

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 3rd March 2024

Reports to the AGM

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CO-CHAIRS

There are many positive things to report this year -among them a continued rise in full and associate membership, in the numbers of cheder children and in the variety and frequency of consistently well- attended services that would please bigger congregations than ours. You can read more about these and other aspects of the past year in Sukkat Shalom in the individual reports below.

In our last annual co-chairs' report, we rashly said ' we hope that this will be the Sofa's last year before it goes into the archives'. However, the three of us are prepared to stand again as co-chairs as no-one else has so far said they'd like to. Change takes time and it's been good to see the succession planning of 2021 leading to many new developments this year. For example, our members' survey, the introduction of a new data management system and our social media activity has meant that we can target requests for help, encourage working groups and generally foster better and more communication. This has resulted in a lively Shabbat dinners scene, more people involved in organising and helping and more lay leaders for services. We also expect to appoint our first part-time administrator soon.

Stemming indirectly from our succession planning process and starting this council year, we 'll be trying out bi-monthly instead of monthly council meetings, which we hope will lead to more of the detailed planning occurring outside council meetings and done by more people. We are also trying a return to in-person council meetings (as before the pandemic) which we

believe will result in better discussion and decision-making, will build stronger relationships between council members and will bring tea and cake back into the proceedings. We are pleased that no members are standing down from the Council this year, and that new people have come forward interested in joining.

Sukkat Shalom is a small community and the only LJ community in Scotland. However, we are not isolated, and we draw a lot of support from the national LJ movement who are always available to help and support us, as well as providing important information resources through their regular newsletters and monthly community briefings on a range of topics. This year four of us attended the first in-person LJ biennial since the pandemic and have had the support of LJ's emerging leaders' programme. Locally we have strong relationships with Glasgow Reform Synagogue and with the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, joining forces with the latter for Mitzvah Day and for a memorable Burns Supper.

During 2023 Liberal Judaism (LJ) and The Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ) announced their intention to create a single Progressive Jewish movement for the UK. This move has met with a generally positive response, given the current absence of differences in matters of principle between the two movements. Reform and Liberal communities have been reassured that the two bodies will be able to retain their own identities, a reassurance that has much to do with the positive response. Progressive Judaism represents 30% of the affiliated Jews in the UK and we hope that this proposed new movement will give us a greater reach and a stronger voice. It was good to welcome Rabbi Charley Baginsky (current CEO of LJ) and Rabbi Josh Levy (current CEO of MRJ) to Sukkat Shalom in February this year, to meet them in person, hear more about 'Progressive Judaism' and to be able to discuss a range of issues with them.

We again thank Rabbi Mark Solomon for his spiritual and intellectual leadership, for the guidance and support he gives to the whole community, especially the Exploring Judaism group and for the tireless energy, flexibility and creativity with which he both sustains and animates what we already do and encourages novelty and variation.

Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin and Nick Silk

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

This year we think there are two headlines for the Religious Affairs report. The first is similar to last year's (and indeed previous years too); we continue to hold at least one service each Shabbat, which can be on Zoom, in-person or a hybrid service, and we continue to debate whether we have got the balance of the different types of service right. The second headline is that, since our cheder is now meeting on Saturday mornings, many of our in-person Shabbat morning services now involve cheder children (and parents!). This is a really exciting development and can only help to build our sense of community.

As well as having Shabbat services, we also celebrate all the major festivals and many of the minor ones too. We continue to be fortunate in having Rabbi Mark lead the majority of our

services and the variety of services – in-person when he visits us, Zoom services from his house or hybrid services i.e., streamed services which are shown on-line when Rabbi Mark is leading services from either Edinburgh or Leicester – means that all our members have the opportunity to join services led by Rabbi Mark. Having said that, we do have a growing number of lay leaders who lead both Zoom and in-person services and it is really good to see that not only is the number of people involved growing, but so is their confidence in leading services. A vote of thanks to everyone involved is definitely appropriate.

