

Review of the Poultry Club of Great Britain.

2014/ 2015

**A report at the request of Council and supported at the 2014
Annual Meeting.**

Final copy.

Appointment of the Review Panel.

At the September 2014 meeting of the Council of the Poultry Club of Great Britain, the (then) President of the club, Andrew Wetters was asked by Council to set up a review panel to look at all aspects of the administration and running of the Poultry Club. This was in response to an agenda item originally from the July (Council) meeting, proposed by council member Philip Parfitt, which had not been discussed due to lack of time (in July).

A. Wetters agreed to chair the panel, but informed Council he would be unable to commence immediately, suggesting work would start in the New Year. In the forthcoming weeks, Peter Ward (Prospective candidate for council), Duggs Carre (member volunteer, experienced in charities work) and Councillor Alan Barrow (Mayor of High Peak and experienced in charity administration, trustee to a number of charities and independent of the Poultry Club) were invited by the chair of Council and appointed to the panel.

Following the 2014 AGM at Telford in November, Mike Tudor was invited to join the panel and a similar invitation was extended to Phil Parfitt, following a meeting between him and PCGB officials held at Stafford show.

P. Ward by this time had been elected to Council, but as he has no previous knowledge of the review period as a council member; he was asked by the chair to continue.

During January a scoping meeting was held, attended by all members of the panel. General issues and how the Panel would operate were agreed.

It was clear that there were many issues panel members wish to look into, including some which involved individual members, and also included issues arising from interactions between individuals. The chair reminded members that it was a review and not an inquiry, so processes and procedures would be looked at, but not individual cases. Although it has been claimed elsewhere, the panel viewed that it would be harsh to say the Council was not fit for purpose. However it was abundantly clear that major improvements were needed. The RP wanted to see greater transparency on actions taken and improved the efficiency of the club. It was decided that the panel would concentrate initially on:

- The Review Panel (RP) would examine PCGB administration processes and make appropriate recommendations to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
- Review topics passed to the RP from the AGM.
- Review the constitution document and appendices which form the operational guidance of the Club. (Note: Ready to be passed at July meeting and circulated to members before the 2015 AGM).

- Review any matters raised by members to the RP
- The RP would prepare a report.

Following largely unrelated disciplinary action by Council, Messrs Tudor and Parfitt left the Panel.

The RP produced a draft constitution for PCGB, which Council approved at the July meeting. A copy was to be sent to members before the 2015 AGM.

The RP have considered that re-drafted appendices should be produced, these will be considered by Council, covering (in no particular order at this stage):

- Financial procedures
- Asset identification and control
- Elections*
- Disciplinary action*
- Trustees and role of council
- National show
- Safe-guarding (children and vulnerable adults)

The RP agreed to produce an over-arching report with suggestions for improvement.

A formal recommendation list will also be produced for Council and the membership.

Any confidential, or issues which involve individuals which may require further action will be covered in closed letters from the RP to the Chairman and the club's Compliance Officer, the existence of such letters, would be noted in the report's final conclusions.

A. F. Wetters (Chairman)

P. Ward

D. Carre

Councillor A. Barrow.

- Initially covered in the constitution, but could be expanded.

Council

The role of Trustees

The RP concluded there was no point in re-inventing the wheel, and after perusing the documents felt the charity commission's publications should become the basis of Council's guidance to Trustees. The RP felt there was merit in the development of specific 'job descriptions' for Council members, Chair and vice-chair.

The RP identified local community voluntary organisations ran courses on all aspects of the Trustees role and suggested council members availed themselves of these. For example, High Peak CVS, ran a series of training courses, covering responsibilities, financial controls etc from as little as £15 per three hour session.

Leadership

The review panel felt on more than one occasion in the recent past, that vigorous leadership had been lacking from both Council and officers. Again, a lack of urgency to deal with 'awkward issues', had in turn, in the opinion of the RP, lead to confusion and ill feeling between parties.

At times Council appeared to lose confidence in decision making especially when under pressure from complainants, these were difficult times when possibly Council was pulled in a number of directions.

