



Chair's Report, 2015-16

WF LETS, despite having a historically strong foundation, interest and community value, with a small but steady increase in membership over the last few years, has seen a real decline in activity, partly due to a very small core minority of members' trading continuously, coupled with a slowdown in committee input due to members' time constraints and a lack of inspiration / momentum / collective initiative to explore strategies to make it more thriving as a system. Additionally in WF borough there is a lot of community activity, particularly on social media, that overlaps with some (but not all) of the benefits and functions of LETS in terms of skill-swapping and community bonding. As LETS mainly operates through an online trading system that members have to access, perhaps for some people it is less than immediate, compared with for example a Facebook page where they can make contact and get a response straightway. Members' challenges when asked have included lack of response to enquiries about offerings, people joining but not following up with any actual trading, and wants and offerings not being updated.

We have responded to some of these issues: we have a Facebook page with several hundred likes, which is a potential portal for more trader involvement, and we have recently adjusted the system so that members are emailed when their offerings expire, and all recently expired offerings were Automatically refreshed.

A key lack is the discontinuation of regular events for traders to meet and get to know each other which might better fulfil the social connection function of LETS. Through the last couple of years we have made attempts to re-inject energy into the committee and at present we do have a small core of enthusiastic members who are keen to make LETS more thriving. The social media element and some members' expression that we need to be more part of that is both positive **and** reminds us that actually LETS has often been a way for members of our community to make connection with others who *do not* have regular access to social media or who don't use the internet a lot - folks who are maybe more isolated - so LETS, in the words of one committee member, has been a 'lifeline' for some people, and this can't be forgotten. So a focus in continuing the system should be to bear this in mind and explore how better to reach out to people who don't already have flourishing online communities to access.

Suggestions for the next phase are again: making regular events happen in different localities around the borough so that neighbouring traders can meet and find what skills and offerings they share locally; being part of community events and festivals; and ideally, having a person who is actively responsible for making this event programme and promotion of it happen. New joiners always express what a great idea LETS is and as older members we know how useful it is - the task is to make this usefulness effectively available and functioning for more people. Diversifying the offerings is another potential way to increase trading as some members' have said that they don't really need a lot of what is on offer - so, some outreach activity to specific groups in the community with particular skills could be useful here? Again, a person with the energy and community connections to initiate this would be very useful! We could put a call out for someone like this. As chair for the last 2 years, I also have found that my time is limited lately and I will step down from this role as of today's AGM, but am happy to be involved with LETS as a promoter and word-spreader for the scheme and for events.

Rasheeqa Ahmad

Outgoing LETS Chair