Other highlights of 2023 included:

- We had what feels like a record number of b'nei mitvah for a year: Noa Wilkes in January, Catherine and Adele Berkani in April, Tavish Gray in September, Frankie Almeleh in October and James Gibson in November
- We held admission ceremonies for Mike Elam, Jana Gibson, Malka and Ze'va Ojiako, Airlie Ogilvie, Phil Wiltshire, Elliot Holmes
- We had baby blessings for Amelia Silk and Noa Winter
- Rabbi Mark conducted the marriage of Andrea Torres & Rolando Hernandez Trapero in May, and Len & Phyllis Alden renewed their marriage vows in June
- Rabbi Pete Tobias visited us in March and we visited Glasgow Reform Synagogue in August
- We had various bring and share suppers during the year, including our tu b'shvat seder, Shavuot seder and a supper specially for Liberal Jewish students in Edinburgh
- We held a Shabbat morning service in Newstead in July; our first time since covid
- Rabbi James Baaden led our Kol Nidrei and Yom Kippur services

Once again, thanks are due to everyone who helped during the year; Rabbi Mark, the many lay leaders, Charlie Raab our warden, Stew Green who co-ordinates our venue bookings, and also all those who have helped with security, setting up and clearing up after services. We are always looking for more volunteers, so if you would like to help, just let us know, and similarly if you have any feedback on the types of service, their format of any other aspects of our services please also do let us know.

Nick Silk and Maurice Naftalin

CHEDER

This year saw some big changes to cheder, as we moved our session time and location to St. Mark at 11am to coincide with shabbat services. This move was largely positive, and most families have now found a way to reschedule their Saturday activities so they can get to cheder. Since children are expected to attend the shabbat services from age 12, we changed our cheder age range to be 3-11, and started offering youth meetups for anyone aged 12 and over (including post b-mitzvah). Our teachers this year are Lizzie, Mor, Katy, and Ash, and Gila and Mor continue to be co-heads.

Cheder includes 21 children between the ages of 3 and 11, and 6 over 12. For those 3-11, we offer the main session between 11am-1pm which includes stories, games, crafts, songs, and discussions –around the themes of Jewish holidays, traditions, and values. When it is appropriate, we divide this group into Alef and Bet for some of the activity. Lizzie leads the Bet group and Mor leads Alef, with Ash and Katy helping leading various activities.

After the regular cheder session ends, children who want to can join a more focused Hebrew session at 1.20-2pm. This part requires more commitment and works on knowing Hebrew letters and learning to read. This is a smaller group of children (up to 10 children) who are generally making good progress with their Hebrew.

When cheder happens on the same weekend as shabbat service, cheder children join a portion of the service (around 20-30 minutes). We can see the children's comfort and enjoyment of these times grow as they become familiar with the room and the setting. The children enjoy going on the bima and/or presenting their (sometimes edible) creations to the community, but they also enjoy sitting in the audience, particularly when there are songs they know and can sing along with. We aim to join at different times of the service, so children can be familiar with the different parts.

The 12 and over group is led by Katy, and includes a whatsapp group and occasional outings. So far there was one outing which the children enjoyed, and we hope to continue this group to create better continuity for children after their bnei mitzvah.

Mor Kandlik Eltanani

MEMBERSHIP

The table below gives our membership figures as of 21/2/2024 compared to those reported to the 2023 AGM, as of 6/3/2023.

Membership numbers	AGM 2024	AGM 2023
Adult full members	143	127
Children of members aged 0 to 19	56	Not reported
Associate members	26	22

At this year's AGM we can see an increase of 16 in full members from the 127 we reported to last year's AGM as of 6/3/2023. We have also had 8 resignations and one death since last year, and thus 25 new members have joined during the year. This increase is made up of 19 people who are new to Edinburgh or new to the Community and 6 who have transferred to full membership from associate membership after a successful visit to the Liberal Judaism Beth Din.

