

Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 9 February 2024, at Burlington House and via Zoom

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Lucy Devine, Director of Wellspring Consulting Ltd, was introduced and welcomed as undertaking a Governance review. ME asked Council that any Conflicts of Interests need to be declared.

ACTION: AM to circulate Conflict of Interest forms

1.2 Attendance

PRESENT:

Prof Mike Edmunds (ME); President and Chair
Prof Mike Lockwood (MLO); President Elect
Prof Mike Cruise (MC); Interim Treasurer
Prof Mark Lester (MLE); Senior Secretary
Prof James Hammond (JH) G Secretary
Dr Matt Middleton (MM); Vice President, (A)
Prof Stephen Eales (SE); Vice President (A)
Prof Andrew Curtis (ACU) Vice president G online
Dr Sheona Urquhart (SU); A Secretary
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)
Dr Olivia Keenan (OK); (A)
Prof Belinda Wilkes (BW)
Dr Joanna Barstow (JB)
Prof Steve Miller (SM) online
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) A
Prof Caroline Smith (CLS) online
Dr Imogen Gingell (IG) G
Dr Ashley Spindler (AS) A online
Prof Derek Ward Thompson (DWT) A

APOLOGIES:

Prof Clare Watt (CW); Vice President (G)
Dr Jasmine Kaur Sandhu (JKS) (G)
Prof Silvia Zane (SZ)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director
Dr Robert Massey, (RM) Deputy Executive Director and Policy
Mr Audie Muller (AM), Head of Operations
Ms Lucy Devine (LD), Director of Wellspring Consulting Ltd
Mr Andrew McDonald (AMD), Society of Antiquaries

2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 8 December 2023 were approved.

Matters Arising:

2.2 Action Status Report was received by Council

3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

3.1 Update on the BH lease, for information

AMD kindly answered questions from Council and updated Council regarding Heads of Terms. AMD confirmed that the next steps were to have a formal signing meeting, which would be followed by a press announcement and Ministerial involvement. No date has been scheduled at present.

AMD explained the conditions of a nominal peppercorn rent. It is entirely nominal and no rent is demanded. AC noted that the agreement did not include a map which included the courtyard. AMD confirmed that the plan includes the West yard and the courtyard.

MC asked if alterations were needed or required what consent level would be required. AMD confirmed that this would need to be agreed by the Department. MC sought clarification on sub-letting and whether we could sublet to other societies. AMD confirmed that we could do this.

AMD confirmed that public engagement activities in the courtyard would not be split up. The RA pays 50% towards the courtyard with the remaining societies contributing 10% each. Any displays in the courtyard are subject to licence. MC suggested that the introduction of a gift shop, could provide a source of revenue for the society.

3.1a Heads of terms for information, for information

AMD confirmed that the Heads of Terms is unlikely to change.

ME thanked AMD.

MC outlined the implications noted in the Treasurer's report. The Treasurer recommended that the Society should pay the minimum acceptable deposit. In relation to the loan, this can be paid off anytime with no penalties.

MC commented that we would have a good chance of securing lottery funding if we encouraged public engagement. RM commented that we would need to improve accessibility and with increased public activities.

PD outlined the 5.8% mortgage and informed Council that this was the rate set by the Treasury.

PD put forward the following for Council to formally approve.

Council was asked to vote on accepting the Heads of Terms in principle. Council unanimously agreed. AC, JKS, SZ were not in attendance to vote.

Council was asked to approve a working group whose purpose would include to act autonomously on any small variations to the Heads of Terms. The working group would include PD, MC, ME.

Council unanimously agreed. AC, JKS, SZ were not in attendance to vote.

3.1b Delegated authority, was approved by Council.

3.2 CiviCRM and Direct Debit update, for information

PD and RM apologised to all for not being able to fulfil the expectations of Council that monthly direct debits would be available to Fellows to pay their subscription this year.- However, there is an opportunity for us to improve due diligence in future and ensure that we that our contracts with third parties permit us to seek penalties when projects are not delivered by third parties. We will also push our contractors harder to justify our confidence in the information they provide us with as projects proceed.

Action: Reference to the DD on the website needs to be removed.

Action: AM to report on progress on monthly direct debit introduction

3.3 Home Office response, for information

RM updated Council and would continue to press the Government on the visa issue. It was commented that the Global Talent Visa was a desirable route for postgraduate students.

Action: RM to contact the Royal Society and ask them about the Global Talent Visa. With a view to submit a joint response.

It was also stated that ME, RM, and SE contributed to a Science and Technology Select Committee in January 2024. Professors Martin Barstow and Anna Scaife made oral submissions to this session

4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

4.1 The Treasurer's Report, including Risk Register and Statement of Accounts was received by Council.

MC updated the Council and confirmed that everything is going as expected.

4.1a Staff pay award was approved (staff recused themselves from the meeting for the discussion)

MC highlighted to Council that a Remuneration Committee was established and sat in January 2024 whose primary purpose is to set the overall salaries.

