

Notes from National Council meeting via Zoom to discuss Future Group proposals
28.04.21

Present:

Margaret Moffat, George Kempton
Michael Bennett, Jenny King, Ros Lobo, Judith McMurray, Pat Oliver, Sharon Slack, Loreen Smith, Lorraine Taylor, Rosemary White, Sue Williams
John Rostill
Debbie Arnold

Apologies : Helen Dempster, Barbara Ham

1	<p>The Chair, Margaret Moffat, welcomed everyone and explained that the meeting would consider one agenda item - the proposals presented by the Future Group as a way forward for the Fellowship. She then handed the meeting to the Chief Executive, John Rostill. He welcomed Sharon Slack to her first meeting of National Council.</p>
2	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <p>The Trustees have agreed the principle of a number of proposals presented by the Future Group as a way forward for the Fellowship, taking into account the steadily declining membership numbers.</p> <p>At this stage there is no agreed implementation timetable and there have been no costing of any of the proposals so far.</p> <p>This meeting is part of the consultation process and follows meetings with Central Office and Staff at which the proposals and their impact had been discussed. The Chief Executive has held separate discussions as to how these proposals would apply to Scotland and Wales, especially in relation to regional configuration.</p> <p>The outcome of these consultations will be presented to the Board of Trustees at their meeting on May 26th and decisions made regarding means of consultation with the wider membership. In the meantime, all proposals and discussions are to be regarded as confidential</p>
3	<p><u>Planning for the future – slide presentation.</u></p> <p>The Chief Executive explained the background to the work of the Future Group. The Fellowship currently has around 7000 members and 130 branches and continues to experience declining membership numbers.</p> <p>The proposals should be considered in the context of 4 guiding principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will they increase membership? 2. Will they increase the number of branches? 3. Will they lead to more engagement with the membership? 4. Will the perception of democracy continue? <p>The purpose of the consultation process is to consider the proposals in terms of the separate elements rather than as a whole.</p>
3.	<p><u>Structure</u></p> <p>There are 3 elements to the proposed Fellowship structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on groups of complete counties to form regions • National Council is the advisory body with a Chair and Vice Chair elected from its members. The NC Chair or Vice Chair will attend Board of trustee meetings to observe and speak but not to vote • Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees will attend NC meetings

It was agreed that the current regional structure is irrelevant and outdated.

The changes to the structure of NC were unanimously supported.

The proposed Regional Structure was discussed further.

A county based structure was in agreed as appropriate by the majority of Regional Representatives

The Chief Executive emphasised that the current Regional Representatives and Development Officers would have an important role to play in defining Regional boundaries. The map which had been provided for consultation purposes is for illustrative purposes.

Lorraine Taylor commented that she had previously carried out some work in relation to the size and high branch /membership numbers in and around London. Members outside of the central London area do not necessarily consider themselves as being part of the London region. The current area covered by the SE Development Officer is extremely large.

Michael Bennett suggested that a London region with 25 branches would be excessive for one RR to cover. Two of his current branches are currently classed as in the NE Thames region but have Essex postcodes so would therefore move into the county under the new configuration principles.

He agreed that the change to the website which enable branch searches by county, was positive.

Voluntary Member Representation

The introduction of elected County Member Representatives was received mixed reactions.

Jenny King commented that introducing County Representatives would help in maintaining contact with branches, particularly in regions which cover a large geographical area, as it would relieve some of the pressure on the Regional Representatives. Branches could communicate with the Regional Representatives via the County Representatives, as well as directly.

The Chief Executive suggested that filling County Representative vacancies might be easier than those for Regional Representatives as the County role may be perceived as less intimidating. County Representatives could progress to being Regional Representatives.

The election of two Postal Member representatives was also well received.

Some concerns were raised regarding the ease of recruitment of Member representatives – existing volunteer vacancies can often be hard to fill and the Fellowship will now be looking for more volunteers.

Pat Oliver asked how the Fellowship development Officers fitted into the organisation. The Chief Executive explained the division of responsibilities between the Membership Representatives and the Fellowship Development Officers:

- Fellowship Development Officers = outward looking – focus on contact with Trusts and opening new branches
- Regional and County Membership Reps. = inward looking – focus on branches and members

Both are aimed at increasing membership / branches

The FDO's may be responsible for more than one region.

The FDO's would work collaboratively with the Regional and County Member representatives.

Sharon Slack used the example of the DO in the North West who is currently heavily involved in opening new branches and therefore does not have the time or need to be involved in the support of existing branches.

Using the illustrative reconfiguration, she highlighted that the North West has the highest regional population, but that two of the 4 counties have only 1 branch. A County Representative would therefore need to be elected from a single branch in those two counties. The Chief Executive replied that the introduction of these roles would be gradual and that the timescale over which any changes would be introduced is likely to differ according to the circumstances of each region. Additional branches may have been formed by the time any proposals are introduced. He recognised that there is likely to be some disparity between regions but that population and travel were two of the main considerations.

The proposals reflect where the Fellowship future should lie, rather than the current position. The membership of the Fellowship continues to fall and therefore current practices may need to be changed to some extent to reverse this decline and ensure the future of the Fellowship. Any changes made will reflect the four original principles. Once the ideal plan is agreed, costing will take place.

Recruitment is key to providing the funds to enable some of the proposals to be achieved.

Current staffing levels are:

Central Office 3 staff each working 3 days / week

Chief Executive working 15 hours / week

Development Officers usually working 1 day a week

There are no full time staff.