The number of associate members has also increased, despite the 6 who have transferred to full membership. All but 3 associate members are studying with Rabbi Mark and are registered with Liberal Judaism as on a path to conversion.

During the year we have started to use a new membership system 'infoodle' see: <https://help.infoodle.com/v1/en> which allows us to report on numbers of children of members, by age group. We will be bale to use this more fully next year when we will have a full year running on the new system,

During the year our members celebrated one wedding, one baby blessing, one bris and 4 Bnei'mitzvot.

Gillian Raab Hon Secretary.

INTERFAITH

I continue to be a personal member of Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA) and I am also a member of the West Lothian Faith Forum. This latter body was largely inactive during the covid pandemic but has latterly been relaunched and I have attended all of their meetings. Both EIFA and West Lothian Council organised events for Holocaust Memorial Day, which I attended, while EIFA held a number of in-person and on-line events during the year. Of particular note was the "United for Peace, Edinburgh Communities United Against Hate" event which took place on 13th November. It had been planned for several months but took on an added dimension following the atrocities of Simchat Torah. Readings were given by members of many different faith communities, including our co-chair, Sue Bard.

Nick Silk

ECO-SYNAGOGUE PROJECT

The [Eco-Synagogue](#) project, partnered by the Board of Deputies, brings together all parts of the UK Jewish Community to explore how environmental sustainability and activism can be promoted and embedded in all aspects of community life. Communities are invited to engage with the project and work towards bronze, silver or gold accreditation. The project has developed an audit tool to help communities identify the strength of their commitment and activities to promote sustainability. The main thrust of the audit tool is, understandably and appropriately, on communities' premises. There is recognition, however, that not all communities have their own properties, like Sukkat Shalom.

The ELJC Council expressed an interest in applying for Eco-Synagogue accreditation in early 2022 and a small working group was brought together of interested members to pursue this. The working group met online through spring and early summer 2022.

The 2023 AGM considered a range of possible next steps:

- **Management:**
 - What is the Council's commitment to sustainability and environmentalism?
 - How will that commitment be expressed and communicated to the membership?
 - What action will the Council take to demonstrate that commitment?
- **Prayer & Teaching:**
 - How can Judaism's historic and contemporary approach to environmentalism be explored in services?
- **Lifestyle:**
 - How can members be encouraged to consider the environmental impact of their personal lives and to consider more sustainable practices?
- **Catering:**
 - How can the community consider the environmental impact of catering at communal events and move actively to more sustainable options?
- **Travel planning:**
 - How can the community plan its activities to help members to choose green travel options? And members be encouraged to make those choices?
- **Community & Global Activism:**
 - Can the community identify local, national and international projects to partner and encourage member involvement with?

Shavuot saw a service built around a discussion of how the community - as individuals and collectively - might take on a distinctly Jewish-informed approach to address the environmental challenges of our times. We recognised that many members are active in their lives away from the community and there was agreement that an environmental strand could be considered in communal activities.

Mitzvah day saw the two Edinburgh communities join forces for a litter pick, with about 20 people enjoying a walk from Salisbury Road to Holyrood Park, through the Innocent tunnel and back to the shul. It is to be hoped that we can build on these small early steps in the year ahead.

Jonathan Staal

ADULT LEARNING

Rabbi Mark has continued to offer two classes, one on Talmud and the other on the work of the 11th/12th Century Jewish poet and philosopher Judah Halevi. Both of these weekly classes have enthusiastic followers. Rabbi Mark also leads a weekly Exploring Judaism class for people who are in the process of converting, or thinking about doing so. This class is held in person and on Zoom when Rabbi Mark is in Edinburgh and on Zoom on the other weeks.

The Ark LJ synagogue in London continues its generous offer of weekly Biblical Hebrew classes to LJ members anywhere. A number of our own members and associate members attend these classes that are offered at four levels and are led by Rabbis Aaron Goldstein and Lea Muhlstein.

Sue Bard

COMMUNICATIONS

Social Media Report _Andrea Torres

Instagram

Instagram paged launched with first post on 10 September 2023.

