

Chair's report on Council meeting of 25 April 2008

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Susannah Cox
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Jackie Gunn
Adebayo Olukoshi
Angela Sealey
Richard Taylor
Stan Thekaekara

Corporate Management and Staff

Barbara Stocking (Director)
John Shaw (Finance & Information Services Director)
Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director)
Penny Lawrence (International Director)
Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director)
Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising & Supporter Marketing Director)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

David McCullough (Trading Director) was unable to attend Council since he was attending the funeral of David Williamson, Managing Director of Matthew Algie. Trustees expressed their condolences.

This was the second meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2007/08 and took place in Oxford.

1. Before the main Council meeting, trustees had a discussion with Barbara Stocking, Phil Bloomer and Penny Lawrence on Oxfam's relations with governments and other civil society organisations – both in the UK and internationally.
2. The Director gave an update on recent events. These included:-
 - *Zimbabwe*. Barbara Stocking gave details of Oxfam's request together with other agencies for humanitarian space in Zimbabwe. Work was taking place with partners in South Africa and Zambia, with a large number of people in receipt of food aid plus water and sanitation.
 - *Food prices*. Council reflected on the current escalation in food prices and its effect on the countries where Oxfam worked. This was a key issue in terms of poor people, and would be analysed in greater depth at the July Council meeting.
3. Trustees considered a number of issues which were coming up at forthcoming meetings of the Oxfam International Executive Directors and the Oxfam International Board. These included rules around use of the name 'Oxfam', and ongoing discussions on growth and governance in the Oxfam family. Feedback on this discussion would be given to Oxfam International.
4. The Honorary Treasurer introduced a number of papers and policies which had been discussed at the Trustee Audit and Finance Group earlier in the month. Council then agreed the updated investment policy, the updated reserves policy, and a proposed change to the financial year end (if all Oxfam International affiliates signed up to this). Council also noted the results of a recent survey of the Trustee Audit and Finance Group, and expressed appreciation for the group's input to Council discussions.

5. Council approved the 2008/09 annual plan (i.e. the objectives and the budget). Barbara Stocking advised that contingency plans were in place to address spend in order to minimise the impact on programme or reserves from any economic downturn; again this would be analysed in greater depth at the July Council meeting. The objectives also identified the need for Oxfam to input to a more public debate on poverty.
6. In tandem with the annual plan, Council considered and approved the organisational risk register – with the incorporation of some minor changes. A more substantive discussion on risk is scheduled for Council in April 2009 as part of a three year rolling cycle.
7. Cathy Ferrier (Supporter Marketing Director) presented an initial paper on a possible group via which Oxfam could engage with high value individual donors. A number of suggestions were made, and a more detailed paper will come to Council in July 2008.
8. Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director) presented the outline conclusions of the recent staff survey prior to a strategic review session in July on the development of Oxfam staff and volunteers. This gave a generally healthy picture, with a couple of areas for further analysis or improvement. It was noted that Oxfam had featured as one of the top 100 British employers in a recent survey in 'The Guardian'.
9. John Shaw (Finance and Information Services Director) introduced the Company Secretary's annual report on the trustee code of conduct, which was approved.
10. Finally Council approved a policy on compliance with counter-terrorism regulations. Trustees accepted that this was necessary to protect Oxfam in some very difficult situations and to comply with funding criteria from certain institutions. The policy will be reviewed again in April 2009.

The meeting closed with an evaluation to inform future meetings and agenda planning.

John Gaventa
Chair