

**MINUTES OF THE 42nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
of the
NHS RETIREMENT FELLOWSHIP
held at
the Forest Pines Hotel, Spa and Golf Resort, North Lincolnshire
on Saturday 25th November 2023 at 12 noon**

Present

George Kempton Chair
Chris Kitchin Vice Chair
Gareth Oakland Hon. Treasurer
Janine Brooks Trustee
Beverley Lawrence Trustee
Mabel Saw Trustee
Vic Griffiths Vice President

Members' Council, Postal and Branch Members

In Attendance

Mike Seaton, Chief Executive
Debbie Arnold Fellowship Administrator
Sherry Smith, Fellowship Administrator
Lucia Hiden, Head of Comms
Angela Johnson, Fellowship Support Officer

The Chair convened the 42nd Annual General Meeting at 12 noon and welcomed members, Vice President Vic Griffiths, Trustees and Members' Council.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Trustees David Paterson, David James and Mark Bagnall.

2. Minutes of the 41st Annual General Meeting held in Hinckley on Sunday 23rd October 2022

The Chair asked that the minutes of the 41st Annual General Meeting be approved. Pam Holroyd (postal member) proposed, and Terry Young (Kettering) seconded the motion. This was endorsed by the members and the minutes signed by the Chair.

3. Annual Report of the Chair

The report of the Chair was received by the members.

The Chair emphasised that the Fellowship is first and foremost, a members' organisation in which all have a voice. The formation of the Members' Council, (Chair Lorraine Taylor, Vice

Chair Ros Lobo), which followed the 2022 AGM, was an important step in this. Branch members should talk to their branch officers, who can then raise issues with their Regional Member Representatives, where they exist, who sit on the Council. Branches without Representatives can approach the Members' Council Chair or Vice Chair directly. Postal members should approach the Postal Member Representatives. The Members' Council Chair and Vice Chair will then take issues to the Board of Trustees meetings for discussion, thus ensuring that members' voices are heard.

He also drew attention to the Member and Branch Handbook, a draft version of which, was discussed at the September Members' Council meeting. It was agreed that it required further work and needed member input. Subsequently, the draft handbook now appears on the Fellowship website and all members are invited to consider it and pass their views to the Fellowship Vice Chair or to the Members' Council Chair.

The Chair highlighted the current vacancies for member trustees to sit on the Board. He emphasised the role that the member trustees play in ensuring that the Board delivers members' requirements. All attendees had received a flier in their conference packs encouraging them to consider applying for a member trustee position and to also encourage other members to do so.

4. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive's report on NHS Retirement Fellowship activity between 01.04.22 and 31.03.23. was received.

The Board of Trustees are responsible for the management and finance of the Fellowship while the National Council, replaced by Members' Council after the 2022 AGM, comprised of Regional Member Representatives and Postal Member Representatives, represents the members, and provides information and advice to the Board of Trustees to assist in decision making.

For the year 2022-23 the Board of Trustees met 4 times, twice in London and twice using Zoom. National Council met twice, once in London and once via Zoom and Members' Council held their inaugural meeting in London in January 2023. Minutes of all meeting are available on the website.

The Chief Executive highlighted the challenges of the year in terms of funding together with the implementation of new structures and ways of working, describing it as a transitional year. The members, Members' Council and Board were thanked for their welcome and support following his appointment in January 2023.

5. Vice President

The Chair invited the Fellowship Vice President Vic Griffiths to speak.

The Vice President was attending his 22nd NHSRF AGM and conference and asked to contribute to the discussions.

He expressed his concern about the continuing fall in the number of members and branches, despite the P60 initiative. He drew attention to the decline from just over 13,000 members in November 2013 to around 7,000 in November 2023, and from 169 branches to 114 branches in a similar time period.

The number of vacancies for Regional Member Representatives, the absence of any patrons and the loss of Development Officers was also of concern to him. He commented on the loss of grants from NHS England Scotland and Wales which has resulted in the capitation fee being the only guaranteed source of income at the current time.

The formation of Members' Council chaired by Lorraine Taylor, with Ros Lobo as Vice Chair was a positive step. He described them both as very capable and energetic Regional Member

Representatives and he expressed his hope that they will be given the opportunities, using feedback from the members, to steer the Fellowship back on track.

He called for a plan to help struggling branches, to increase membership and to ensure the Board of Trustees is fully informed about what the members want from the organisation and what must be achieved. Without this he feared the Fellowship would close.

The Chair thanked the Vice President and noted the pertinent comments he made.

6. Honorary Treasurer's Report

The Honorary Treasurer, Gareth Oakland, presented the financial statements.

