

REVIEW OF COOLHURST LTC AGM, MARCH 2016
CONDUCTED BY CHARLIE LOGAN AND MARTIN BOSTOCK

1. PURPOSE OF REVIEW

Martin Bostock and Charlie Logan were asked by the GMC to review the 2016 AGM voting process, as there was a degree of disquiet from members, many of whom felt the evening was not conducted in an appropriate manner.

We were asked to review the event with a clear brief to suggest a more robust and transparent way of managing the process from 2017 onwards. We did not address the outcome of the 2016 meeting (i.e. the election results themselves), except for double checking the counts, nor did we investigate any other methodologies (e-voting, proxy voting etc).

2. APPROACH

We have examined the processes set out in the club's Articles of Association and established that nothing as far as we can tell took place which was specifically in breach of the Section, *14 Proceedings at General Meeting*.

We have interviewed a number of the people who were closely involved in the running of the 2016 AGM to ascertain where they felt the problems arose and how they felt they could be addressed in future.

These included:

- Dave Smart - Club Chair
- Gillian Collin - Club Secretary (since resigned)
- Sarah Luther - Clubhouse Manager
- Pambos Patsalides – Adjudicator (a club member and a member of The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. Partner in Greenback Allen LLP)
- Steve Morley – Adjudicator (a club member and a District Judge).
- Sean Murray – Adjudicator (a club member and a former administrator in the Metropolitan Police)

We had also hoped to review 'best practice' as recommended by any independent bodies, for clubs such as ours, but did not have time to complete this aspect before the GMC meeting on April 18th.

This could form part of a broader piece of work following on from this review (see Recommendations for the Future, below).

3. KEY FINDINGS

There was a considerable commonality of view amongst the people we interviewed.

The largest single problem was the exceptionally high turn-out, which swamped the organisers.

Detailed interview notes are available, but the other most commonly raised issues are summarised here:

Overall administration

- Lack of a clear 'owner' of the event
 - Lack of clarity between the roles of Club Secretary and the Clubhouse Manager on the day meant some areas of detail were overlooked
- Insufficient preparation time for printing, number and collation of ballot papers
 - All agree that starting earlier in the afternoon (even half an hour or so) would have helped relieve the pressure, especially as there was only one stapler available and no guillotine
- Inadequate briefing of adjudicators
 - not all adjudicators had appreciated that they would also be handling registration, and were not properly briefed on the importance of registering members before issuing ballot papers

Registration

- Inadequate process
 - By the time members began to arrive, only one registration desk was in operation, staffed by a single adjudicator with a single print-out of the membership list, and tasked with ticking off members and handing them ballot papers. Other members of the organisational team were still busy printing and collating
 - A large queue quickly built up and frustration was growing
 - Some people (e.g. women's squash team players with a match on, and tennis players booked into the balloon) wanted to take ballot papers, vote, and leave before the meeting.
 - The adjudicator on the desk (Steve Morley) took the decision to allow members to take ballot papers without registering in order to keep the queue moving and reduce frustration.
 - Even after other adjudicators joined Steve, members were still allowed to collect papers without registering. They were confident that between them they knew all members by sight and thought

that it wouldn't be too hard to collect names once people were in the room. They had imagined a 'signing in book' or equivalent being passed around the venue.

- However, the subsequent roll-call process took a very long time (30-40 minutes) and caused considerable frustration amongst members present. Because it took so long, some members drifted away, others were chatting and may not have heard their names called out. Others still had left to play squash or tennis even before the roll-call took place.
- Because of all the above, it is difficult to have confidence that the process accurately captured either the number of members in the room at the time, or the total number of people who had attended - and voted - during the course of the evening.

The numbers

- At the end of the meeting, all ballot papers and registration papers were stored in a box and subsequently given to Martin and Charlie for re-checking. Two thorough re-counts were carried out; a detailed spreadsheet accompanies this note.
- The key figures to note are probably these:
 - Total number of member names ticked during registration/roll-call (two lists were kept; one held by the chair and one by the Club Secretary. These have been carefully cross-checked): **114**
 - Largest number of votes cast in any individual ballot: **131**
 - The maximum discrepancy was therefore: **17**
- With the chaotic (and quickly abandoned) initial registration process, and the imperfect roll-call, it is fairly clear that a number of members might have attended - and voted - at some point during the evening but not been captured on the registration lists
- A number of non-member coaches were also present, who would not have been picked up as their names do not appear on member lists. Some or all of these coaches may have voted.
- It is therefore not hard to imagine (although impossible to prove) that although there is a discrepancy between the number of voters registered as attending the AGM and the number of votes cast, in reality the two figures may have been much closer.