It was suggested that Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) should be agreed (and may be published by Council,) so members have a realistic idea of turn-around of correspondence, complaints and enquiries which needed Council input. Such KPI's are not set in stone, but it is felt they would be helpful as some members have expected 'instant' responses, especially to email enquiries. It must also be understood the Secretary has many tasks to complete, especially close to newsletter times, or other deadlines, and indeed may not have the authority to respond to some enquiries and thus will have to take advice before replying on behalf of council to the member enquiry.

Council should set aside time each year to develop plans of work and set clear deadlines.

Council and National show committee should take stock and review what each body it is responsible for in the Fancy. At times Council appears torn apart by the contrasting tasks of acting as the 'Governing body' and the responsibility of masterminding the National Show.

Corporate Responsibility

Council members have a responsibility to work together and unite behind decisions which have been democratically reached. The review panel recognises that any group of people will have different views but once decisions are reached it is important everyone on council should support the majority view.

The RP felt that on more than one occasion grudges and disagreements were allowed to keep being brought up. Often, and for the 'best of reasons' even major decisions were taken at a 'committee level' and Council had little choice but to support what was effectively 'a fait accompli'. Members were denied the opportunity to put forward views until long term commitments had been made.

Council really needs to improve communication with the membership at all levels, especially where the membership is required to give major participation, like the National Show venue. The RP does not need to be prescriptive on how this is done, but clearly a 2-way consultation with the members is a minimum.

Going forward Council should develop an organisational structure and job description of each officer (Chair, vice chair, compliance, safeguarding etc) and each committee's role and purpose.

The management and role of the Secretary / Treasurer should be clearly laid out to ensure greater clarification for the post-holder, Council and the membership. The secretary should be provided with the opportunity to discuss the role, job performance and any issues annually. It is suggested this involves the Chair and one other in an informal meeting, which is written up and retained in the secretary's personal work file.

Council are reminded when they have approved a decision on any matter or issue at a council meeting, the matter or issues cannot be considered again for a two year period.

Matters arising from the minutes should only be considered for factual corrections not revision of decisions or another prolonged discussion.

Review of Sub-committees

The RP looked at Council sub-committees, some were active and doing sound work, whilst others rarely meet. The sub-committees each involve 3 or 4 council members co-opted to serve on them. Appointed council members are deemed to have the skills required to contribute to the effective running of the sub-committee.

Affiliated Societies (AF's)

There are four council members in this group, many issues raised by AF's are dealt with by the Secretary, the council show awards member or referred to the next council meeting. The RP suggest council decides whether this committee is required.

Judging Tests & Workshops

Eight Council members contribute to the work of this committee and the RP recognises the hard work and forethought which goes into its operation. This sub-committee works extremely well and credit is attributed to the council members and experienced voluntary members of the judging who take members for their tests. The RP feel that minutes of meetings should be submitted to council rather than oral reports.

The workshops held at the National for aspiring judges, have proved popular and again the RP recognises the time and effort taken to make these a success. The RP sees no reason to change a winning formula and would like to see them continue.

Finance

It is widely accepted and understood that an organisation cannot function without an adequate finance structure to controls spend and incoming monies, and that strict controls and records must be maintained at all times. These are essential to enable council to meet member's requirements for open and transparent operation.

In recent times this committee has not met on a regular basis, certainly not within 12 months during the review. The RP are extremely concerned that there is a lack of financial planning, and structure for the club's finances, especially with the National Show, which operates without a budget or financial plan. There is nothing which suggests there are any financial irregularities but spending commitments have been made in recent times which have left the financial responsible officer no choice but to approve them.

Elsewhere in the report the RP will cover individual issues, but urges council to revitalise the finance committee urgently.

National show

This group includes councillors and co-opted ordinary members and volunteers. The success of the show relies largely on the effectiveness of this committee and council should ensure records of decisions, especially financial, are reported in minute form, to enable control of finances to be maintained.

Publications

The RP are keen to see a communications strategy developed to ensure newsletters are effectively used, and the timetable for production ensures compulsory notices are included in a timely fashion. The number of newsletters is reviewed with the suggestion from the RP of producing three a year.

Greater clarity is required in the PCGB's role in production of the standards book, especially around copyright, editorship and the rights of future productions.

