

Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise

Minutes of AGM held September 16, 2020: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

Linda Hill Miller, LAH Travel; Allison Harrison, Hot Yoga Edinburgh; Isabelle Jarmin, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Lynne Cadenhead, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Carolyn Currie, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Bronwen Thomas, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Morag Malloy, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Emily McGowan, Advancing Eve; Jennifer McKenzie, TEFL; Susan Love, FSB; Jane Stewart; Ann Johnson, Blazeman; Michelle Smith, Value Add Business Services; Criona Courtney, Royal Bank of Scotland; Pauline Reay; Laura Galloway, Heriot Watt; Lisa Thomson, Purpose HR; Suzanne Doyle Morris, InclusIQ; Shona Blakeley, Women's Fund for Scotland; Hannah Dean, University of St Andrews; Wendy Pring; Lyn Batchelor, Napier University; Dr Kingsley Omeihe, Napier University; Carole Cooke, Scrumptious Productions; Sandra Paterson, Kids Bee Happy; Nathalie Agnew, Muckle PR; Mandy Bailey, RBS; Christina Scott, Be Yonder; Felicity Donohoe, Scottish Parliament; Mairi Damer, Word UP Scotland.

MSPs present: Gillian Martin MSP (Convenor); Bill Bowman MSP

Apologies:

Jackie Baillie MSP, Vice Convenor; Poonam Gupta, PG Paper; Morna Simkins, MS Society; Jennifer Lindsay-Finan, Riverpark Training; Gill Lawrie; Jo Macsween; Anne Meikle.

Lynne Cadenhead provided attendees with information regarding protocols and GDPR for attendees.

Welcome and Introductions

Gillian Martin MSP (Chair) – welcomed and acknowledged that this was only the second meeting of this year due to disruption of Coronavirus. As this meeting represented the Annual General Meeting, at this point she vacated the chair and handed over to Bill Bowman MSP in order for formal proceedings to commence.

Nominations for Office Bearers

Bill Bowman MSP requested nominations which were confirmed by Lynne Cadenhead as follows -

- Convenor Gillian Martin MSP – proposed Bill Bowman MSP, seconded Lynne Cadenhead
- Vice Convenor Jackie Baillie MSP – proposed Bill Bowman MSP, seconded Gillian Martin MSP
- Secretary Anne Meikle – proposed Criona Courtney, seconded Gillian Martin MSP
- Treasurer Carolyn Currie – proposed Criona Courtney, seconded Laura Galloway

Chair was then passed back to Gillian Martin MSP, who welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Lynne Cadenhead to say a few words on the work of WES and what had been happening in the women and enterprise sector during this challenging time.

Presentations

Gillian Martin MSP then introduced the speakers -

Linda Hill Miller, LAH Travel, described the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on her business. As owner of a travel agency her previously successful and highly profitable business faces significant

debt without support through the existing Government routes. Issues include being unable to furlough staff whilst working to repatriate customers when countries locked down, cancellation of travel plans which required refunding and then further issues of cancellation and repatriation when quarantine has been imposed at short notice on specific countries (including blanket whole-country quarantines when only certain areas are affected, as occurred with Spain), all of which have had a direct impact. Whilst she has been able to take advantage of a Bounce Back Loan, she stresses that this is debt, not support. Insurances – including very specific travel industry insurance – has not covered any of these issues.

Allison Harrison – described her three year old business which is located at the heart of the financial district in Edinburgh city – an area where six months later, staff at neighbouring businesses who would previously take advantage of local yoga services - are still working remotely. The business provides work to 8 self-employed teachers. Despite an immediate pivot to online delivery the business was declined a pivoting business grant and an appeal turned down.

Finally, being able to reopen the business doors at the end of August, although the business currently records a decline in income of 55%. She thanked Women's Enterprise Scotland and the Women's Business Centre for support during this time. She pointed to template response from local MSP although more supportive response from MP.

She pointed to the benefits of yoga for fitness and mental health, and to the fact that other countries have recognised yoga businesses and created exceptions in restrictions in order for them to return to business sooner. She pointed to the fact that the fitness sector – which employs 6000 people - is perceived as less essential and yet Scottish Government has recognised importance of mental health and commissioned a report on the subject.

Discussion

Gillian Martin then invited questions and comment from attendees:

Ann Johnson described issues of running a company and noted that the impact of COVID on businesses had similarity with impact of downturn of oil and gas industries on businesses in north east. She observed that larger companies faced particular issues. She commented on the knock-on impact on jobs especially being able to support apprenticeships.

Lisa Thomson noted the significant dependency on schools and childcare remaining open for women to continue to work and described the impact on her business despite HR services being much in demand during the course of the pandemic.

Susan Love commented that businesses need a support plan for the next 6 months, that businesses are despairing now and although there is a time for initiatives such as job schemes businesses need support until that has an effect. There are lots of sectors running out of road – small businesses exist in more niche areas.

Gillian Martin encouraged all to make sure local representatives are informed of their issues.

Suzanne Doyle Morris commented that FSB stated a figure of 53% confident about businesses recovering. Over time this may diminish and points to similar statistics in the US which have declined over time.

Linda Hill Miller pointed to ripple effect – if people don't travel then other, local, services also suffer for example, dog kennels, beauty services etc.

Sandra Patterson supplies businesses in children's activity and the live event sector. A sector which is completely closed. Absence of long term information is a huge problem and business needs support by forward planning for that now. Seasonal businesses will go under because surviving on 25% of usual spring/summer sales is different from surviving on the same proportion of winter sales. Likewise, part-time businesses, of which women are a very large percentage. Part-time income funds holidays, yoga classes etc. It also very often buys peoples' food. We should be planning for extreme poverty this winter.

Summing Up

Gillian Martin summarised the meeting and noted that the matter was worthy of putting forward a member's motion to the Scottish Parliament on women led businesses in the time of COVID. She encouraged those attending to make sure local MPs were suitably informed of the issues experienced and agreed to work with Lynne Cadenhead of Women's Enterprise Scotland on preparing the Motion.

Gillian Martin thanked everyone for their participation and input and closed the meeting at 13:00.

08/10/2020