The role of the Chief Executive is to advise the Board based on findings from the consultation process and to implement proposals with which they agree.

Membership model

The proposed membership model involves introducing a single membership category and moving away from the current system based on branch members and postal members. Members would join and pay through Central Office and link with a branch if desired.

Consultation will take place with branch Treasurers to examine the impact of this on their work.

Rosemary White believed that making the role simpler may assist in the recruitment of Treasurers.

Central Office processing systems would need updating and the workload of staff would increase.

A number of issues were raised:

- Michael Bennett was concerned that there would be confusion amongst members who wish to join directly with a branch. The majority of branch members are recruited by word of mouth and join when they attend the branch. Directing them to Central Office for payment may cause confusion and the subsequent loss of these potential new members. This may also make the role of the Treasurer more difficult.
- Lorraine Taylor agreed that most members expect to join at the branch.
- Pat Oliver and Sharon Slack believed that some flexibility was required with options of paying at the branch or Central Office. The option of paying by Direct Debit was considered attractive for some members and had the additional benefit of relieving some of the pressure on Treasurers.

The following is a list of the 16 principles agreed by the Trustees on 12th January 2021 together with additional comment made by NC members:

		Comments
1	<i>That the structure of the NHSRF organisation should be based on complete counties, with groups of counties comprising regions</i>	1 & 2 Michael Bennett suggested that most branch members are not concerned with regional or county boundaries, simply their branch. The London areas would be very large areas for a Regional Rep to cover. Lorraine Taylor suggested concentration should currently be on recruitment and retention of members
2	<i>That the current regions be reconfigured (and a mechanism to finalise that reconfiguration)</i>	
3	<i>That there be a county based member representative elected by branches within each county</i>	3 & 4 Not all RR's agreed with the introduction of County Member Representatives. Sharon Slack suggested that the pace of change and the ease of introduction would be different across the regions for example comparing London with the North West.
4	<i>That the county representatives in each region elect one of their own as a regional representative</i>	
5	<i>These elected regional representatives make up the National Council, together with two members representing members not linked to branches and elected by them from amongst that group</i>	
6	<i>The National Council elects one of its own as its Chairman (and Vice-Chairman), one of whom will attend but not be a member of the Board of Trustees, with a right to speak but not to vote</i>	
7	<i>The Chairman (or Vice Chairman) of the Trustees attends the National Council with a right to speak but not to vote</i>	

8	<p><i>To redefine the roles of regional representative and Fellowship officer as proposed and adopt them for the purpose of consultation (which demonstrates the collaborative approach required)</i></p>	<p>8. Michael Bennett suggested that the role descriptions for the Regional and County Representatives could discourage members from applying Pat Oliver agreed role descriptions were somewhat intimidating Lorraine Taylor raised the issue of applicants needing to be car owners – she performs her role as a RR using public transport</p>
9	<p><i>That a paid officer be appointed by assimilation with a revised job description to cover each region (but may cover more than 1 region)</i></p>	<hr/>
10	<p><i>That the new membership model is based on National membership and branch association</i></p>	<p>10. There was some dissent. Michael Bennett indicated that branches are the heart of the Fellowship and without them there would be no organisation. The term 'branch association' could be interpreted as an add-on making the role of the branch sound inferior</p>
11	<p><i>That for new members, annual subscriptions be paid on the anniversary date of joining</i></p>	<p>11. There were mixed views on the practicality of this and the impact on the Treasurers</p>
12	<p><i>That changes in the constitution are drafted and circulated to Trustees for comment and submission to the next Annual General Meeting</i></p>	<p>12. Some Constitutional changes will be necessary and are currently being considered ready for the Trustees meeting on 26th May 2021</p>
13	<p><i>Once agreement in principle to the proposed changes to receive an indication of the costings so that these can be included in the budget for 2021/22</i></p>	<hr/>
14	<p><i>An implementation timescale</i></p>	<p>13,14,15,16 The pandemic has affected the consultation plans and therefore no costing has yet taken place or implementation timescale proposed.</p>
15	<p><i>A process of consultation which includes discussion with staff, meetings of the National Council and regional face to face roadshows (once permitted) be organised</i></p>	<p>Capitation fees for 2020-21 were reduced to £10. The resulting fall in income was to some extent, alleviated by the majority of the £75,000 grant obtained from the National Lottery</p>
16	<p><i>A comprehensive report outlining the outcome of the consultation process to be submitted to the AGM on 22 October 2021</i></p>	<p>The Capitation fee for 2021-22 has again been reduced to £10 and the current budget demonstrates this may result in financial pressure. A grant from NHS England is still awaited but could alleviate this and give the Fellowship some flexibility.</p>

8.	<p><u>Conclusions</u></p> <p>In general, the need for some change in order to ensure the survival of the Fellowship was agreed. The detail of some changes e.g. the regional reconfiguration and the impact of the new membership model on branches, especially Treasurers, needs further consideration and consultation. The changes to the National Council with regard to the elected Chair and Vice Chair were accepted. The introduction of County Member Representatives however was not universally accepted and there were strong reservations expressed regarding recruitment of additional volunteer representatives</p>
9.	<p>The Chief Executive handed back to the Chair Margaret Moffat who thanked National Council for their comments. She recognised that Loreen Smith and Judith McMurray could have limited input at this stage because the proposals apply to England only, and thanked them for their attendance.</p>

Debbie Arnold
28.04.21

Signed Date