The broader activities of the council require promotion, such as support to members having issues with poultry keeping. It is suggested a display of council action and support to individuals and societies is staged at the National show.

The title 'what the poultry club does for its members'.

PR & Marketing

In addition to the communications strategy, a promotion plan should be developed which would recruit and retain more members.

Breed Clubs and Standards

Breed club's 'develop' the breed standards. The PCGB ratifies that standard, and PC judges are required to judge exhibits accordingly. The RP suggests that the PCGB reviews current publishing agreements and develops a policy for on-going publications.

Juvenile

The RP are keen to see the encouragement of juvenile exhibitors and would like to see a forwarding looking policy agreed by council and this sub-committee in this area.

Discussion Points.

Tendering.

During the life time of the review, Peter Ward prepared documents to cover tendering exercises for goods and services provided to the PCGB.

In the case of the 2015 National show penning arrangements the RP could not condone the decisions taken when the show sub-committee suggested penning contractors provided equal number of pens which resulted in paying more for the total bill (in the order of £2,500 or 80 member subs).

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Council conduct.

Serious concern was expressed by the review panel of the conduct of councillors, there is clear evidence of the leaking of council papers and the confidential emails sent between them and members. This practice needs to be urgently stamped out and the content of emails should be moderated.

The RP were made aware of decisions of council (and who supported and who was against) being common knowledge within hours of the meeting.

The lack of corporate responsibility was also highlighted, where council split on decisions and would not accept democratic decisions.

Regrettably, the RP became aware of some situations where personal differences were allowed to interfere and cloud decisions. Club office holders must stamp this out.

National Show

The RP were of the view that the National Show is a jewel in the PCGB crown; however there are always opportunities to improve.

Notes for 'improvement'

- A proper system is engaged to harness volunteers, it was suggested that offers to help had been made and not followed up.
- The RP were concerned there was no master timetable for the National Show and that financial planning was totally lacking (2015). It is suggested the finance committee and show committee draw up a financial proposal and budget. Greater financial controls are needed and better records of spend required.
- Penning costs have been covered elsewhere; clearly greater control is required in this area, whilst being open and fair to penning contractors, the club clearly has a responsibility to 'pen' the show at the most advantageous prices.
- The organisers also have a responsibility to stick to fixed prices for trade stands, any late applicant normally pays a premium at exhibitions, rather than 'doing a deal' to fill in spaces, as this is not fair to those regular 'early' customers.
- The Hon Vet officer, should supervise the 'clean down' of occupied isolation pens, before the breakdown of the show.
- Concerns have been expressed about birds left after the show. In most cases this is a genuine case of mistake or forgetfulness in the rush to pack up. However, there needs to be a plan to deal with any birds left. Where possible this should be to an isolation unit or similar. Fanciers should be bound to make arrangements to collect
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birds quickly. Cases of birds not being collected for a month are simply not acceptable.

- Note: It is also suggested that a 'sweep' of the car parks is made before leaving the site to check the numerous boxes left, which may contain live or sadly, dead stock.

National show committee

This committee consists of council members and co-opted members on a voluntary basis, meeting on an ad hoc basis. On the whole, it is functional and has a positive effect. However, the RP were concerned there is a lack of record keeping, planning and control.

Expertise is gained, but no effort is made to record 'corporate memory or experience' which will assist those in the future tasked with delivering the show.

The RP strongly recommend a budget and timetable is produced, with financial controls specified.

All expenditure requires careful recording for scrutiny after the event to ensure value for money is obtained. Future budgets should be amended accordingly.

In this way the workload can be spread over a longer period and allow sound financial practice to be used in obtaining quotes or tendering for prices. Much of the 'standard' work, i.e. ordering pens, rosettes and prize cards could be completed during the spring and summer, removing the need for expensive 'just in time' ordering and deliveries.

The RP discussed the status of the National show, many suggestions were considered, and it is suggested that Council consider if there is any merit in appointing volunteers to run the show at 'arms length' from Council, but not the PCGB; with Council underwriting the show and providing working capital of say, £40,000.

