guest dinner, it is what makes the college special, and what benefits our academic development.
- Felice: What we are specifically proposing:
 - o We sent out a survey, we had a great number of answers. We submitted those responses to the finance committee and we mentioned them in the letter aimed at governing body. So, we are not really voting on this per se.
 - o Second thing is the letter. Governing body is approving budget during week 8. Letter will be brought up then. FYI MCR/JCR presidents do not have power to vote at the governing body meeting, but we can influence the decision. Our proposal is cap rent increase at 5.5%.
- Jeremy: There is calculation sbehind this. Rent proposed increase would take same proportion as UKRI stipend increase.
- Hannah: Also rent is only for 9 months, not even 12 months.
- Jeremy: Thanks, we'll add this to the letter.
- Jonas: JCR will ask for 3% increase in rent, FYI.
- Jonas: What the JCR is doing, is adding an appendix to the MCR; basically, we agree with the MCR's points, and something we are adding is that for most places you don't pay for maintenance, so we are arguing why are we paying for maintenance.
- Isavella: Did you guys have polls as well?
- Jonas: Yes.
- Felice: I took their form and adapted it, but idea remains the same so that it aligns.
- Jeremy: Something that might happen is that College agrees with us but say that they can't do anything about it.

- Felice: So then the proposal is a rent strike. This is a little contentious especially that most of us are outgoing students. Question is: when do we say we go for rent strike? What % rent increase do we decide as the limit to rent strike?
- Jeremy: Do we basically rent strike starting at 5.5%? Above?
- Illia: Can you please detail what the rent strike would entail?
- Felice: We would not want you to move out or anything.
- Arunima: Also, if you don't pay on time, you get interest. And, if you are an international student, this can be dangerous.
- Jeremy: Technically if you don't pay your battels, you don't get your degree.
- Felice: One of the main concerns for now is safety of the rent strike.
- Felice: The idea right now is that if we vote for the rent strike, we explain the situation to the freshers and incoming committee, and ask them if they want to rent strike or not.
- Vivek: I am just not sure how effective/not effective it is to vote right now for a decision that will impact incoming students.
- Jeremy: We are voting for the committee who will be here at the beginning of next year to tell future people that they can rent strike.
- Adam: By voting now, we are preventing the committee to do anything about it.
- Joanna: Does the MCR get the names of incoming freshers?
- Felice: No, we can't get the names before they actually arrive.
- Nora: Even if we encourage students to go on rent strike, individuals are not obligated to do it right?
- Jeremy: No of course not. The purpose of this is to threat with a rent strike. But we don't want that.
- Paula: Is that happening in other colleges?
- Felice: Wadham is already striking at the moment.
- Jeremy: Catz has increased rent more than other colleges did for next year.
- Paula: I think all this is very important information for freshers.
- Isavella: What are the alternative options?
- Felice: The only one we have been talking about is rent strike. Also, JCR is going with rent strike as well.
- Jonas: JCR agreed on rent strike, but in the meantime, I am also reaching out to students' newspaper to show the situation (if it comes to that point).
- Illia: Question for JCR: was the decision to go for rent strike based on the 3% limit?
- Jonas: The details of our rent strike will not be decided before governing body meeting.

- Jeremy: Honestly, any reduction will be considered as a huge win. Because up until now, College has always rejected proposals.
- Vivek: University of Manchester has also rent strike, they dragged students out of the building.
- Katy: Consideration about welfare: college will mention hardship fund.
- Jeremy/Laurence: it's in the letter already.
- Felice: We will also be asking college to put up more information about hardship fund during week 0 because people don't seem to be aware of it or feel like they would be rejected (according to survey).
- Hannah: If the media comes before rent strike, is there collaboration between colleges? Because media may not really care about individual colleges but more about oxford uni as whole.
- Jeremy: There has not been discussion among colleges yet I believe.
- Joanna: Is there anything current students can do? Protest?
- Felice: Governing body meeting is during Week 8, we can definitely discuss an option to protest then. Maybe silent protest.
- Felice: Also, the room has a massive window, people can stand in front of that window for example.

Votes:

- Write a letter to the Master and Dean of the college to bring the students' perspective to their attention and raise concerns for students' welfare in light of price increases and the alienation of less well-funded students from main site.

Motion called to vote: passed unanimously.

- Bring in a formal plea at Governing Body of Week 8, requesting the Finance Committee to propose a new budget that reflects only a 5.5% increase in rent for accommodation.

Motion called to vote: passed unanimously.

- Vote for protesting as suggest by Joanna: we vote on organizing a form of protest during governing body meeting – details to be discussed so that exam revision are not affected.

Motion called to vote: passed unanimously.

- Propose student action in Michaelmas Term 2023 to the incoming MCR committee, should college not agree to renegotiate the terms of rent and respond with a new budget that better reflects the financial means of the postgraduate Oxford student. This will be done in coordination with the JCR. If it's rejected but a lower value is proposed, details can be further discussed.

Motion called to vote: passed with a majority (22 for, 1 against, 1 abstain)