Since then:

- As of 18 Feb, the page has a total of 14 posts and 103 followers.
- Momentum has grown slowly, with most followers joining our page during September / October 2023. We gained followers of different age groups, but most commonly those between 18-35. Our followers also range from individual users, JSoc pages from across Scotland/North England, & other LJ communities.
- Posts vary for
 - 1) individual events (eg Mitzvah Day, Burns Night),
 - 2) On a bi-monthly basis we post a highlight of the upcoming events/services in 1 graphic.
 - This has been the most popular post across our platforms as it gives members a glimpse of the diary dates for our events/services for the next 2 months.
- For Hannukah we also posted via Instagram & Facebook 'Stories' - posts that are only live for 24 hrs. These posts had a design of a chanukiah with an additional light shining each

day. This feature has been helpful, as well, as we post services reminders on Friday/Saturday mornings to all followers and they disappear in 24 hrs.

Facebook

Our Facebook page has existed longer, however, I was able to gain access from the end of June 2023.

- As of 18 Feb, this page has 558 Followers, most common ages vary from 25-34 and 35-44.
- Similarly, to Instagram, the same posts that have gone live there, have also gone live on Facebook to keep consistency in messaging.
- The highest peak of page visits came on 16 September (aligning to the popularity our page typically gets during the High Holidays).
- Since June 2023, we have received 16 new 'likes' or followers. A plan will be formulated for reaching more people via Facebook next year and hopefully we can increase the # of followers.

Twitter (X) / Social Media Guidance Handbook

- In Summer 2023, I met with Helen, Han, and Jennifer and Hubert. The plan to was have a social media calendar with planned posts for the year and take turns creating/posting. Though this plan did not turn out, I hope to reassess how to engage others in social media posting. Additionally, I had created a social media guidance handbook that I hope to clean up this year, so we can save internally for any future social media handover (if it is needed).
- Our small social media group did speak about no longer posting on Twitter. Though there is a benefit in posting on Twitter (eg posting services reminders, etc) the reality is that Twitter (aka: X) is no longer a positive platform for a Jewish community to share information on. I'd be glad to provide further clarification if needed on this. However, I assume that most people reading this report can understand when I say that Twitter over the past 1-2 years has become a hostile environment for Jewish, BIPOC communities.

Newsletter (Etrog) Sue Bard

The last Etrog was produced in July/August this year – the 44th edition of our bi-monthly newsletter that succeeded former newsletter 'Lulav' in 2016. This was intended as a suspension, rather than an ending as we wanted to look at it in the context of weekly reminders, new social media activity and the intention to redesign our website. And also, given the amount of work involved in producing it, whether it was a priority.

Weekly Reminders Gillian Raab

These continue to be circulated usually on Thursdays with information on upcoming events and services. The task is shared between Gillian Raab and Maurice Naftalin. We are still using mailchimp, rather than sending them via our new membership system. We hope to change to this soon, and this will allow more people to help with them. We would welcome a discussion at the AGm as to their form and content.

SOCIAL ACTION

Our membership survey, conducted in 2022 (and that new members continue to complete), revealed that a number of people were interested in participating in social action. Several Zoom meetings took place for interested people to discuss how to take expressed interest further. It was decided it was important to sustain and build on what Sukkat Shalom already does, such as participation in Mitzvah Day and choosing Kol Nidrei charities. A Social Action WhatsApp group was established to encourage communication between interested people and to provide a place and a sounding board where anyone who wanted to start a discussion or flag up an idea could do so.

Sue Bard

CARE AND SUPPORT

We try to provide informal care and support in a number of ways that including: through our ELJC Care and Support WhatsApp open to all members to join; by actively supporting new members to connect with the community; by responding appropriately to phone and email enquiries; circulating information about relevant organisations and sources of help in our weekly information emails, and most importantly by trying to create a culture in which people look out for each other.

Sue Bard

Sue Bard