ELECTIONS

The RP carefully considered the many points raised on how to improve elections within the PC. The RP felt a slightly more formal process would be beneficial, but in the main supported the current system. Confusion did arise over the election of candidates to replace members of Council, who still have further time to serve, when they left Council.

The RP felt the current ruling that when the four year vacancies are filled, the vacancy / ies caused by resignations etc, are filled by the candidate/ s with the next highest votes in order of the length of term of office remaining and so on. There is merit in waiting for the

next election if the vacancy occurs after the March meeting. The candidate serving the remaining time available is of course eligible to stand for re-election after the 1-3 years served.

These candidates cannot serve for the standard four year term as this would throw out council numbers.

It is the election of the chairman and vice chairman of Council (at the September meeting) which the RP believes should be a little more formal.

Candidates should be formally proposed and seconded in writing; with papers handed out at the July Council meeting to be returned to the secretary by August ??, to allow the secretary to prepare a note for the September meeting.

The proposer to produce a 75 word statement outlining the candidate's credentials to hold office and the Candidate may either provide a supporting statement of 100 words to be included with the note or address council with a 100 word statement.

The President will take the chair and also conduct the secret ballot, acting as scrutiniser, collecting the papers, calculate and record the result in terms of votes cast, and announce results to Council and give the result slip to the secretary. The President will be responsible for destroying confidentially the voting slips.

Action Point: Council consider adoption of the above.

Council elections

Procedure for the election of Council members / Trustees.

The PCGB will appoint an individual independent of the club, Hon. Scrutiniser to receive the votes cast.

Nominations should be made in writing in the normal way, with a proposer and seconder and a confirmation the candidate is willing to stand. All must be current members for more than 12 months.

It is proposed the proposer supplies no more than 75 words outlining what the candidate can bring to the post. The candidate should prepare 100 words in the support of their application.

The closing date must be clearly stated.

Numbered voting slips should be sent to all members and returned within 10 working days.

The scrutiner will be told to record where more than two voting slips are received in the same envelope.

The scrutiner shall record the following information

PART A (for public notices)

Total number votes cast.

The number of papers rejected (if any) and reasons (i.e. late, too many votes marked.)

The number of votes cast for each candidate

Part B (for PCGB records held by Sec)

A separate report on any anomalies or irregularities will be produced. No more than two voting slips will be allowed in any envelope.

At this point the voting papers are sealed and sent to the Sec/Treas., along with reports of Part A and B. On receipt the secretary confirms to the Chairman and Council the election has been concluded. [If Part B has been completed the Sec/Treas., will relay the content to the Chair and Vice Chair and President, who will decide the course of action]

The Chairman informs all candidates and council of the outcome. Results are also sent out as a press release and published in the next newsletter.

All candidates are sent a copy of Part A which will have been signed by the scrutiner and Chairman.

The voting slips will be retained for four years. In the event of a challenge to the result, The envelope containing the voting slips will only be opened by one of the Holding Trustees who will verify the contents against the report Part A, before any investigation can take place.

Financial Controls.

The RP were disappointed with the lack of standard financial controls and normal financial planning. No evidence could be found of any forecasting of spending or rigorous control of spend.

Expenditure was deemed to be largely cyclical and therefore straightforward to forecast.

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The RP suggest the PCGB introduces set 'spending limits'. Whilst not set in stone the RP offers the following scale of spending limits for Council and it's officers.

Secretary / Treasurer say £250.

Chairman / vice chairman (when acting on chair's behalf) £1000

By majority council approval, (email or phone) £5000

Council decision (at Council meeting & recorded in minutes) £25,000.

For single payments exceeding £25,001 (rarely made) the RP believe the membership should be consulted or dealt with at an AGM if time permits.

It is also suggested the club introduces an official order system similar to that of local Councils with the approved signatory given similar spending levels to the above.

Levels of stocks of merchandise and procurement should be approved and controlled by Council.

Council meetings

The RP also suggest that each Council meeting there is a presentation on the club's financial position and that a report is given on spending decisions of over £500. The report should show spend against forecast. Any decisions (non-financial) taken by officers should also be reported at this time.

For the National show as stated elsewhere, more rigorous financial planning and accounting is required. The RP thinks greater financial separation of income streams would be desirable.

