

# Leith Chooses meeting 5 February 2025

Present: Abigail, Bruce (minutes), Don, Douglas, Jack, Naomi, Sally, Tremaine, Erin Fulton (CEC community grants)

Apologies:

Definite actions are green-highlighted.

The following is not a complete record but hopefully catches most of the main points

## 1 Voting concerns

There has been an allegation that Nepal Scotland Association, in the course of an event outwith LeithChooses' control, were taking people's phones and voting 'for them'. See email trail in item 2 below.

- Tremaine: this is 'pretty damning' and that NSA should be disqualified.
- Bruce: we don't have evidence that's hard enough to disqualify them.
- Don: NSA might have told people 'we will help you vote', [i.e. that the alleged actions may have been a positive attempt to help people navigate the online voting system]
- Sally: I have been trying to find out the addresses given by a large group of Nepal folk who arrived at the voting day together.
- Someone (possibly Bruce): I am concerned that people would willingly hand over their unlocked phones.
- Someone: LeithChooses has always had a trust system.
- Jack: there are interesting patterns in how the 121 Great Junction St address is mis-capitalised.
- Jack: there are 47 online votes which have the postcode for 121 Great Junction St. Of these, 37 volunteer in Leith, 7 work in Leith, 3 live in Leith, 0 study in Leith.
- Sally: There is no residential accommodation next to 121 GJS [implying that the 3 'live in Leith' votes for this address are dodgy]
- Someone: this needs to go through the CEC complaints process.
- Someone: we could disqualify the votes of people who wouldn't have been eligible. [The complainant had said that no more than 12 – possibly just 6 – volunteer at this address, implying disqualifying about 40 votes. This would still leave NSA winning a grant. LC has never published how many votes each organisation received.]
- Abby: we should not be too reliant of the exact number of volunteers
- Naomi: we can't do nothing.
- Don: NSA has not done things that break actual rules, but it has broken our ethics/assumptions about voting and PB. Hence LC needs to put in strict processes.
- Abby: we are not well staffed [at the ballot box] on the day. Better policies, and better awareness of them, are needed
- Jack: we do have objective evidence: multiple volunteers corroborating attempts to multiple vote, or at least queue-jump. The claim that people's phones were taken and misused by NSA is not corroborated.
- Douglas: Do we want legal advice?
- Jack: What can we say to complainant(s).
- Tremaine: We can say we have looked at the votes. We will have this meeting's notes as proof of an investigation. Do we agree we are not going to penalise NSA, but to talk with them.
- Bruce: this would give NSA a right of reply. We can't go back to complainants without this full investigation.
- Actions: Tremaine/Naomi to take this back to their line manager (Andrew Field) and the CEC complaints team. Jack (and Bruce) are willing to be witnesses about ballot-box happenings.
- Abby and Don: the alleged actions may stem from language barriers and/or cultural issues
- Susan: I am very concerned that the matter was reported to Mr Field (first) – I am the chair of the steering group
- Tremaine: CEC policy mandated this – the complaint arrived via a CeC email address.

## 2 Other vote-matters

- Sally: it's fortunate that not all boosted applications won: boosting should not lead to automatic wins.
- Sally: there is also a potential problem with Broughton Primary: it's right on the border of the LC area, so pupils who don't live in the LC area can still vote.
- Action: Tremaine/Naomi to offer the partial grant to Broughton Primary, asking them to respond by the end of next week. (If they decline it, Tremaine/Naomi to offer it to the loser with the highest number of votes.) DT can't be at awards night.
- Bruce: given the differences in total numbers of votes, there is no need to go through the record row by row looking for ineligible votes. (The few votes that might be disqualified would not change which organisations win.)
- There was concern that AUGB's and Building Bridges' projects were very similar, but it was agreed that because they were eligible projects that had been entered into the competition, nothing could be changed at this point.

