

## Notes ahead of the Business Meeting

The officers have identified four topics for discussion with you and other tower representatives on 18th November. Please think about them, and discuss them with your members, so we can have a productive discussion.

### Practices run by the Branch

Each month the Branch currently runs a general Saturday practice, a general weekday afternoon practice, two elementary practices and an advanced practice. Running up to 60 events per year is a significant commitment for the officers and it's sensible to review how well they support members' needs.

Those who attend practices regularly clearly see them as beneficial (or they are happy to invest their time for the benefit of others) but many members attend very few, and around half never attend any practice at all, so the effort put into the practices isn't benefiting them.

On the flip side, if too few people attend practices they can't be held, which deprives those who would have attended of benefit. So far this year 6 practices have been cancelled for lack of support (one in seven).

Worst hit were advanced practices where nearly half were cancelled. That could be seen as a 'market signal' to drop them but that would hit ringers who at other practices are mainly helping rather than developing their own ringing so it would be better to increase support.

Elementary practices are well supported – occasionally too well – and the general daytime and weekend practices have had one cancellation each. Questions to consider are:

- Does the current mix of practices adequately meet the needs of members (and if not, what should change)?
- What would persuade members to attend a few more practices (to ensure they are viable)?
- What could we do to meet the needs of the 50% of members who don't currently attend anything?

2023 (Jan – Oct)	Daytime	Advanced	Elementary	Weekend
Practices run	9	6	19	7
Average attendance	10	10	13	11
Max attendance	19	12	22	19
Min attendance	9	8	9	9
<b>Cancelled</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

For more information on the pattern of attendance at Branch events pre and post Covid, see the [accompanying document](#).

### Engaging young ringers

Jennifer, our Youth Officer, has done an excellent job developing opportunities for young ringers, including forming alliances with other branches. We have a core of active young ringers who take advantage of those opportunities and are progressing their ringing.

But some young ringers in the Branch are not very engaged. There may be several reasons for this but it particularly affects ringers aged 16 – 23. That is an age when many ringers are lost, especially those making the transition from home/school life to university and beyond. It's also the age when some ringers exploit their new freedoms to push their ringing forward and go on to benefit both themselves and those around them.

- Can we find ways to maintain the interest of more young ringers – with opportunities, support and encouragement – to reduce the risk of drop out and to help their ringing careers go on to prosper?
- If older teenagers find it harder to fit in with the younger ones, could we make the youth activity more attractive to them, for example by giving them a more active role?
- Could we find ways to make 'non youth' activities more attractive to older youngsters, to help them feel more equal to the (much older) majority?

A first step to answering those questions is to engage with the young ringers, to understand their motivation and to find out how they might become more involved (either 'taking' for their own benefit or 'giving' for the benefit of others). The best people to do that are those who ring with them in their own bands, especially their mentors, tower captains and role models. With your help the Branch may be able to engage better with them.

## Long term recruiting

Most bands took a hit from Covid, and many were not in a 'strong' position before it hit. Few of our towers are at the generally accepted level needed to maintain ringing in the face of illness, holidays, business travel, etc, with 'twice as many active ringers as bells'. All would be healthier and better able to withstand periodic loss of members if their numbers were higher and they had the capability to train and develop a steady flow of recruits.

'Ring for the King' provided a short term surge of potential recruits, which might (or might not) have given a slight boost, but the long term need to recruit (and retain) new ringers remains. Questions we should all ask include:

- Does our current approach to recruitment generate enough people with the interest and aptitude to become long term ringers? And if not, what should we do differently?
- Do we need support to do that? And if so, what could the Branch do to help us?

## Payment process for Guild subs

**When** – The Guild membership year runs from January to December. Subs become due on 1st January (or the date of joining for a new member) and membership is conditional on paying the subscription.

The Guild delegates the collection of subs (and the process of election) to its branches. The Branch in turn delegates subs collection to tower correspondents, who know the individuals and are also responsible for updating membership lists when people leave (stop ringing or move away) or join.

Everything can't happen on one day so the Guild allows three months grace for the Branch to forward subs to it, ie the Branch must send them to the Guild by 31st March. The Branch also gives some flexibility to tower correspondents. Requests are sent at the start of the year and tower correspondents are expected to make their returns as soon as reasonably practical, but no later than the Branch AGM on the third Saturday in February (which is roughly halfway through the leeway the Guild allows the Branch).

From comments made in the past it is clear that some people have misconceptions about this -- for example that subs only become due on 31st March rather than 1st January.

**How** – Traditionally subs have been paid in cash and forwarded from the tower to the Branch and then to the Guild by cheque (or cash) but many people now expect to pay for things by other means. In an ideal world Guild subs could be paid in whatever way individuals found convenient (cash, cheque, card, PayPal or BACS) but the

world is not ideal and we need to live with some practical constraints.

Collecting subscriptions via tower correspondents is still the most practical way to handle the small payments from a large number of members, especially since many don't regularly attend Branch events. The Branch doesn't impose any constraints on how tower correspondents collect subs from their members. The only requirement is that the list of members is accurate and matches the payment. The easiest and most reliable way to ensure that match is for the list and payment to arrive together.

That is easy when paying by cheque (or cash) but difficult for any tower correspondent who doesn't normally use either. Many commercial transactions are now done by bank transfer but paying subs by bank transfer would separate the payment from the update of membership list. If everything worked 'by the book' it could be made to work but it would be more error prone.

The bank transfer allows minimal information to be added to a payment so it would critically rely on the tower correspondent sending the Treasurer a confirming e-mail with the membership list reconciled to the payment. In practice things don't work 'by the book' – people forget to do things or make slips, and there may be discrepancies that need resolving. That's not too hard when everything comes together but a lot more difficult when they are separate, or if they get out of step, or if one is forgotten altogether.

We are all human and we are all volunteers. We all have other pressures and 'real life' to contend with. Experience shows that tower subs and membership updates don't always arrive on time and often need chasing. Splitting the two parts of the process would add another layer of uncertainty, and effort to sort things out.

**In the future** – For those who would like to see change – the Guild is considering the possibility of a central system that would support online payment – but nothing is in place yet.

If/when implemented it will imply major change in the way the Guild, its branches and its members operate. Members paying their subs direct to the Guild would cut out both the Branch and tower. So instead of the tower telling the Branch and the Guild what members it had they would need to find out from the central system who had paid their subs and declared affiliation to them. A tower correspondent would not be able to make sure all subs were collected before submitting them – the central system would tell him/her who had paid, leaving the correspondent to work out any who hadn't and remind them. It can all be made to work but it needs doing carefully.