

The Fire Brigade Society

Minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting

Friday 22 September 2017 at 18.00 hours

The Morton Room
County Durham and Darlington FRS Headquarters
Belmont Business Park Durham DH1 1TW

(1) Welcoming Address

Our President Jon Hall welcomed everyone, thanking Durham and Darlington FRS (DDFRS) for hosting our weekend.

Area Manager Dominic Brown (DDFRS) welcomed The Society to the county and gave a health and safety briefing. Dominic continued to provide an outline of the service provided which is broadly split into three distinct areas, the dales, central A19/A1M and east coast, the later having a strong mining heritage and considerable social deprivation.

DDFRS have set a goal to be the best, proved by HMICFRS inspections and benchmarking. The workload had increased with safe and well visits, and community safety, these extending beyond fitting alarms to addressing issues with social isolation, helping people stop smoking, reduce alcohol intake, with information from these initiatives being passed onto partner organisations. Such approaches reflect the changing face of the fire and rescue service.

DDFRS are proud to have the 5th lowest rate of accidental house fires in the UK, with significant reductions in business fires, they are bucking national trends on most fronts. Operational crews are very busy. No beds are provided for nights shifts. They also have the lowest accident and lowest vehicle damage rate across the country. New initiatives include Tri-responders, RDS / police and emergency paramedic response at Stanhope and the Barnard quad station. Government has helped with significant funds to assist with improved interoperability.

A further recent initiative is the addition of Apprentices with hoped for positions at the end of the course and realistic roles for young people. The scheme has been introduced as the DDFRS retirement profile shows that in two years the apprentices may be suitable to join as a firefighter to 'fill the void' left by retirees. Currently the average age of crew is 43, predominantly white male, only 5% are female and this does not represent the community. A trading arm has been added to work streams to look to increase income.

Graham Mitchell presented a montage to Dominic on behalf of The Society.

(2) Appointment of Chair (the President or his appointed Deputy)

Jon Hall stated that he would chair the meeting. He said that he had enjoyed his ride and arrival on the preserved West Sussex Dennis, apologising for his delayed attendance which was due to the final presentation for a major tendering opportunity.

(3) Advice of Minutes Secretary

Steve Dodge will take the Minutes.

(4) Apologies

Geraint Roberts, Graham Dickens, Judith Oakley, Soren Heeks, Adam Griffiths, Clive Shearman, Eddie Simmonds, Stuart Brandrick, Les Edkins, Stephan Roth, Clive Stephens, Mike Bunn, Paul Cartwright, Colin Davis, Malcolm Thompson, Mike Smith, Mattias Borchert, Claus Marriot Pederson, Svenge Hanson, Rodney Orme, Matthias Stokbrand, Brett Clayton, Colin Carter and Simon Adamson,

(5) A 'Moment of Reflection' for The Society

Ralph Horton led the two minute silence for those members who had passed away since the last annual AGM, allowing time to reflect on memories of these members on the occasions when we spoke, corresponded, meet on visits and at meetings: David Lennox (Ireland), Alan Brown Deas (Scotland), Graham Hodgson (North West), Harry Michael (Mike) Steer (North East) We were also asked remember those members who have passed away in previous years and pay tribute to all those members of the fire and rescue services who have made the ultimate sacrifice protecting us all.

(6) Receive and Approve the Minutes of the 2016

(AGM held at 18.30 hours, Saturday 24 September 2016 at London Fire Brigade, 169 Union Street London SE1 0LL)

Jon asked if any amendments had been received. He was advised there were no amendments. It was noted that the AGM minutes were provided in November 2016 according to individual member's mandate.

Alan Broughton had communicated with the President concerning the statement in the minutes that 'the accounts were unanimously agreed' offering that this was incorrect as he did not vote. The meeting was advised that any member who does not vote, or abstains, is not part of the vote. Hence as all those present that voted were 'FOR' acceptance of the accounts, the minutes are accurate. However, any member entitled to vote who wishes to not vote, or to abstain, must make their intention very clear to the person(s) undertaking any count for transparency.

