

The Royal Air Force Club

2025 Annual General Meeting minutes

Thursday 15th May 2025

The Royal Air Force Club – 1800hrs – Online & in the Presidents' Room

Those speaking:

DM	Air Vice-Marshal David Murray	Chair of the Board of Trustees
DW	Air Commodore Dai Whittingham	Trustee and Chair of the House Committee
MP	Mr Miles Pooley	Chief Executive & Club Secretary
MH	Mr Paul Sylva	Director of Finance
RW	Mr Richard Weaver	Audit Partner, HaysMac

Full Members Online	Full Members present at the Club
87 (at the highest point)	28

DM welcomed those present to the Annual General Meeting and reported that over 100 members had registered to attend online, with 28 more in the Sovereigns' Room at the Club.

During the introduction, DM reported that several questions had been submitted in advance which would be answered during the meeting. Some questions may be referred to the relevant Committee for follow-up and response to the Member. Live questions would be answered (time permitting) or summarised and answered as an attachment to the minutes. Explaining the voting procedure, DM stated that proposers would be chosen from those willing Members physically at the Club, and a Secunder would be sought from those attending online.

1) Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16th May 2024

DM reminded those attending that the minutes of the previous AGM are available on the website in the 2 or 3 weeks before the AGM to allow Members to read and to request any changes if required.

Proposed for acceptance by: Wing Commander James Poynton

Seconded for acceptance by: Group Captain Peter Barrett

Carried unanimously by those online and attending in person.

Decision: Following a vote, the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2) The Annual Accounts

RW presented the 2024 annual accounts which were signed by the Board on Wednesday 10th March 2025. In summary, the audit report stated that the accounts presented a true and fair view of the Club's affairs and were prepared by UK accounting practices. The audit report is unqualified, and no issues have been found that affect the business as an ongoing concern.

Question from Wg Cdr Clive Upton:

At the bottom of the Income and Expenditure Account, an amount of £450,302 is listed under 'Other Expenditure'. Could this amount be clarified?

This question could not be addressed during the meeting; however, the following response was provided to the member the following day.

Response from Mr Paul Sylva (PS) ~ Director of Finance

Dear Wg Cdr Upton,

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The larger costs that make up the 'Other Expenditure' category are:

Large Other Expenditure items	Value £'000
Website	£28k
Reception Misc Costs	£25k
Reception Furniture	£12k
Staff Laundry	£67k
Kitchen Repairs & Maintenance	£100k
Kitchen & Restaurant Cleaning Supplies	£37k
128 Magazine	£26k
Fundraising Expenses	£15k
Marketing & Publicity	£15k
Contract Cleaning	£19k
Events – Misc Costs	£10k
Photography	£11k
Other Smaller Items	£70k
Total Other Expenditure	£450K

Furthermore, as this line item has grown over time, the categories will be reviewed to provide clearer expenditure going forward.

Proposed for acceptance by: Flt Lt Haig Tyler

Seconded for acceptance by: Air Cdre Peter Round

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person.

Decision: Following a vote, the annual accounts were approved.

3) The Trustees' Annual Report

Priorities of the Chair & Board of Trustees

DM presented the priorities of the Board of Trustees, which included:

- A review of 2024
- The Board of Trustees
- Priorities
- A general Club update
- The 2023 Impact Report

A review of 2024

Coutts Centenary building extension loan

- The Coutts Centenary building extension loan has been paid off several years early, saving over £400,000 in interest payments. From September 2024, the Club has been debt free.

Price increases

- Bedroom rates have only been increased by 2.5% and there has been 0% increase in food and beverage prices for this year.

Membership

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- The Board is pleased to report that since 2014, there has been a 24% increase in Serving members.

Club improvements

- Improvements in 2024 included bedrooms and significant upgrades of the Presidents' Room.
- The main focus for 2025 is the Running Horse and basement refurbishment

Royal links

- His Majesty The King accepted the role of Patron of the Royal Air Force Club and it is hoped HM The King will have an opportunity to visit soon.
- HRH The Duke of Gloucester also visited the Club in 2024 to unveil a new Stained Glass window in the 601 Squadron Room to commemorate the anniversary of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

The Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees were introduced and on behalf of the Membership, DM recorded thanks to the members of The Board of Trustees and the various sub-committees who have voluntarily given up an estimated 550 volunteer days of their own time to support and contribute to the success of the Club.

The 2024 Impact Report

DM launched the 2024 Impact Report, which has been redesigned in response to feedback received from the 2022 and 2023 editions. The updated version places greater emphasis on the Club's charitable impact and the benefits of membership.