MC thanked AM for the paper that was submitted for the Remuneration Committee.

The Remuneration Committee did agree that the process should be fair, transparent, and traceable so that it could be understood how we came to that decision. It is important to reward staff for the work that they do and not just remunerate them.

MC declared a conflict of interest as he receives an honorarium.

The Council voted and agreed a pay award.

The Council agreed that staff salaries should be increased by the current CPI (4%) plus another 1% to recognise the high quality of service that has been delivered in challenging times. The pay award is 5% in total, in line with our peers such as the RSC and IOP.

Action: Notify staff of Pay Award Executive Director

Action: Buzzacott to examine VAT returns Accountant

4.1b Budget, was approved

MC commented that 2023 figures are distorted by the OUP signing on bonus. In 2024 costs are expected to increase. It is expected that staff costs will be higher, as FTEs are increasing at RAS, in order to deliver the strategy.

MC said that he, the accountant and the Executive Director have met the auditors to plan the audit.

MC submitted a RAS Financial Authority: Levels and Procedures paper to be formally approved by Council.

Council agreed and voted to approve the Levels and Procedures paper.

4.2 The Finance Committee Minutes, were approved.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 Report by Executive Director

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5.1 The Report by Executive Director was received by Council.

PD updated Council following a meeting of the Caroline Herschel panel and informed Council that Dr Linda Tacconi won the award, amidst a very competitive group of applications. PD, ME, and NC will be going to Berlin in March.

Oversight Committees. In regard to communications and website, RM will be convening a committee and will be inviting members of the Council to join.

5.2 The RAS Bullying and Harassment Report 2023, was received by Council

PD commented that Sheila Kanani will organise a launch meeting for the report. In addition, it was put forward that we should consider practically what we would want to adopt from the report.

Action: SK to convene a group with representation from the Council. This group should include OK, PT, SM. This group should make recommendations then come back to Council.

JH mentioned it was important to collect evidence on what differences these recommendations make. The British Geophysical Association society are looking at doing a similar initiative and it would be appropriate if SK could share this with them.

Action: JH to contact SK and explore knowledge sharing with the British Geological society.

RM stated that the launch is on 17th May at 11.00.

5.3 The Strategy, revised strategy paper, was approved by Council

ML requested that the Mission Statement be updated to include international members and make the reference to 'young people' more upfront. JH and AC said that there should be a process to organise meetings at BH and we should look to include meetings across the country so that we are not London centric. AC suggested that we could partner with another society in the North, which would allow us to have a presence there.

It was agreed by Council that the delivery of the strategy should be a standing item on the Council. We will develop a delivery plan on how we will achieve this.

Action: AM to convene a delivery group. Council members to be invited.

Council voted to approve the strategy paper.

Action: Delivery Plan to be presented to Council as soon as practicable

SM suggested the acknowledgments should be more general.

Action: Amend the acknowledgments

Council also agreed that a Governance Oversight Group should be established. The group will comprise ME, IG, and SM, PD and LD. LD was thanked by Council for attending and carrying out the induction training. LD will be inviting Council members to have individual 1:1's over the coming weeks.

5.4 International Astronomical Union 6th – 15th August, Cape Town, was noted by Council.

PD explained that the President and Treasurer are usually in attendance. SU has expressed an interest in attending. ML said that he could possibly attend the beginning and the end, covering the business meetings. MC briefed Council on IAU.

Action: MC to discuss further with ML. PD and ME to also raise with Diana Worrell.

5.5 The RAS Council Elections 2024 review of nominations were received.

The Council accepted the nomination of Arvind Parmar as Treasurer.

5.6 Scrutineers were received for approval.

PD mentioned that there is a by-law requirement for external scrutiny of the process for election. Peter Grimley was accepted for the role of scrutineer.

5.7 The RAS Astronomical Heritage Committee Terms of Reference, were received by Council and approved.

5.8 The RAS Astronomical Heritage Committee Minutes, were received by Council and approved.

5.9 The RAS Library Committee Terms of Reference, were received by Council and approved.

5.10 The RAS Library Committee Minutes, were received by Council and approved.

5.11 The RAS GJI Editorial Board Minutes, were received by Council and approved.

6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee: inquiry into the effects of artificial light and noise on human health: Government response, was received by Council.

Action: PD to contact Baroness Brown, Chair of the Lords Science and Technology Committee

7. OTHER

- 7.1 The Membership Officer's Reports was received by Council. All proposed fellows were approved.

Action: Amend deceased date Membership officer

- 7.2 Redacted

- 7.3 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 12 January was received by Council and approved.

SU has 3 event session proposals for ECN.

Action: Amendment to be made. Change Hybrid to Highlights.

Action: JH asked for the call for proposals for SDM be advertised.

8. AOB

RAS 150 years celebration. ML suggested we could look at 150 years in the past and 150 years going forward.

OK recommended that we work together with the other societies in a relaunch event.

Council Rose at 14:31 9 February 2024