Voting process and counting

- Votes were collected in two tranches: those who arrived early, voted and left (permanently or temporarily) were collated and counted first. Those who voted as the meeting progressed in sequence were then counted, and the two totals for each relevant ballot added together. The two sets of sub-totals do not seem to have been saved, which is a shame.
- Counting appears to have been handled reasonably smoothly, and the recounts by Charlie and Martin showed up only very marginal discrepancies against the votes announced at the meeting. The exception was the Member Resolution, where the results handed to the Chair were quite dramatically lower than those found in the recounts. At the AGM, the Chair announced 51 for and 29 against. The recounted figure was 71 for and 44 against. (NB. The result would not have been different either way). It may be that this was the result of an error incurred in the amalgamation of 'pre votes' and 'in-meeting votes'.
- 120 sets of ballot papers were printed at the beginning of the meeting. It soon became clear that these would be insufficient, so a further 10 doubled-up sets had to be produced (these were printed on different coloured papers) producing an additional 20 voting forms – 140 in all.
- Several people have commented that a secure/private area should have been set aside for counting as members were wandering in and commenting during counting.
- Some concerns have been expressed that had unscrupulous members wished to abuse the system by voting more than once in the same ballot they could have done. While there is no evidence that this took place, the organisation was sufficiently loose that it could have been open to abuse.
- There have been reports (not agreed by everyone concerned) of ballot papers lying around in the bar which could have been picked up and used inappropriately. As mentioned above, while the system could potentially have been abused in this way, there is no evidence that abuse took place. As stated above, the discrepancy between registered attendees and votes cast is not enormous and is in any event not great enough to suggest that any of the election outcomes might have been affected.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- a. Before the AGM is announced each year, it is recommended that the Club Secretary publishes the proposed process for the election of officers. This will include how to stand for office, what is expected of each officer and the process for publishing supporting statements. The Secretary will also ask for volunteers to act as Returning Officer, with overall responsibility on the night, and also

for two administrative volunteers. If no-one suitable applies, the Secretary – with support of the Chair – may co-opt a member to act as Returning Officer

- b.** The Returning Officer should be appointed 28 days before the AGM. This should be a member who is not standing for any post and who is not proposing or seconding anybody else. He/she will appoint an administration assistant, who is an employee of the club, and two counting volunteers. The Returning Officer will be solely responsible for the voting on the night, acting independently of the Chair and the General Management Committee.
- c.** The Returning Officer will ensure there is a registration desk (manned by the administrative assistant) at the entrance of the club, by the squash notice board, from 6.30pm on the night of the AGM. Members will be registered, checking off against the member list and given a wrist band and numbered, single voting slips. The two volunteer counters will be available from 6.30pm to support with this process. An alphabetical member list will be used to validate registration. This could potentially be split into three segments (e.g. A-G, H-N, P-Z), with the administrative assistant responsible for one and volunteer counters responsible for the others, to speed the process.
- d.** At the start of the AGM members will be asked to enter the squash courts and the Returning Officer will ensure people only enter if they have the wrist bands provided at registration.
- e.** Voting slips will be collected by the volunteer counters in a sealed box and voting will close at a set time (recommended at 9pm). This will impact the agenda of the AGM. If a member leaves the meeting they will post their vote in the box which will be at the registration desk and supervised by the administrative assistant.
- f.** The counters will retire, with the Returning Officer, to the office and conduct a full count. The Returning Officer will then return to the AGM and announce the results

4 FURTHER THOUGHTS

We have not explored broader options for more radical changes to the Club's election system as we were aware of the time imperative to report back to the GMC. However, we believe it may well be worth considering alternatives, particularly the use of e-voting (there is an option to propose this within the Constitution). The recommendations summarised above are, we believe, fit for purpose and would have avoided the problems encountered this year. However, they are dependent on a high degree of volunteer support.

E-voting is far less admin heavy on the night of the meeting and potentially enables far wider democratic member participation in Club decision making. There are many good, affordable and secure systems available.

Nothing is perfect, and e-voting has some disadvantages as well as advantages. We recommend that a further piece of work be done following this review to examine alternative systems and make recommendations for the 2017 AGM.

This could also perhaps satisfy those who have requested an SGM, if this review does not calm their concerns.

Charlie Logan and Martin Bostock. April 15th 2016