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**Muswell Hill Synagogue Chairs Update 2019**

Over the last year, we have been working to implement the strategy laid out at last year’s AGM. This paper shows the progress made against each plan or where relevant if progress still needs to be made.

In summary – the main areas of success for 2018-19 have been:

* Development of our events under our events coordinator, Beth Franks
* Launch of Top of the Hill as a midweek activity for members
* Engagement of new members in setting up events such as Burns Night

Main areas for further development in 2019-20

* Moving the building project forward
* Continuing to engage new volunteers to support the community in security, welfare and social action projects.
* Developing more activity on Shabbat including for young families and better engagement with children.

**Policies and Procedures**

As the community has grown over recent years we identified a need to move away from an informal system based on people just knowing how things work and relying on information being passed on through members, to a more formal system of written policies and pathways.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will set up a shared cloud based community calendar for key staff and the exec to access. | This is still being explored. A system is now being trialled where all staff including our caretakers, event coordinator, Rabbi, administrator and youth director meet at least once a month to make sure all are in the loop of plans. |
| We will explore whether there are other areas that would benefit from a written procedure. | A policy on eco matters and single use plastics is being explored. |
| We will ensure that all policies are shared with the community to allow for openness and transparency. | We have continued to use Ethos emails and the blog on the website to update the community. |

**Membership**

Membership has continued to grow and is now at 719. We have had 28 new members since the last AGM and have lost 10 members, 5 of whom sadly passed away, 4 transferred to other US shuls and 1 switched to Reform. Our current membership continues to be a majority of under 60s and breaks down as follows.

20-40:   68

[40-60](tel:40-60%20357): 357

[60-80](tel:60-80%20208): 208

80- plus: 86

This strategy has been concerned however, with not just membership numbers, but with positively engaging more members to be involved in whatever part of communal life they connect with. A big success has been the engagement of newer members who are now very active in running various parts of communal life.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We are exploring solutions for fairer allocation of seating for all members, there will be a full consultation with the community before any solutions are formalised. | A request for thoughts on this matter was sent out last year to the community which led to around 60 responses which were split 50/50 on opinions on the matter, with some members feeling very strongly that they would like to retain their allocated seat and others expressing opinions that they wish to see a new system. The board has discussed this extensively and is trying to find a way to ensure that those who want to retain their seats can whilst also allowing all members who want a seat the opportunity to have one. |
| We will actively promote the community both internally (through better communication with current members) and externally by keeping the web site as up to date as possible and utilising social media channels. | The new events email seems to have been well received, reflected in the good level of attendance at many events. Our Facebook Page is also used by our Community Events Coordinator to update the community. The website is kept up to date and also used to keep members informed of news. |
| We will continue to find ways to engage as many current members as possible through initiatives such as the Volunteers Shabbat and social action projects. | We are exploring another date for a Volunteers Shabbat and the synagogue council has just started a piece of work to attempt to make sure communications are clear as to what volunteer roles are available and how members can take them on. |
| We will roll out our new pathway to involve new members and continue to evaluate if it can be improved or built on. | All new members now receive a personalised email from the Chair to welcome them. Our administrator follows the pathway for each of them to make sure the process of welcoming them is robust it is clear that they have been made aware of how to get involved in community life. We are also exploring a buddy system and how to better make new members feel welcomed. |

**Finances**

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| To formalise our fundraising for the building once we have the final costing and plans and to continue to keep the community in the loop of the progress made towards reaching a total. | All members of the community have now been invited to a meeting to discuss the plans for the building project and contribute to the funds. £500,000 has now been pledged |

**Synagogue Building Project:**

Our building committee led by Co Vice Chairs, Greg Swimer and Marc Rubinstein continue to work hard to assimilate feedback from the community and input from the United Synagogue and to work with the professional team to see how these can be incorporated into the project plans.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will continue to refine the ideas further until they form a single, fully costed, coherent and detailed plan that can be presented to the community and United Synagogue for approval.  This plan will be informed by:   * Our Community Vision and Purpose * The seven ideas developed by the Board in 2016 (see para 2 above) * The five principles that resulted from the 2017 consultation (see bullets above) * Level of affordability commensurate with expected donations and shul finances | A first iteration of the plan including detailed costings was unveiled at a community wide meeting in July. Over the past year, there has been a series of meetings with community members to discuss this plan. The majority of feedback has been positive with some useful ideas coming from the meetings and a good start to the fundraising, currently at £500,000 from 40 donors. The plan incorporating more feedback from the meetings is now being costed. |