Show officers should be given appropriate spending limits, against the financial forecast, with larger sums being 'approved' by Chair and Council.

The National show accounts should be audited by the finance committee or an outside body, on a bi-annual basis. Charity Commission guidelines to be followed for PCGB accounts, voluntary audits can be made on a need to do basis.

Debtor's list

The PCGB had a considerable list of money owed to it (2015). At one time it was suggested this money had been 'lost' by Council. The RP considered this carefully and the evidence it found, led to the conclusion this was often due to standing orders not being updated to reflect increases in membership fees. The secretary and individual volunteer council members have endeavoured to reduce this list. At the time the RP considered the matter,

The list had been 'cleansed' and deceased members and those known to be no longer keeping poultry removed. Council had authorised the writing off of all sums under £5.

The 'debts' had been reduced to £4,500. Approximately half the original sum (October 2015)

The RP asks Council to look at a 'smarter system' for updating standing orders and DD's etc. And a pro-active system of dealing with subs which were underfunded.

It is also the case that some people do in fact 'over pay' due to standing orders being incorrect, they often view the extra payment as a donation.

Legal Advice

The RP was concerned with the current level of use of the club's legal advisor. Whilst clearly important, the costs are likely to be high. Clearer direction and control is required from senior post holders.

Communication with members

Council should use every available method of communication with members and adopt a more open and approachable stance. Council should 'sell' the hobby more and involve the membership in these promotions. The National is an ideal venue to promote the club more actively and a display should be considered.

- To this end, Council should develop a marketing and PR strategy.
- Council explore the production of membership cards and introduce a member benefit scheme. Members should 'know' their membership number and this should be in use wider in the Fancy, including qualification for special awards at shows etc.
- The PCGB has a brand and image of repute; whilst this needs protection and policing, it also offers opportunities for careful commercial exploitation.
- All council sub-committees should prepare minutes of meetings, these maybe handwritten, but a copy should be provided for the Secretary to file as a record. If a subcommittee does not meet within the 'work year', Council should review whether it is required.
- Insurance, the PCGB should undertake an independent review of insurance needs. Corporately there will be public liability, employer's liability, Trustees Indemnity, and National show and affiliated society insurance, including a cancellation policy for the National.
- The RP did look at outsourcing the elections for council, (with the Electoral Reform Services), but the costs were deemed prohibitive.

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- **Membership fees and other related fees, like judging tests, should be reviewed by Council against each financial forecast.**
- **EGMs in the opinion of the RP should only have one agenda item.**
- **AGM items from members should provide some background information at the time of submission and not consist of just a title. This allows for a factual response to be prepared.**
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Council should schedule a further review in say, four years time.

Report ends.

FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW PANEL.

- 1. The panel recommends the PCGB Council develops a five Action Plan, identifying areas of work and topics which require revising, reviewing or developing. (A programme of work to cover standard revision and standards book, welfare officer guidelines, judges and judging, show rules, judging tests and workshops). Each year a timetable of works needs to be agreed and delivered. Finally, a further review should be held in say four years time.**
- 2. The panel urges Council to involve the membership in major key decisions. Council should provide the background on say changes of venue for the National Show and any decisions which involve major expenditure of say over £25000.**
- 3. The panel found Councils attitude to Tenders & contracts, worrying. Examples where clear breaches of all financial rules were identified which show a complete disregard of any financial controls. Council MUST put in financial controls which are followed to ensure these incidents are not repeated. Contracts MUST be carefully studied and not signed until Council can ensure there are no clauses which will cause problems in the future.**
- 4. Council is urgently advised to sign up to a code of conduct covering Trustee's roles and responsibilities including a confidentiality clause.**
- 5. As part of the financial controls Council develop spending limit guidelines for Council, club officials and the secretary/treasurer.**
- 6. Council needs to develop clear guidelines for disciplinary, safe-guarding and financial controls.**

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Report to Council.

The report to Council and presentation of the findings of RP was made at the Council meeting on 13 September 2016.

It was agreed to put the Review Panel's report on the web pages and make provision for electronic copies and hard copies be available to members.