

THE MACFARLANE TRUST

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 26 October 2015

Private and Confidential

PART B

795.15 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

796.15 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

797.15 Beneficiary cases

- i) The board reviewed the case of a primary beneficiary, to whom the organisation had originally awarded a grant and loan in March 2014 to assist with significant debts. There had been many difficulties in securing the engagement of the beneficiary throughout the process, and the beneficiary's relationship with Pennysmart, the money management advisers, had broken down in the summer of 2014. In February 2015, the Grants Committee had placed a time limit on the offer, subject to the beneficiary engaging with a new debt advice agency. Since March 2015, there had been no further progress.

Given the amount of time that had passed without any progress or even updates on the case, the board agreed to withdraw the offer of the loan and the grant. This would not preclude the beneficiary for applying assistance with debt in the future, but any future requests would be treated as new applications and considered as such; they would also need to be accompanied by a report from a qualified debt adviser and up to date information on the level of any debt.

- ii) The board considered an appeal from a couple, both primary beneficiaries, in relation to their discretionary top up payments. The female primary beneficiary had been in receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) for some years. SDA was now being replaced with ESA, which SDA recipients were gradually being asked to apply for. The beneficiaries discussed the move to the new benefit with Neil Bateman, and in spite of his strong belief that the beneficiary would qualify for ESA, they decided that she would not apply for it.

JB advised that when calculating discretionary top up payments, in cases where beneficiaries are eligible for a benefit but are choosing not to apply for it, the office calculated household income as if that benefit were included. In doing so in this case, it had meant that the level of top up payments had not increased. The beneficiaries were contesting this.

Following discussion, the board agreed that the principle of MFT not acting as a substitute for statutory support where it was available should continue to apply. The appeal was therefore declined.

- iii) The board received the latest exchange of letters from August 2015 between MFT and the infected widow who had previously asked for her loan of £113,000 to be written off/transferred to another property. The latest letter was from MFT's lawyers to the beneficiary's lawyers on 25 August 2015, to which no reply had been received.

798.15 HR matters

Further to her email of 23 October 2015, JB briefed the board in more detail regarding the dismissal of the Director of Finance, GRO-C, the previous week.

799.15 Any other confidential business

There was no other confidential business.

Additional information relating to minute 790.15 – Political Developments

RE and JB expanded on the information given to board members in Part A.

RE reported that he and JB, together with the two Chairs of the other Alliance House entities, had met with the Minister on 21 October 2015. The Minister had thanked everyone for what they were doing. RE had said that MFT trustees would appreciate this acknowledgement to them in writing. With regard to future arrangements, the Minister had said that she understood that it was a complex area and that the views of campaigners were not representative of the wider beneficiary community. She had said that they were looking to reduce the number of entities, but there was no clear idea yet as to what this would look like. She had also confirmed that making management cost savings had never been the aim of any rationalisation of the organisations, and she had recognised that any savings would be relatively small. She had advised that it was still the intention to launch a consultation before the end of 2015, but that existing arrangements would be likely to continue into 2016/17. She had said that they were very keen on hearing further ideas about what non-financial support could be provided to beneficiaries; it had been agreed to discuss this further with DH officials.

The Minister had also raised the issue of a potential additional "winter fuel payment" or "interim payment". JB explained to the board that Shona Robison, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary, had written to the Minister suggesting that some of the £25 million announced by David Cameron in his March statement to the House of Commons should be distributed by way of an increased winter fuel payment to Caxton Foundation beneficiaries. JB advised that Scotland directly allocated funding to Caxton, as Caxton had been established post-devolution. The same does not happen for MFT and Eileen Trust, and therefore the Cabinet Secretary had not been able to make a direct recommendation regarding these two organisations. DH had asked JB to provide information regarding how much additional funding would be required to make a £1000 winter fuel payment to primary beneficiary and bereaved households of all three charities. At the meeting with the Minister, it became clear that DH was also considering paying this to infected registrants of Skipton and MFET as an alternative to making payment through the charities. DH were still considering the issue and would advise the Alliance House entities in due course.

The board agreed to support an additional winter fuel payment for 2015, made up of £1000, providing it was funded from additional Government funds and was made clear to beneficiaries it was a one-off payment and would not necessarily be repeated in subsequent years.