Jon asked for a full member, or HLM, who was at the last AGM, to propose acceptance of the 2016 AGM Minutes. Bob Smith proposed acceptance.

Jon further asked for a full member, or HLM, who was at the last AGM, to second the proposal. Jeff Sanders second the proposal.

The vote, by a show of hands, was unanimous to accept the 2016 AGM Minutes.

(7) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

(8) The Annual Report

Ralph Horton stated that there was nothing to add to the formal Annual Report made available to members, in accordance to individual member's mandate on how they wished to receive this document.

Ralph added he was saddened to see the Committee disappear, but 'modernisation' of The Society was necessary and ultimately the changes would be for the good of The Society. Ralph stated he had been on Committee for 25 years, and chair since the role was formalised in the current Constitution. He thanked John Parry, Tony McGuirk and Jon Hall for their 'Presidential guidance' during his tenancy as Chair. He concluded saying that the 'Baton of Chair' now passes to the President. There were no questions.

(9) Receive and consider the accounts of The Society for the financial year to 31 March 2017, the Treasurer's report on the financial position of The Society and the Auditor's report on The Society accounts.

(The Society accounts were provided in August 2017 according to individual member's mandate.)

Alan Field reported on the accounts, which were part of the formal Annual Report:

He began by thanking previous Treasurers for their efforts and Brian Jackson for his special efforts in managing the accounts, especially considering the domestic matters impacting on his home / work life balance coupled with unjust comment from a very small group of members, who perhaps did not appreciate the work necessary. Alan highlighted the ongoing adjustments in the presentation of the accounts in a Society year format rather than rolling year format. He noted that problems arose if costs or income were shown in a different year, such as several thousand pounds of membership subscriptions. It is anticipated that future account presentations will be a true reflection of The Society year. A copy of the audited account was given to each person at the AGM and the statement has been posted on The Society's web site.

Alan continued, stating that, although there was nothing untoward in the accounts, two years ago they reflected the day to day position of The Society, rather than the actual financial year. The FWP's work in the interim, has reworked the previous accounts, and ensured that they, and this and subsequent years' figures are a true picture of the annual situation.

Alan thanked those involved as it required a significant time by a few to resolve. The Management Working Party (MWP) spent more than 1,000 man hours in compiling their document; the Financial Working Party (FWP) spent equal amount of time on financial matters.

Alan commented that this was a remarkable effort by people who do not get paid, observing that it was and is very easy to criticise, yet all of the work by both Working Parties was undertaken in a genuine effort to ensure The Society thrives. There is further work to be done, but we are well managed and clarity is intended. Alan continued, saying the accounts had become 'isolated' and 'unclear' posing the question 'was the presentation for a specific year?' Receipts into the bank of had been audited as accurate and subsequently re-audited by the FWP. Alan asked for questions. Alan Broughton said there was no question of fraud. However, there were questions on the steps from one accounting system to the proposed system. He fully accepted that the Auditor had signed off the accounts. Alan Field advised that next year all accounting will be 'in line' with a clearer picture of The Society's finances. Many thousands of pounds could have gone into the 'wrong year's accounts' giving a distorted view.

Jon asked for a full member, or HLM, who was at the last AGM, to propose acceptance of the audited accounts. Mike Clark proposed acceptance.

Jon further asked for a full member, or HLM, who was at the last AGM, to second the proposal. Jeff Sanders second the proposal. The vote, by a show of hands, was unanimous to accept audited accounts.

(10) The President's Address

Jon Hall said the Dennis PE he arrived in at the AGM was one of very few vehicles which meant anything to him! It was one of three pumps at Preston Circus at the start of his career. It was a truck he rode often, with trips down to Madeira Drive, and most memorably to the Grand Hotel incident. She was a great truck and I had not noticed how much of my formative firefighting life was spent with this particular vehicle. He went on to say that he was reduced to tears on the journey to the AGM. The engine noise was fantastic and the pull away was remarkable! He thanked Graham, Terry and Steve, saying it meant a lot to him! Jon also thanked Brett Clayton and his team for providing such a tremendous variety and range of heritage vehicles for the visit.

