

MINUTES OF GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Held online on 28 November 2020 starting at 3.00pm and attended by 44 Committee members.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Lane, Master, who welcomed members to the meeting and reminded them that the meeting would be recorded. Minutes are subject to confirmation at the next General Committee meeting.

1. Apologies

Eight apologies for absence were received.

2. Any other urgent items of business

The Master was aware in advance of the meeting of two issues which will be raised under Item 14.

3. **Minutes of the meeting on 14 March 2020** were accepted unopposed as a correct record. Proposed by Ken Darvill, seconded by Stuart Gibson.

4. Matters arising

a) Youth Fund

Stuart Gibson updated the Committee on his contacts with HMRC since the March General Committee meeting. HMRC had suggested that, in the light of its significant financial resources, the Guild as a whole should become a registered charity, rather than the Youth Fund only. Discussion will be needed at a Guild AGM, but in the meantime, Stuart Gibson will begin to prepare an application.

Rosalind Garrett-Bowes asked what HMRC's objection to charitable status for the Youth Fund alone had been. Stuart Gibson explained that the Youth Fund does not have its own bank account and it had therefore been necessary for HMRC to review bank statements relating to all the Guild's activities. There was also concern about what would happen should the Youth Fund be treated as a distinct entity but needed to close.

Stuart Gibson has also been considering the Guild's membership database in the light of GDPR (the General Data Protection Regulation 2018). Work on the database would be needed if charitable status for the Guild overall is sought. Stuart invited two or three branches to contact him if they are interested in trialling an updated approach to Guild records.

John Harrison reminded the Committee that work began on updating the database ten years ago: he has the work that was done at that time. Alan Marchbank recalled that there had been another membership database at one point and this database could also be useful.

b) Public Relations Working Group

Jennifer Rooke, who has experience working on websites, Katie Lane, Ken Darvill, Tony Crabtree and Stuart Gibson have formed a working group with Tim Hayward's help. They

hope to update the website shortly progress on their work has been limited while coronavirus restrictions have made the future so uncertain.

5. Correspondence

Katie Lane reported that she had been contacted by the executors of the will of Kathleen Mary Robinson, the last surviving granddaughter of F.E.Robinson. The will includes the bequest to the Guild of a commemorative silver bowl from the estate, to be known as the F.E.Robinson Silver Bowl. Katie Lane will collect the bowl, ensure that it is receipted and photograph it.

6. Reports of sub-committees

a) Finance and General Purposes Sub-committee

Ken Darvill said that in future, we were hoping that AGMs could have a facility for members to join in online as an alternative to coming to the meetings in person post-Covid. The aim would be to encourage more members to attend AGMs in either of the two ways. Alan Marchbank noted that it would also be helpful to allow members to view or listen to the meeting afterwards. Colin Newman suggested that YouTube could be a useful repository for such recordings.

The sub-committee report was accepted unanimously.

b) Education Sub-committee

Robert Newton reported that it had not been possible to hold the Training Meeting face to face on 21 March, but it had instead been held in two online sessions.

The report was accepted unanimously on a proposal by Robert Newton, seconded by Colin Newman.

c) Towers and Belfries Sub-committee

Tony Crabtree drew the Committee's attention to John Davidge's report on the Tower Maintenance Award, forthcoming in the next edition of Odd Bob.

It was proposed that all current awards should be extended by a year. 17 awards have been presented by Len Palfrey in nine branches. Additionally, the Tower Maintenance Handbook has been updated ready to be uploaded onto the new Guild website; and numerous 'return to ringing' inspections have been facilitated as towers planned to resume ringing. Sadly, all courses had been cancelled.

The report was accepted unanimously on a proposal by Tony Crabtree, seconded by Colin Newman.

7. Central Council Representatives' Report

John Harrison highlighted three new Central Council workgroups. Two deal with young ringers and the third 'senior stakeholders' such as the Church and Government. The rapid setting up of these groups demonstrates a new, agile approach to work on the part of the Council.

The main current debate is a proposal to create a category of direct individual membership of the Central Council. Guild members are encouraged to contribute to the debate if they have the opportunity.

The report was proposed by John Harrison and seconded by Bobbie May. It was passed unopposed.

8. Diary of Events

Ken Darvill noted that face to face meeting will be unlikely before April 2021. The next General Committee meeting (due in mid-March) would therefore take place online.

It is hoped that the new Covid-19 vaccination programme will enable restrictions to be limited. A number of 2021 events have therefore been left in the diary, including the AGM in May, the 8 bell competition and the Ringing Day. There will be further discussions in January and February, and in February Branch Secretaries will meet. In the meantime, branches planning to host these events are urged to be patient until the situation becomes clearer.

A decision will also be needed early in 2021 on the Guild Festival in July 2021. Towers remain booked and service arrangements in place. Katie Lane continues to oversee the organisation of the Festival and no arrangements have yet been cancelled.