Members attending the meeting in person received a physical copy of the report, while those attending online will be sent the digital version.

The focus for 2025 and beyond

DM presented the focus for 2025 and beyond which included:

- The requirement to build up the **Club's reserves** while maintaining affordable pricing was noted. As reaching the £6 million target is expected to take several years, the Club has taken steps to mitigate the risk of requiring emergency funds during this period. An agreement has been secured with a commercial bank to ringfence a loan on favourable terms, which can be accessed immediately if required.
- Continuing to grow our **Serving Members**.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Impact:** Consideration of the Club's environmental footprint and identifying opportunities to enhance sustainability, including steps toward becoming more carbon neutral. This also encompasses integrating sustainability principles into the planning and execution of capital expenditure projects.
- Continuing to use **data** to make decisions for the benefit of members.

Reflections from the Chair

In advance of agenda items 6b and 8, AVM David Murray, Trustee and Chair of the Board since November 2021, reported that in Autumn 2024, after careful consideration, he informed the Board of his intention to stand down as both a Trustee and Chair of the Board of Trustees, effective Wednesday 9th July 2025. This aligns with the precedent set by previous Chairs, who typically serve terms of approximately two to three years.

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To oversee the appointment process, a Nominations Committee was formed, comprising Flt Lt Haig Tyler (Club Vice-Chair, Business), Air Cdre Adam Wardrope, and independent Club member Ms Jane Ford. A well-established independent process was followed, with input from the Club President. As a result, the Board of Trustees approved the appointment of Air Vice-Marshal Warren “Bunny” James as both a Trustee and Chair of the Board, effective Thursday 10th July 2025. DM noted that he had not been involved in the selection process and had abstained from the vote of approval.

In addition, DM thanked all those who have served as a Trustee or on a Committee during his Tenure for their work and support and was pleased that he was leaving the Club in a healthy financial position, with clear strategies for the future.

Report from the Chief Executive / Club Secretary

MP stated that his report will include an update on The Club Staff, membership levels, Arts and Heritage, member feedback and accessibility.

Our people

The report from MP included that over the past year, there were several changes to the Executive Team. In August, Club Manager Kathryn Cooper retired after 38 years of dedicated service. In recognition of her exceptional contribution to the Club, the Trustees were pleased to award her Honorary Life Membership. In January, Executive Chef Michael Dutnall departed after nine years to take up the same position at another London club.

Following Kathryn’s retirement, the structure of the Executive Team was reviewed, leading to the creation of the role of Director of Operations. This replaced the broader Club Manager role and better aligns the team’s responsibilities going forward.

The current Executive Team comprises the following key roles:

- Rachel Matthews, Director of People & Culture (8 years at the Club)
- Elliot Plimmer, Executive Head Chef (joined in February from the Royal Overseas League)
- Katariina Reissaar, Director of Operations (recently promoted from Front Office Manager; nearly 2 years at the Club)
- Paul Sylva, Director of Finance (15 months at the Club)

MP additionally reported that he will achieve 10 years in his role as Chief Executive & Club Secretary in two weeks’ time.

Turning to Club staff, MP reported that they comprised of approximately 130 full and part time dedicated individuals, supported by an excellent group of casual staff during peak periods.

The workforce remained notably diverse, with 48% from the European Union, 37% from the United Kingdom, and the remaining 15% representing over twenty other nationalities. 29% of staff have been with the Club for over five years, and 7% for more than fifteen years.

The Club continued its commitment to paying at least the London Living Wage and placed strong emphasis on training, staff recognition, and community engagement—fostering a positive working environment where colleagues feel valued and proud to contribute.

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Several photographs were shown of Staff and Staff recognition events.

Membership

Turning to Club membership, it was reported that overall numbers remain stable. As of the end of 2024, total membership stood at 24,245—a slight increase, primarily driven by growth in the Serving membership categories, partially offset by a modest decline in Former Serving Members.

The Club remains committed to engaging with the next generation of members, including regular attendance at the RAF College Cranwell IOT Freshers' Fayre. Support from our network of RAF Club Station Representatives also continues to be invaluable in promoting the Club and strengthening links within the RAF community.

A new initiative was also announced: the **Care and Compassion – Respite Break** scheme. This programme offers Serving Officers facing welfare challenges the opportunity to stay at the Club for two nights, with all meals and a traditional afternoon tea included. Further details are available in the 2024 Impact Report—physical copies are available in the room, and a digital version will be shared with those attending remotely.