## 3 Emails about the allegation

### 3.1 Sent: 02 February 2025 20:38

To: [Caroline.Lamond@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Caroline.Lamond@edinburgh.gov.uk); Leith Chooses <[LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk)>

Subject: Urgent Concern Regarding Voting Process at Nepal Scotland Association for Leith chooses

Dear Leith chooses

I hope you are doing well.

I am writing to formally raise a serious concern regarding the voting process conducted today at the Nepal Scotland Association. During the event, there was a formal embassy program for issuing passports by Nepal embassy and Himalayan centre, and I have come to learn that some representatives from the Nepal Scotland Association approached individuals from this program, asking to check their phones which we thought was to do with passport renewals for Nepal.

In doing so, they took control of their devices and proceeded to vote on their behalf without their informed consent.

Many attendees were unaware that they had even participated in the voting process until later, when they realized they had unknowingly cast votes without reviewing the organisation.

It has also come to my attention through conversations with others that One-to-One [121 great junction Street](#) has repeatedly been used as the address for Nepal Scotland Association voting in such instances as volunteers.

When concerns were raised with the Himalayan centre Centre team, they expressed their disappointment and clarified that this campaign had nothing to do with them, nor were they aware of how it was handled and why their address was used.

In past Himalayan centre had various organisations linked and volunteering and had over 60 people gathering and contributing but recently this has not been the case as everyone has moved away for different causes and different organisation.

Whilst asking about the current structure

- Himalayan centre with the address [121 great junction street](#) currently only has six active board members and five 6 active volunteers linked formally.

many in the gathering and various social media group were told to use that address to vote even if they don't live in leith which isn't the reflection of Leith voters - the way in which votes were collected raises serious ethical and democratic concerns.

It appears that people were coerced or misled into voting in the last few days and mostly today which is neither fair nor representative of true democratic engagement especially when there are genuine campaigns for Leith chooses.

I want to make it clear that I am not looking for trouble, but I strongly feel that this situation warrants an immediate review—particularly regarding the votes linked to [121 great junction street](#).

There are many deserving organisations competing for the same support and funding, and if such tactics are employed to unfairly influence voting outcomes, it undermines the integrity of the entire process.

I would sincerely appreciate it if this matter is looked into with urgency. Please let me know how this can be reviewed further.

Best regards,

<redacted>

3.2 Reply: Mon, 3 Feb 2025, 17:10 from [LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk)

Hello <redacted>,

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. I will raise this with the Leith Chooses Steering Group at our next meeting on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February. It may be helpful for the steering group if you would attend the meeting and give your perspective on what you witnessed.

The meeting is at 3pm at McDonald Road Library in the Learning Centre on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February. Please let me know if you can attend.

Thanks,

Tremaine

3.3 Sent: 04 February 2025 16:05

To: Leith Chooses <[LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:LeithChooses@edinburgh.gov.uk)>

Subject: Re: Urgent Concern Regarding Voting Process at Nepal Scotland Association for Leith chooses

Hey,

I'm currently in Aberdeen, so I won't be able to attend the meeting.

We also need to be cautious about discussing the Nepal Scotland Association, as speaking against them could create issues for me as it's the community !

One key point to consider is how many votes 121 Great Junction Street received, given that the number of volunteers and board members is no more than 12.

It's important to note that not everyone from the Himalayan Centre would have voted for the project. The community has been under pressure from all sides to vote without really understanding and I feel bad for the other meaningful projects that had genuine support but were overshadowed.

Leith Chooses already seems like a popularity contest rather than a fair assessment of project quality, but when voting is manipulated like this, there should be consequences.

To validate our concerns, please check how many votes the organisation at 121 Great Junction Street actually received. Do not over rule them or their options from those that actually voted. Only the concern address vote will need to be verified with some sort of punishment or sanction .

Surely you have limit how many people can be voted in same address .

People come there to renew their passports and visas, often handing over their phones, which raises serious concerns.

This situation is incredibly unfair and disappointing.

Best,

<redacted>