9. Subscriptions for 2021

a) Resident Ringing Members and Associate Members

The 2020 Guild subscriptions were set by the General Committee at £8 12 months ago. Of this, £5 was used by the Guild to fund essential services such as insurance, and other regular expenditure such as ringing publications, activities by young ringers and grants.

Reports from some branches indicated disquiet should the 2021 subscription remain at £8 because far fewer activities and services had been provided during 2020. It was therefore proposed that the Guild should accept a minimum subscription of just £3 per member, for 2021 only, in recognition of the limited ringing possible in the previous year. Branches would be free, as they are now, to add an additional contribution if they are able to raise it.

Points emerging in discussion included:

- a concern that, as costs were rising generally among membership organisations reduced subscription income could deprive the Guild of money to deliver some activities or services regarded as important
- likely loss of members and income as Guild activities recover from the Covid restrictions
- a concern that offering a flexible subscription rate, however well-meaning, would be confusing.

Alan Marchbank proposed an amendment that the allocation to the general Guild should be £5. Richard Stanworth reminded the meeting that the Guild rules expect the General Committee to set the subscription rate, and there is no scope for members to set their own subscription rates.

The original proposal was amended to propose that the 2021 subscription be set at £8, split between £5 for the Guild and £3 for the branch, as currently. The proposer was Alan Marchbank and the seconder was Hilarie Rogers. The proposal was passed by 37 votes to 2.

b) Non-resident Ringing Members

On a proposal by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Ken Darvill, it was agreed by 38 votes in favour to 1 against to maintain the subscription for non-resident members at the current level of £8.

10. Peal Fees for 2021

Stuart Gibson proposed retaining the 2020 peal fee of 50 pence per rope for 2021. The proposal was seconded by Colin Lee and passed with 38 votes in favour and 1 against.

11. Guild Budget

Stuart Gibson introduced the budget and explained that it had been prepared in the expectation that the Guild minimum subscription for 2021 would be £3 as discussed in Item 9.

Stuart proposed adoption of the Guild budget, amended to £5 subscription income per head. It was recognised that reduced membership would be likely to contribute to an operating deficit of some £5,000 during the year.

The proposal was seconded by Keith Vernon and passed unopposed.

12. Learning and Development Workgroup Terms of Reference

It was proposed by the Chair of the Education Sub-Committee that it be re-named the Learning and Development Workgroup. The change would simply update the language used to describe learning and development within the Guild and no change to the group's way of working, objectives or deliverables was envisaged. Delegated financial authority would remain as at present, as would the group's membership structure.

It was clarified in discussion that members of the group may be elected or co-opted, as currently. Its membership would be from the 'current resident membership of the Guild'. The group would continue to report to the General Committee, either directly by the Chair or by his or her delegate at a General Committee meeting. It was noted that the Towers and Belfries Working Group already uses this approach and is a good example of how well it can work.

Colin Newman's proposal was seconded by Ken Darvill. The amended Terms of Reference were accepted on a vote of 31 in favour and 5 against.

13. Date of Eight Bell Striking Competition 2021

Ken Darvill proposed combining the competition with the AGM with both being held on the same afternoon and at the same location in order to attract greater numbers to the meeting. Historically the host branch has provided much of the necessary quorum for the meeting but next year is a particular concern because the host branch is small. There may also be some members who are still reluctant to mix at events and meetings because of the Covid virus.

Patricia Newton suggested trialling this approach in 2021 with a review and discussion at the November 2021 General Committee Meeting. If there were many entries for the competition it could prove difficult to manage both events within the time available. Alternatively, if the combined event became very long, attendance could be split and members drift away before the AGM. John Davidge suggested that, if necessary, heats could take place in the morning to allow the final to be in the afternoon.

Ken Darvill agreed to Patricia Newton's suggestion to trial the change for one year.

The amended proposal by Patricia Newton to trial and then review the experience in 2021 was seconded by Ken Darvill and passed by 38 votes to 1.

14. Any Other Business

- a) Annual Report: Heather Browning noted that next year's report will be available in March and that content and reports will be needed by the end of January. Distribution methods will be considered in March. Some contact details may be out of date, e.g. for tower correspondents. A further question arose about the personal data contained in the Annual Report and how this is managed and destroyed as appropriate, as some towers are open access and the Annual Report currently links members to specific towers. Currently we do not ask permission to use the personal data of tower correspondents.

It was suggested that we move to generic email addresses across the piece: some towers and branches already do this and branches could manage their lists. It was also made clear that persons of protected status (persons whose location should not be disclosed) could be redacted from web information, but under current arrangements their locations would continue to be revealed in printed material. Furthermore it was not clear whether the safeguarding requirement for parental consent to publish a child's name had been consistently applied.

It was agreed that further consideration was needed for the 2021 report and also to consider how to deal with historic reports without unnecessarily reducing their value as local records.

- b) Bishop of Dorchester: Katie Lane has written to the new Bishop, Gavin Collins, to invite him to be Guild Vice President.

15. Thanks

Katie Lane thanked those attending and, in particular, Colin Newman for his efficient organisation of the meeting online. The meeting closed at 4.30 pm.