Arts & Heritage

The Club's art collection has grown to over 1,300 pieces, with approximately 15 new additions since the last AGM, including prints, paintings, and silverware. Notable events include the unveiling of a portrait of Daphne Pearson by Air Marshal Dame Sue Gray and Air Marshal Claire Walton in April 2024. In September, two portraits of Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding and Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park were installed in the Churchill Bar. In October, HRH The Duke of Gloucester unveiled a new stained glass window in the 601 Squadron Room, created by RAF Serviceman Chad Kenney, to mark the centenary of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Club Events

In 2024, the Club hosted over 40 events, selling more than 2,700 tickets. As illustrated in the accompanying graphic, Dinners were the most popular format. Planning for the 2025 calendar is well underway, and initial preparations for 2026 have begun. Members are encouraged to share any suggestions for future events.

Fundraising and Legacies

In summer 2024, the Club bid farewell to Claire Dakin, Director of Fundraising and Legacies. Claire joined during the post-pandemic recovery and significantly advanced the Club's fundraising efforts, notably establishing the *Friends of the RAF Club* scheme. The Club was pleased to welcome back Charlotte Gray, who rejoined to lead the programme with a renewed focus on legacy giving. Charlotte previously held a marketing and communications role at the Club from 2016 to 2021. Further information is available in the Impact Report.

Sustainability

The Club remains committed to reducing its carbon footprint, with a target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2040. In partnership with EarthCheck, a leading sustainability audit and accreditation organisation, the Club is integrating sustainable practices across all operations. As a result of these efforts, the Club is on track to achieve the Bronze EarthCheck benchmark later this year.

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Member Feedback

In 2024, 99% of surveyed members said they would recommend the Club. A new feedback survey for Meetings and Events bookings was also introduced; results will be shared at the next AGM following a full year of data collection. A visual summary presented showed leisure as the most common reason for member stays, followed by visits to family and friends.

Report from the Director of Finance

PS presented a business and balance sheet update and stated that in addition to the information presented by RW earlier, in 2024, Club income reached £12.3 million—the highest on record—marking a £715k (6.2%) increase from 2023. Controlled expenditure resulted in a surplus of £1.3 million, up £270k from the previous year. Total expenditure rose by 5.25%, with wages and staff costs remaining a significant part of total spend. Food and beverage costs rose by 3.1%, and the gross profit margin improved to 68% (up 1%).

A key milestone was the early repayment of the Centenary Extension Loan (£3.678 million) in April 2024, saving the Club £400k in interest. This repayment reduced year-end cash reserves to £2 million, down from £3.9 million in 2023.

The General (Free) Reserve Fund, which stood at nil in 2023, increased to £970k by the end of 2024. The Club's reserves policy sets a target of £6 million, equivalent to six months' operating costs. To support the gradual rebuilding of reserves, a £5 million credit facility has been approved by the Trustees to provide financial flexibility if needed.

Report from the Chair of the House Committee on Club Refurbishments

Chair of the House Committee and Trustee Air Cdre Dai Whittingham presented to the Membership an update on:

- The significant renovations to the Presidents' Room
- The recent improvements to the Accessible Entrance of the Club, including the replacement of the wheelchair lift. The new self-operated lift provides step-free access into the building for the first time without requiring staff assistance, though assistance remains available if needed.
- An update on the Running Horse project, noting the considerable efforts made to preserve the essence and character of the space. The redevelopment will increase the area by 25% and, for the first time, make it fully accessible.

This concluded the 2024 Trustees Report.

4) Retirement of Trustees

DM reported that four Trustees have retired since the last Annual General Meeting each having completed a full nine-year term of office. DM noted that all four had served the Club with dedication and tireless commitment, particularly during the Centenary Building Project and throughout the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Their contributions during these pivotal periods were invaluable, and their legacy of service and support has left a lasting impact on the Club. The DM expressed sincere thanks on behalf of the Club and its members.

- i) Air Commodore Barbara Cooper, Chair of the Fundraising & Legacies Committee

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- ii) Flight Lieutenant Ian Melia, Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee
- iii) Squadron Leader Sean O'Brien
- iv) Hon. Group Captain Joanne Salter, Chair of the House Committee

5) The Re-Election of Trustees

The following Trustees sought re-election for a period of up to 3 years:

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Group Captain James Beldon	Wing Commander James Poynton	Group Captain Peter Barrett	Unanimous approval
2	Group Captain Al Lockwood	Mr Neeraj Kapur	Air Commodore Peter Round	Unanimous approval (with 1 abstention)
3	Flight Lieutenant Haig Tyler	Air Commodore Wendy Rothery	Squadron Leader Steven Graham	Unanimous approval (with 1 abstention)
4	Air Cdre Adam Wardrope	Group Captain Peter Holtby	Squadron Leader Steven Graham	Unanimous approval
5	Wing Commander Paula Willmot	Squadron Leader Gavin Turnbull	Air Commodore Peter Round	Unanimous approval (with 1 abstention)

Carried by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: The five named Trustees are re-elected for a period of up to 3 years.