Jon said that his job for The Society is unusual. He was not involved in detail, but looked at the 'horizon and the future' rather than what is going on 'today'. Storm, reform, norm! Historically there had been several issues which his survey had revealed. Last year ended the 'storm phase'. The Society membership provided strong votes, so the two Working Party's mandates could be extended into 'reform'. The last twelve months have seen 'reform' and 'stabilisation'. The Society is stable! What's next? Credit those doing the work, the Committee, Working Parties, regions, and members. Jon said there are components from his survey which are still to be addressed: He said he expects over the next couple of years to improve electronic communication and the web site. Jon encouraged constructive engagement and involvement of members to run The Society. There is a membership shortfall, but he said it was pleasing to see membership numbers are up and people are re-joining, though regrettably there are obituaries. The Officers cannot do it all alone, they need all the membership to pull together and support them. The 'reform' effort from the Working Parties has been phenomenal. Well done, we are now very stable.

Management Review Working Party, Richard Williams reported:

We have all seen and digested a considerable document from the MWP. Thanks are given to Mike Smith, Howard Davis and Ralph Horton, working with myself as a team, for the considerable effort afforded, with acknowledgement to the full support of their ladies. The MWP were very pleased with the extremely positive vote, noting that recommendations were not made lightly, but the result was very gratifying. There is no monopoly of good ideas. Richard asked members to please put their name forward for posts or present constructive, feasible options for consideration. Adverts for posts in the new organisation were in Fire Cover 217, the closing date having been changed to 7 October 2017.

Financial Working Party, Alan Field reported:

The detailed report from the FWP has been issued. Alan said it is difficult to increase income, but we have reduced the cost of insurance through the hard work of Brian Jackson and Les Edkins. We have significantly reduced Officer's expenses. The Committee have met locally to the majority of Committee Members making further significant reduction in costs, especially with many Officers not claiming their full expenses. Brian Jackson, Steve Dodge, Les Edkins and I have worked very hard on the FWP and are looking to maintaining tight budgetary control, though as always, constructive, achievable comment or input is always welcome.

(12) Consider notices of motion duly submitted in accordance with Constitution clause 20(2)

No motions had been submitted.

(13) Transaction of business that may be specified for the meeting

There was no business specified for the meeting.

(14) Rose and Bob Bonner Photographic Competition *(No award as advised in Fire Cover 215, page 2)*

The President stated that the lack of images for this competition is disingenuous to Rose and Bob Bonner. He encouraged members to submit their images. Jon said he may approach Fire magazine with a couple of thoughts on this matter.

(15) Bob Herbert Award

This award is voted for by Committee for best written feature article in Fire Cover. Ten articles were shortlisted. The winner was 'Aberfan' by Ralph Horton. Ralph stated he would donate the value of his winnings, and match it with a further donation to the Aberfan disaster fund.

(16) Other Awards and Presentations

Steve Dodge began by saying that Jon had reduced the Committee's workload, especially Ralph's by promoting the ethos of not 'pandering to certain member's demands'. A 'phrase' Ralph and Jon have is that a matter may dictate that Jon should 'sharpen his diplomatic pencil', the result of which is not always pleasurable for recipients of such letters or emails!

To say thank you, Ralph had purchased a small gift for Jon, who had been given a ride in a fire engine, now he gets a goody bag! Opening his present Jon found some hair restoring guidance and a set of pencils annotated 'Jon's diplomatic pencil'. Jeff Sanders commented that the membership appreciate everything Jon had done for the ordinary

members who just wants to enjoy The Society and the good work he is continuing to do for The Society. This statement met with a warm round of applause.

