

Press release: Regulator finds significant failures at the Presidents Club Charitable Trust

The Charity Commission found that there were significant failures at the Presidents Club Charitable Trust and that its trustees were in breach of a number of their key charity law duties.

In a [report](#) published today, the Commission concludes that the trustees failed fully to recognise or address risks to the reputation of the charity – and its purpose of raising money for good causes – arising from holding an all-male event* staffed by female-only event staff, who were subject to instructions on their appearance, including that they wear ‘smart, sexy shoes’.

The regulator also found that the trustees’ failure to put in place clear or adequate procedures and policies to deal with harassment or improper behaviour at the event was in stark contrast to the measures they took to protect the privacy of the guests. The Commission is clear that any event organised by a charity should aim to provide a safe environment for everyone involved.

The Commission’s case was opened in January 2018 after reports in the media alleging that women employed to work as hostesses at the 2018 event were subjected to harassment and inappropriate behaviour by male guests.

The Commission’s role is to hold trustees of charities to account for their compliance with charity law duties and responsibilities, and to promote public trust and confidence in the charitable sector. Specific allegations of abuse, harassment and discrimination would be for the police and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to investigate and make findings on.

Following the media reports, the trustees of the charity announced that they were in the process of winding up the charity.

The report details breaches of trustees’ charity law duties including:

- As a result of the lack of written contracts with suppliers, absence of oversight and a lack of awareness of the relevant regulatory guidance, the Commission finds that the trustees did not act with reasonable care and skill.
- The Trustees failed to comply with their legal duty to manage charity resources responsibly, specifically avoiding exposing the charity’s assets, beneficiaries or reputation to undue risk.

The Commission has issued the trustees with formal regulatory advice under section 15(2) of the Charities Act 2011 to ensure future compliance. The Commission has also agreed a regulatory action plan with the trustees in

order to gather in as much of the money raised at the event as possible. Thereafter, the trustees, working with the Commission, will ensure that the charity is wound up in an orderly manner and that remaining funds reach the causes for which they were intended. Further events will no longer take place upon the winding up of the charity.

Helen Stephenson, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, said:

The allegations made about the event were entirely at odds with what we would expect from any charity when raising funds for such important causes. Our report should serve as a warning to others that raising funds for charity does not absolve trustees of their legal duties or moral responsibilities. Quite the reverse, the manner in which they are raised is just as important. The public expect the highest standards of conduct from registered charities. When a charity fails to meet those standards, it can risk the very reason it was set up in the first place.

Charities and their fundraising events should be places where all people are protected from harm, and where all people are treated with respect and care. It is clear from our findings that the trustees of the Presidents Club failed to put the proper steps in place to ensure the January dinner fully met those expectations. The trustees thought insufficiently about the welfare of the women hired to work at their charity's event while taking careful steps to protect the privacy of the male guests attending the dinner. It is not the Commission's role to determine whether any of the women working on the night were subjected to harassment or abuse. What we can say is that the trustees' attitude towards their welfare in the name of charity fell short of what would be expected in the 21st century.

We have no evidence that the trustees acted in bad faith. But they demonstrated poor judgment, and a lack of awareness of the important legal duties and responsibilities the law places on trustees.

Notes to editors

1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
2. Search for charities on our [check charity tool](#).
3. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has confirmed that a male only event is not a breach of the Equalities Act 2010. Section 193(7) of the EA says that "It is not a contravention of section 29 for a person, in relation to an activity which is carried on for the purpose of promoting or supporting a charity, to restrict participation in the activity to persons of one sex."