**Religious Life**

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| There is strong support for the continuation of the Shabbat on the Hill initiative, both as a way to enhance the Shabbat morning religious services and as an element in our adult education programme. | This has been an ongoing part of our community offering with various interesting speakers throughout the year. |
| Other ways will be explored to engage more people in the service, through other events such as alternative services, discussion groups or other Shabbat morning activity.  This will be looked at in conjunction with proposals for Rosh Hashanah 2018 to use the Rose and Harry Epstein Hall for more of the morning for learning activities or interactive services to ease the pressure on seating in the shul. | An alternative service led by the Rabbi and Stephen Frosh was trialled successfully at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This worked to ease the pressure on seating over the chagim. It hasn’t been further explored for Shabbat mornings, but continues to be an idea for future development.  The Rabbi is now exploring the introduction of a young families guided (explanatory) service during Shabbat on a children services slot (once a term). |
| The children’s services need constant attention to make them engaging and interesting for young people and hopefully an experience they enjoy. There will be ongoing work to encourage more people to get involved in volunteering to run them. | The service for older children has been relaunched as a monthly Shabbat Club under the leadership of Yeva Robinson. She will now be taking over from Hela Shamash who has done a great job over the past few years running activities for young children. The children’s services group are now exploring various new initiatives including:   * training for children service leaders, * using and training 6th formers to help with the services, * using the Rabbi more in children services * looking at other activities on a Shabbat such as a tefillah club. |
| Improving the experience of religious services for women is a priority for the community (see below). |  |

**Women in the Community**

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will continue to develop the women’s services and explore more ways for women to be involved in services. The hope is that the guide being developed for families planning a women’s service will lower the barrier of entry to this activity and make it something more families can choose if they wish to | The guide has been completed and launched at a meeting for parents of girls having a Batmitzvah in 2019/20. |
| We will initiate a programme for women to give a sermon/dvar Torah on certain Shabbat weeks to increase the involvement from women in the service. | This was launched and has included some very well received speakers including younger women such as Leah Brodkin. Helen Style is very keen to hear from other women who would like to take part. |
| We will explore ways to make the downstairs women’s area more appropriately sized for the amount of women who wish to sit there. We are exploring the development of a smaller but permanent area as an inclusive space for those who actively prefer to sit downstairs or who are not able to access the upstairs area. | This is included as part of the building project and there will be no further action on this until that time. The area continues to be used for approximately 10 occasions a year with varying success. On some weeks very few women sit there, but it has been noted that on weeks when there is wide awareness of the area, with announcements on email and in shul, the peak amount of women choosing to sit there has been around 20. |

**Education and Communal Activities**

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will continue exploring how we best communicate to members. A working group has been set up to look at how we communicate and who we communicate to. | This is ongoing work and needs more focus in 2019-20 |
| Digital tools will be explored as a way to engage with new audiences who may not want to come out to a talk during the week but may want to engage in bite sized learning experiences. | The Rabbi has been developing short messages on Whattsap as a learning tool. He has had a good response to this from members. |
| New social events such as a Film Club and Bridge Club are being explored. These have been initiated by our Community Events Director with the aim of community members taking them forward and running with them in the longer term. | These events both ran briefly but have now been superseded by other events such as Top of the Hill afternoon events. |
| We will run more Friday night dinners which are a popular way for the community to meet up. | We have held two successful Friday Night dinners with attendances of xx and xx |
| We will continue to develop other ways to engage more people in setting up and running whatever activities they are passionate about. | Through our community events coordinator 25 events have been arranged since last AGM.  Events have attracted attendances of between 20 and 120  456 individual people have attended at least one event. |
| We will set up groups of members to develop events for festivals and other calendar moments. | Our community events coordinator has taken on most of the work on setting up events. For next year we are keen to make sure members are engaged in this process through an events steering group to advise and work with Beth |
| We will develop support mechanisms to help community members set up events. | This is dealt with through our community events coordinator |
| We will explore whether there is a demand to offer more to retired members of the community | We explored this with a very well attended pilot meeting in 2018. This resulted in a committee being set up and 12 meetings have now been held. Attendance has ranged from 18-43 with 99 people in total attending at least one meeting. We hope to see this continue to flourish and develop in 2019-20 |