6a) Election of new Trustees

DM reported, that following an extensive recruitment and selection process, 5 full members are seeking appointments as new Trustees for 3 years. Those in the room and online were asked to vote for each appointment separately.

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Group Captain Peter Brown	Group Captain Jim Beldon	Air Commodore Peter Round	Unanimous approval
2	Wing Commander Gavin Poole	Mr Neeraj Kapur	Squadron Leader Steven Graham	Unanimous approval
3	Wing Commander Amanda Scarth	Wing Commander James Poynton	Group Captain Paul Stewart	Unanimous approval
4	Air Commodore Philip Wadlow	Air Commodore Dai Whittingham	Group Captain Paul Stewart	Unanimous approval
5	Mr Bernie Watson	Mr Neeraj Kapur	Pilot Officer Stephanie Hayden	Unanimous approval

Carried by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: The five named members are elected as Trustees for a period of up to 3 years.

6b) Election of a new Trustee

The following member is seeking election as a new Trustee, to start on Thursday 10th July 2025 for a period of up to 3 years.

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Air Vice-Marshal Warren "Bunny" James	Flight Lieutenant Haig Tyler	Miss Joanne Clements	Unanimous approval

Carried by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: AVM Warren James is elected as a Trustee (starting on Thursday 10th July) for a period of up to 3 years.

7) The appointment of the Vice-Chair (Serving)

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DM stated that Air Commodore Philip Wadlow has been proposed as the Vice-Chair (Serving Officer) and is seeking appointment to this role for a period of three years. He also noted that, at the 2024 Annual General Meeting, Flt Lt Haig Tyler was appointed as Vice-Chair (Business) for a three-year term and therefore does not require a vote at this time.

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Air Commodore Philip Wadlow	Wing Commander Paula Willmot	Group Captain Paul Stewart	Online – unanimous In-room - unanimous

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Following a vote, Air Commodore Philip Wadlow is appointed as Vice-Chair (Serving) of the Royal Air Force Club for a period of 3 years.

8) Appointment of the Chair of the Board

Air Vice-Marshal Warren "Bunny" James is proposed as Chair of the Board of Trustees for three years, starting on Thursday 10th July 2025. DM noted that he would be abstaining from this vote.

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Air Vice-Marshal Warren "Bunny" James	Flight Lieutenant Haig Tyler	Air Commodore Peter Round	Unanimous approval

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Following a vote, Air Vice-Marshal Warren James is appointed as Chair of the Royal Air Force Club for three years starting on Thursday 10th July 2025.

9) Appointment and remuneration of the Auditors

DM reported that for the 2025 accounting audit, the Board of Trustees is proposing to conduct a tender process and appoint auditors for the financial year.

The appointment will be reported to members at the next Annual General Meeting, where a vote will also be held to approve the auditors for the 2026 audit.

10) Propositions submitted to the meeting in accordance with article 2.8G

DM stated that no items have been submitted in relation to proposition 2.8G "...discuss and determine any issues of policy or resolutions of which 14 days notice in writing have been given to the Secretary"

11) Any Other Business

Questions answered in the meeting:

2 very similar questions have been submitted and combined below: Question from Gp Capt Charlotte Thompson & Mr Philip Mercer Would you consider offering guests the option of a continental breakfast ?
Answer from Miles Pooley In response to the question, it was confirmed that a continental breakfast option is available upon request at the current price of £9. However, it is not actively advertised due to past issues with misuse of the buffet and low uptake when previously trialled as a separate service. Members wishing to opt for a continental breakfast are advised to inform the Dining Room Supervisor, who will ensure the correct charge is applied.
Question from Mr Colin Sach I appreciate that it is good for many reasons that bedroom letting is good with a high occupation rate. It is usually impossible to book a room at short notice. Could it be considered that a proportion of rooms are only released for booking, say, one or two weeks prior. In view of the popularity of the venue there is unlikely to be a financial cost (maybe a premium could be charged to cover the risk) but clearly

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a management time issue. That said it would encourage more members to stay at the Club as many, myself included, often only have short notice of a requirement to stay in London.

Answer from Miles Pooley

In response to a question from Mr Sach, it was explained that while the Club understands the challenges of booking at short notice, releasing all bedrooms far in advance supports the majority of members who prefer to plan ahead—particularly for leisure stays. Holding back rooms could lead to dissatisfaction and lost revenue, especially during high-demand periods.