(17) 2018-19 Annual General Meeting, 2018 National and Overseas Visits

Steve Dodge advised the AGM that plans were being progressed for North Wales FRS to host the 2018 National Visit over the weekend of 8-10 June 2018, though this was not as yet confirmed.

He also advised that plans were being progressed for an Overseas Visit, in July 2018, to north Germany and Ralph Horton will be fronting this visit.

As part of a new initiative Steve said we are hopeful that The Society will be invited to attend a visit in Holland in 2018 managed by the Dutch equivalent of The Fire Brigade Society, the VBB, though details of when and where this opportunity may present itself are unknown at this time. This event will be in addition to the normal programme of events organised by The Society for 2018. However, all dates and venues are subject to change as negotiations are ongoing, so please monitor Fire Cover, 'What's On' and The Society's web site for further information.

Future AGMs will be stand-alone event in February each year, with the meeting returning to its original and intended format: to transact business; allow networking and socialising; allow time for members to put forward structured, considered viable ideas for the future and an opportunity to question 'your Officers'. It is hoped to increase further the attractiveness and variety of the AGM by using different venues and a cross section of guest speakers both from within and outside The Society. Future AGMs will not be centred around a visit weekend where the intended and original reason for the event was shunted to an ever more inconvenient time for members, whilst also creating massive time and logistical issues for the visit organisers, often as a result of cramming in 'just one more battenburg Scania. Therefore The Society's next Annual General Meeting will be in the winter of 2019 at a location to be announced, although the Emergency Service Museum, Sheffield, is currently the preferred option. Additionally, a provisional list of locations around the UK for AGMs up to 2023, our 60th Anniversary year, has been created.

Steve Dodge thanked all those members who attended the National Visit to Suffolk and USAF earlier in 2017 for fully embracing the security demands of our American hosts and continuing to meet their demands with regards to the 'non-publication' of images. It is anticipated that security matters, image management by hosts and the need for the written article to be checked by hosts, will increase in the future. There have been some excellent visits in the recent past which have offered variety at a sensible pace allowing interaction, study and education. It is anticipated that all future visits will embrace this ethos. We should all enjoy the visits we attend, engage with our hosts, respect the locations visited and pass the word that The Society is strong, resilient and offering the membership what is wanted.

Steve said those who question his demands on some visits, please don't. I am not on a crusade to 'tie people to rules and regulation. Be assured I am passing on matters our host raises. This also applies to images. He said he was aware of a new book which has an un-pixelated image of HM the Queen's fire engine, taken in the street, not formally requested and therefore the author may be subject to 'communication' from others. However, The Society will continue to respond professionally to matters raised by our hosts today and in the future and we will expect all members to abide by these 'demands'.

As this meeting draws to a close and The Society adjusts its management profile may I, on behalf of the membership, say 'thank you' to everyone who has 'sat on Committee' or offered council to or with the Committee. Your contributions have been and are appreciated.

He also asked that we all acknowledge the lengths that Graham Mitchell has gone too to ensure we all enjoy the weekend. We also thank Stuart Errington for supporting The Society so positively.

Steve highlighted that some members received late documentation for National Visit and AGM even after contacting the relevant email address. This was noted and all members had received documentation. However, for each event there was a 'tranche of emails' which had 'appeared' in a group late in the day. It should be noted that issues with 'links' to other sites from The Society's web site had caused issues for both The Society and the 'linked' group. A 'default' email address for diverting emails to had also given rise to concern. These issues had been dealt with. However, for the immediate future no links from The Society's web site will be provided.

(18) Any matters for the remainder of the AGM weekend

Members were asked to make sure you arrive on time on Saturday and Sunday morning for the visit. Thanks were extended to DDFRS and vehicle owners for their support from the organising team. Thanks were also expressed to the ladies on the visit for their help with the catering over the weekend.

Members on the visit on Sunday were asked to note that Darlington have a community engagement activity to attend, which has been booked for sometime, hence we need to get there before they have to leave.

The President closed the meeting at 20.47 hours.

Steve Dodge, Minutes Secretary.