**Children and Youth**

This area has been well managed by Samantha Blendis and Yeva Robinson. Sam is Josh’s line manager and works with the cheder. Yeva looks after children’s activity in shul both children services and festival events.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will explore more ways to engage teenagers in the community as young leaders, including involving them in running activities for younger people in the community and at chagim. | This launched in 2018-19 and has been very successful with a group of young people now effectively running the R-club. |
| We will develop a more joined up approach to young people in our community, looking at cheder, youth and younger children as one strategic piece. | This year Josh Gaventa has had a combined role as Community Education Director and in this role has managed cheder, the Bar-Bat mitzvah classes and the more general activities for young people in the community. This has allowed a more joined up approach which we intend to build on over the next year.. |
| We will explore new ways to engage with young people for whom there is currently little offering – eg those in years 3-6 of primary school | Josh Gaventa is taking on more hours in 2019-20 to allow him time to develop more programmes for children throughout the year including Shabbat, calendar events and other more general programmes. |

**Welfare**

This area of work has been managed by Melinda Shaw, who is working with our part time welfare coordinator, Beverley Giessing to ensure as many members who need it are supported at difficult times with visits, lifts or food.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| We will have a more proactive role in contacting the community to discover where more help is needed. | We have extended the hours of our welfare coordinator to allow for more of this proactive work. She is now regularly in need with members of the community who need help. Calls are made at Rosh Hashanah and Pesach to proactively discover where more help is needed. She is reliant on a relatively small pool of volunteers to react to calls for help with shopping, visiting etc and more would be appreciated. |
| We will develop a closer relationship with professional communal welfare organisations such as Jewish Care or Jami and to signpost to these organisations when needed. | Our welfare coordinator Beverley has been actively working on developing these links and signposting members when needed. |
| We will continue to explore new ways to engage more volunteers, particularly as befrienders which is always a more challenging volunteer role to fill. | Engagement of volunteers has been a challenge over the past year as more opportunities arise, current volunteers are stretched. This will be an ongoing focus for 2019/20. |

**Social Action and Interfaith work**

This is an area MHS prides itself on. Our Winter Shelter ran successfully again for the second year under the excellent leadership of Anna Lawton. A new development for 2019 has been led by Judith Devons, working towards making our synagogue more eco friendly under the eco-synagogue banner. This includes initiatives such as trying to cut down on single use plastic and to recycle where possible.

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| **Proposal in 2018 strategy** | **Action** |
| Muswell Hill aims to position itself as a leader within the US community in the field of social action and interfaith work and we will continue to explore and develop new projects in this area in partnership with external charities and the US Chesed team. | The US approached MHS for advice when setting up the asylum seekers centre now held in Hendon and Woodford and continues to work with us on developing initiatives. |
| We will explore how to build this into our communications plans to ensure that potential new members are aware of this unique part of MHS’s offering. | New members are made aware of this in the welcome email they are sent from the Chair. |
| We are aware that although the Civic service is incredible well run and popular with those who come, it does not attract a large cross section of the community. We are exploring how to develop and improve the Civic Service to engage more members including younger members. | Ongoing for 2019- 20 |

Thanks as ever must go to all the people who work so hard towards all of this activity. The Vice Chairs, Greg Swimer and Marc Rubenstein have worked tirelessly to lead our building project, listen to the community and liaise with our building professionals and the US as well as fundraising for the project. Sam Clarke as ever keeps us all on budget and has a talent for finding money needed for all the activity in the community. The wardens work continuously to make sure services run smoothly and effectively. Special thanks must go to Mark Shenfield who is standing down this year and has been a very important member of the H.O team. Board members are all engaged in their own areas and their time and commitment is hugely appreciated. The Rabbi is a huge part of the success of our community continually driving new ideas, finding members to lead on projects and generally connecting people with the community in whatever ways he can. Thank you to all of them for all they do.

**Karen Ackerman April 2019**