It was noted that late cancellations do occur, so members are encouraged to check availability even on the day of arrival. In 2024, the Club reached 100% occupancy on just 44 out of 365 days, with lower demand typically seen on Sundays, Mondays, and during quieter months.

Question from Group Captain Mark Stevens

Every time I stay at the Club I come across examples of poor behaviour and/or lack of compliance with the very reasonable dress code (e.g. baseball caps worn at breakfast, business meetings and telephone calls made in the Cowdray Room). I have raised these issues with the Club several times over the past few years but they continue to occur. What steps are being taken to ensure that those using the Club comply with the very reasonable dress and behaviour requirements?

Answer from Miles Pooley

In response to a question from Group Captain Stevens regarding dress and behaviour at the Club, it was acknowledged that views on the dress code vary among members, with some advocating for a more formal approach and others prefer greater flexibility. The Board of Trustees regularly reviews this topic with the aim of maintaining a welcoming atmosphere that also reflects the Club's traditions and values.

Staff receive ongoing training to uphold the dress code for both members and guests, and efforts are made to communicate the policy clearly via signage and booking confirmations. Further improvements include updating signage outside the Cowdray Lounge to enhance visibility.

In addition, Club Trustee Group Captain Al Lockwood is currently reviewing how dress code information is communicated to attendees at Club events, particularly those accessing other areas of the building. An article in a forthcoming e-newsletter will also reinforce awareness and expectations.

Question from Flt Lt James Owens

I popped into the Running Horse recently. It's been a while, but I was surprised by the prices. They seemed pretty much the same as other pubs nearby. I get that we can't match what is paid in a Mess, but I'm not sure there's much value left in membership when it comes to food and drink. I always thought we were meant to be 'a bit more than the Mess but still cheaper than the local pub.' That doesn't seem true anymore. Could the Trustees clarify what the pricing strategy actually is? Are we meant to match the pub next door, or be cheaper?

Answer from Miles Pooley

In response to a question from Flight Lieutenant Owens, it was acknowledged that the Club cannot match Officers' Mess pricing due to higher London wage costs and limited buying power as an independent business. However, an annual price comparison with four nearby establishments—two of which are Greene King pubs—shows that the Club remains highly competitive. In nearly all cases, the Club's food and beverage prices are lower, including compared to the Rose and Crown on Old Park Lane, where a pint costs £6.70 versus £6.00 at the Club. As previously noted by David Murray, there are no planned food and beverage price increases for 2025, despite ongoing cost pressures.

Question from Mrs Judith Evans

Is it possible to have the lovely fireplaces working again in the Cowdray Room?

In response, MP confirmed that while the gas fires in the Cowdray Lounge were restored during the 2016 renovation, they no longer meet current legal standards for operation. Given the Club's long-term strategy to phase out gas use entirely within the next few years, significant investment in making

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the fireplaces compliant is not considered viable. However, the Club will explore alternative solutions—such as electric fires, as successfully installed in the 601 Squadron Room—with the Chief Engineer tasked to investigate suitable options for the Cowdray Lounge.

Question from Wg Cdr Dr Sophy Antrobus

Does the Club have any plans to celebrate the centenary of University Air Squadrons, taking place in October?

DM thanked SA for her question and stated that he would ask Trustee Sqn Ldr John Peters (Chair of the Events Committee) and Group Captain Al Lockwood (Vice-Chair of the Events Committee) to get in touch with her to see what events could be planned to mark this event.

Post meeting note: an event is being planned to mark this centenary.,

Proposal from Air Marshal Mike Harwood

AM Harwood proposed that a formal record of thanks be entered into the official minutes on behalf of the membership, recognising AVM David Murray's dedicated service as Chair of the Board of Trustees. By consensus, this motion was unanimously agreed by those present both online and in the room. AVM Murray was formally thanked for his leadership and contributions during his tenure.

DM thanked the membership for their kind words and applause.

Closing remarks from Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen, that concludes the 2025 RAF Club AGM. Thank you very much for attending, voting and submitting questions. I hope you found the meeting useful.

For any members who wish to become a Bronze, Silver or Gold 'Friend', please do not put it off. Over 500 members are already "Friends of the Club" and we are very grateful for their support. For more information, please see Miles, or myself or Charlotte Gray, the Director of Fundraising.

Thank you to the Club Staff for running the IT which has enabled the AGM to run so successfully and finally on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you for your continued membership. I very much look forward to seeing you in the Club soon.

The meeting ended at 1901hrs