In answer to a question received previously, regarding the lack of an audit of the accounts, he explained that the Fellowship does not meet the threshold of size for an audit and therefore, the statements are only subject to an independent examination which provides a similar level of assurance.

Requests for simplification of some of the information contained in the accounts, has been actioned in the current financial statements as it was believed that the statements from the previous year did not set out the financial challenges faced by the Fellowship in a clear manner.

He explained that in 2022-23, the Central Office element of the accounts represented about a third of the income and a quarter of the expenditure. Whilst the Board has a legal oversight of all income and expenditure, in practice most of the management is devolved out to the branches and their officers. The accounts now identify the Central Office operations more clearly to show the costs incurred, at around £275,000 (compared to £291,000 in 2021-22) and the income at £287,000 resulting in a small surplus. This, together with the liquidation of reserves, was used to pay for the P60 recruitment campaign (£150,000).

The Honorary Treasurer then summarised activity to date for the current financial year (2023-24). Two significant problems were being faced namely the loss of NHS grants and general inflationary pressures on most of the Fellowship's cost base. Despite the inflationary pressure the Fellowship decided to reduce the cost base from £275,000 in the previous financial year, to £240,000 in the current financial year. The Board decided that these costs should be met from membership fees alone, therefore regrettably necessitating an increase in capitation fees from branches and postal membership fees.

During the first 6 months of the 2023-24 financial year, income has been lower than costs, largely as a result of losing members. The Fellowship continues to examine ways of controlling and reducing costs, (e.g. face to face meetings are now at a minimum) and to look for external sources of funding. There remain sufficient funds in the Central Office accounts to implement the restructuring plan and to cover costs for 18 – 24 months.

Questions from members relating to the accounts were then invited.

Michael Bennett queried the change of date for capitation fee collection from 31st December to 31st May. This resulted in a loss of capitation fee income to Central Office for branch members who joined or renewed after 31st May. Branches were therefore able to keep the full subscription for those members without paying any capitation fee. The Honorary Treasurer replied that the decision to make this change was in order to alleviate cash flow problems. Further discussions will take place regarding the structure of the membership, payment of subscriptions and pressure on branch treasurers as a result of additional banking requirements. He added that central access to funds at an earlier date was considered to outweigh the loss of the capitation fees for the period between June and December.

Postal member Violet Henry asked whether ancillary NHS retirees could join the Fellowship. The Chair answered this question, replying that the Fellowship is open to all retired NHS, health and social care workers, together with their partners. The Vice Chair confirmed that the

NHSRF constitution was revised at the 2022 AGM to be all encompassing for all health and social care retirees and those approaching retirement.

The Chair then asked the AGM to adopt the accounts relating to the year 2022-23 and this was confirmed.

7. Report of the Chair of the Benevolent Fund

The Chair gave apologies from the Chair of the Benevolent Fund and informed the meeting that the Chief Executive would be leading this agenda item.

The current Chair of the Benevolent Fund was appointed in November 2022.

The Chief Executive reported that, despite promoting the benefits of the fund in his letters to members, there have been very few applications in recent years. There has only been one application in the last year. He expressed the concern that awareness and use of the Fund is low and that a greater level of promotion is required. He and the Fund Chair will welcome suggestions from members.

The Chair asked for questions from members.

- Alan Ursell asked if the Benevolent Fund would be included in the Member and Branch Handbook. The Members' Council Vice Chair confirmed that it was mentioned in the benefits section of the Handbook whilst Cheryl Booth suggested that it should have a higher profile to encourage applications.
- Trustee Janine Brooks suggested that the Fund could be used to finance a 'telephone buddy' scheme for house bound members.
- Pam Holroyd asked about a suggestion that the Benevolent Fund could be closed and the money taken into the general Fellowship funds. The Chair answered that this had not been taken any further and that the Benevolent Fund remains separate from the general finances.
- Michael Bennett commented that branches should promote the funds to their members to a greater extent.
- Marie Scales suggested that the term 'benevolent' may not be the correct term for modern times. The Chair responded that this would be considered.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiners

The Chair informed the AGM that the Board had nominated Frost and Company, Chartered Accountants, as Independent Examiners.

This appointment was confirmed by the AGM

9. Date of 2024 AGM

The Chairman reported that the date and location of the 2024 AGM will be decided by the Board of Trustees and the Chief Executive in due course, and members will then be notified. The aim is to hold the event earlier in the year dependent upon the availability of the final accounts.

The Chair closed the AGM at 12.36

Debbie Arnold
25th November 2023