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The Leveller 44

January 3rd 2017

Equal people, equal voice

2016

I thought it might be worthwhile listing everything that OEG has been involved in last year. It illustrates the full range of issues that we are involved in.

February	Public meeting – David Preston talking about Oswestry Town Council
March	Public meeting – Derwen College reaching out into the wider community
May	Stall at St Martin's – raising awareness Public meeting – Colin Channon talking about the role of newspapers today Celebrating Age - in conjunction with Oswestry Library
June	Charity market – fund raising Public meeting – The role of trade unions today
July	Public meeting – The Special Olympics
September	Charity market Community Games – awareness raising
November	Public meeting – Mental Health problems in young people

This does not include our House meetings, and countless meetings about the NHS and the future of our hospital services.

Finances are reasonably good at the moment.

Income - £303.00, of which

Charity markets - £67.00

Donations - £156.00

Speaking about the group - £80.00

Outgoings - £253.21, of which

Hall hire - £164.00

Promotional literature - £89.21

The cost of hiring the upstairs room at Cabin Lane Church is the biggest expenditure that we have. Although it is by far the best venue in Oswestry, it costs £36 an evening. Thus, with our normal attendance of 20 – 25, we are always running at a loss there. I am loathe to move, so we either have to ask for a higher minimum donation (currently £1) or try very hard to increase the numbers attending.

House meeting

Our December House meeting was extremely well attended.

We came to the following conclusions:

- While we fully support The Equality Trust (more of that later), we felt that concentrating on social inequality was more appropriate for Oswestry.
- We talked quite a lot about the Foodbank and thought that it would be a good idea to ask Liz Jermy (the new Manager) if we could have another visit to see exactly what they do. This is being arranged at the moment. During the year we have supported the collection of food at Tescos in Ellesmere. This is always enjoyable, though more offers of help would be really appreciated. Two of us also packed Christmas hampers. The Foodbank saw a great increase in demand before Christmas.
- Homelessness and social care are definite subjects for the summer talks.

Programme – Spring 2017

Winter meetings

With winter here and Oswestry weather being what it is, we don't intend to have any public meetings until March, unless something urgent comes up.

So there will be 'House meetings', here at 8 High Fawr Avenue, Oswestry, SY11 1TB, at 7.30pm on the following dates:

January 19th House meeting

We are hoping to show about 20 minutes-worth of *The Divide* – the film of *The Spirit Level*. We can then decide whether we should push for a public showing of it.

February 16th House meeting

Please try to come to our House meetings. We always have interesting discussions, and there are a number of exciting events coming up this spring.

March 16th

Housing. With Cllr Mal Price being unable to attend, we have arranged an alternative speaker. He is Nick Wood, the Housing Strategy Lead Officer for Shropshire Council. According to Mal, there is very little that Nick doesn't know about Housing!

However, we really need to have some questions prepared to ask Nick. PLEASE let me know of any burning questions that you might have and I will forward them to him.

April 20th

Prof. Rod Thomson, Director of Public Health for Shropshire, has agreed to come to speak about Inequality in Health. For example, it has been found that life expectancy in the poorer areas of Gobowen and the other Three Parishes, can be quite a bit lower than in parts of Oswestry. We want to know why and what can be done about this.

State of the nation – January 2017

A couple of stories which reflect what is happening at the moment. New news seems to be fairly scarce over the Christmas / New Year period.

Poverty in working families

Poverty is defined as having an income below 60% of the median once housing costs have been deducted. In a report commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, it was stated that in 2014 – 5, there were 13.5 million people living in households classified as poor. Of these, 7 million were in families where somebody worked, and half of those in poverty have a disability or live with somebody who does.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/07/study-finds-7m-britons-in-poverty-despite-being-from-working-families>

Poverty and mental health

Poverty is a major cause of stress. You can't pay your bills, buy food, cover the rent, afford to provide for your children, these are all massive causes of stress. Even if you've no dependants, just living on the breadline is stressful in itself.

It has been suggested that this stress can lead to mental health problems. The following article concludes:

"You can't ignore the links between poverty and mental health problems. Dealing with both would benefit everyone, but as long as we have one we should expect the other".

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2016/dec/13/mental-illness-and-poverty-you-cant-tackle-one-without-the-other?platform=hootsuite>

Equality Trust

The Equality Trust was founded in 2009, its work being based on the book *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. I have taken this from its main website.

<https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/>

UK income inequality is among the highest in the developed world and evidence shows that this is bad for almost everyone. The Equality Trust works to improve the quality of life in the UK by reducing economic inequality.

People in more equal societies live longer, have better mental health and have better chances for a good education regardless of their background. Community life is stronger where the income gap is narrower, children do better at school and they are less likely to become teenage parents. When inequality is reduced people trust each other more, there is less violence and rates of imprisonment are lower.

If we want to build a better society, it is essential we take action. The Equality Trust is working with others to build a social movement for change. We analyse and disseminate the latest research, promote robust evidence-based arguments and support a dynamic network of campaign groups across the country.

When we started this group in the summer of 2013, we found that the people of Oswestry, although supporting these ideas, were much more interested in how inequality affected us socially. The Equality Trust has always been incredibly supportive of what we do, and at last summer's Groups' meeting in London our work was used as an exemplar of how local groups can work. I am hoping to get down to London for this summer's meeting.

The website has a lot of very interesting information.

They have also just produced an Activists pack - Inequality is not inevitable. This guide aims to help inequality activists target key decision-makers, and those who influence them, so that action is taken to reduce inequality.

https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/TET%20-%20Activist%20Pack%202016_0.pdf

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We are an autonomous group, affiliated to The Equality Trust