



Monday 8th January 2018
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 13 members of the Café Society group present at the meeting. Apologies had been received from Irene B, Viv S, Phil K and Pam P. No discussion topics had been agreed upon before the meeting, so members had been asked to bring along a topic of their own. Thank you to Denise M for organising the drinks order in Phil K's absence. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

How do we solve the problem of missed appointments at hospitals and doctor's surgeries?

- One practical course of action was suggested - the payment of a deposit when making an appointment or a charge made for a missed appointment. It was questioned whether such approaches could be financially viable as they might involve considerable administration
- The modern use of text reminders was praised and members believed the practice helped to reduce missed appointment
- It was generally felt that long waits for non-urgent appointments with GPs was a significant factor in the cause of missed appointments - that patients had forgotten about or no longer required appointments by the time they arrived
- Telephone consultations with GPs were generally accepted by members of the group and a greater use of this type of service was suggested as a way to reduce missed appointments
- Other members thought that the issue primarily needed addressing via public education and more accurate statistics about the demographic of people who miss appointments
- Other issues were raised about the NHS including ease of access and online patient information schemes

How important are strong family ties (when compared with friendship)?

- *This topic was raised in respect to making decisions about where to live. Do (retired) people tend to stay or relocate to be closer to family or to remain or move to be amongst friends?*
- Most members of the group recounted situations of moving to be closer to family, particularly when grandchildren were involved. It was noted that private space is important and nobody thought it was a good idea to be right on the doorstep
- It was understood that families tend to be more geographically spread than, say, 50 years ago but modern travel, like cheap flights, and modern communication like video calls has meant that regular contact is still possible

Is Toby Young (board member of Office for Students) suitable for the role?

- *Toby Young is a right-wing journalist recently appointed to the board of the Office for Students (a new university regulating body). Recent articles have questioned his suitability after his history of inappropriate comments on social media had been highlighted*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-42595992>
- Members of the group who were familiar with Toby Young didn't feel he was a suitable person for a number of reasons but it was thought that this case was part of a larger picture at a time when political correctness (particularly with respect to the equality of women) is a burning issue

Should journalists be fully accountable?

- The role and behaviour of journalists was defended by some members of the group. When fake or misleading news is distributed by the mainstream media, it was felt that editors were responsible
- Members seemed to accept that newspapers have political biases and use sensational reports to boost sales but didn't see that as an abuse of power. It was noted that newspapers are very rarely forced to correct or apologise for untruths

What taxes ought we to impose to assist the NHS?

- Many members of the group were adamant that existing taxes were sufficient and that the National Insurance contribution scheme is in existence for that specific reason
- There were mixed opinions on whether there needs to be additional money injected into the NHS service or whether the allocated money needed more prudent spending. Effective privatisation, outsourcing and, in particular, payments to pharmaceutical companies were mentioned as being major drains on the resources
- An ageing population was agreed to be one of the biggest burdens on the NHS and the drastic reduction in social care was also regarded as primary reason that first-line services like doctors' surgeries and hospitals face a greater demand
- As significant health problems are directly related to alcohol and smoking (and sugar), there was a suggestion for greater taxation on such products but many members of the group were of the opinion that existing product taxes were sufficient
- There was a practical proposal that taxes should be applied to 'producers of things that cause trouble', for example the manufacturers of ecologically-unfriendly coffee cups or suppliers of diesel fuel
- It was mentioned that NHS spending and provision is still a leader when compared to other first-world countries

What is the best protocol when inviting people for dinner with regards to dietary preferences?

- This topic was raised with regards to the rising number of people who have allergies or dietary preferences like vegetarians and vegans
- Most members of the group were quite happy to cater for the specific needs of their guests and explained that they would likely be aware of such requirements before making the invite
- Most members of the group stated that they would be quite happy to eat whatever was served if they were the invited guest
- One guideline that was recommended was to ask the guests if they have any allergies or if there is anything they *don't* eat but never to ask them what they *like* eating

Is it fair that CEOs of companies like Persimmon reap the benefits of the government's first-time buyer incentives?

- *This topic was raised in the wake of the resignation of Nicholas Wrigley, chair of the housebuilding firm Persimmon*
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/dec/15/persimmon-chair-resigns-chief-executive-obscene-bonus>
- Group members widely suspected that it was the property sellers, not the first-time buyers, who were benefitting from this government incentive, echoing the media reports of corporate looting
- The discussion gradually shifted into a more generally conversation about housing policy. Prefabricated homes were mentioned as being an idea that would be worth revisiting
- Members of the group believed that housing schemes need completely rethinking as those at the top are making too much money from the way things are

Is it sensible to be manning borders with volunteers?

- *This topic was raised in relation to the announcement that some small air and sea ports could be staffed by voluntary workers*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42527750>
- Most of the group expressed concern about such a proposal. It was suggested that the wrong type of person would volunteer and that such roles could be open to abuse and become quite lucrative
- The conversation moved onto the wider issue of voluntary work and a question was raised about when to draw the line when vital community jobs are being filled by a voluntary workforce (eg. policing, library services, etc.)
- A member connected with the Age UK and Dial-A-Ride charities explained that willing voluntary drivers are very difficult to find due to the overbearing amount of training, regulations and red-tape
- It was generally acknowledged that a workforce comprising of volunteers cannot provide long-term stability and consistency and should not be used for vital community services
- Members of the group believed that housing schemes need completely rethinking as those at the top are making too much money from the way things are

Have you ever volunteered at a community Christmas dinner?

- After last-minute changes of arrangements, a group member volunteered to help out at a community Christmas dinner event. The member found the experience to be wonderful and rewarding
- Other members of the group expressed concern that television advertisements relentlessly portray Christmas using a 'perfect family' scenario

○ Future Topics

Below is a list of topics that have been forwarded for future discussion. If you have any additional suggestions, especially last-minute topical issues, please email vivienne.barker@gmail.com

- We are in need of suggestions

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 5th February 2018 at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

