



The Royal Air Force Club 2024 Annual General Meeting minutes

Thursday 16th May 2024

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
MP	Mr Miles Pooley	Chief Executive & Club Secretary
MH	Mr Paul Sylva	Director of Finance
VS	Mr Vikram Sandhu	Audit Partner, Haysmacintyre

Full Members Online	Full Members present at the Club
46 (at the highest point)	27

DM welcomed those present to the Annual General Meeting, which for the first time was being held in the Presidents' Room. DM reported that several questions had been submitted in advance which may require research and discussion. Those not answered at the AGM would 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 sourced from those willing Members physically at the Club, and a Secunder would be sought from those attending online.

The Club Patron

The Chair was delighted to report that His Majesty The King has graciously accepted the role of Royal Air Force Club Patron. Since the Club's inception in 1918, His Majesty The King is the 4th Monarch to be the Patron, for which we are very grateful. We look forward to welcoming His Majesty to the Club when his diary permits.

1) Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10th May 2023

DM reminded those attending that the minutes of the previous AGM had been available in the Members section of the website 3 weeks following the 2023 AGM to allow Members to read and request any changes if required. No changes had been requested to the minutes.

Proposed for acceptance by: Air Cdre Barbara Cooper

Seconded for acceptance by: Sqn Ldr David Hume

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

VS presented the 2023 annual accounts which were signed by the Board on Wednesday 27th March 2024. 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.

In addition, VS reported that the audit process over the past few years has been getting more robust, with a lot more questions and information being required by HMRC and that Haysmacintyre received excellent support from the Club when completing the audit, for which they are grateful.

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DM stated that no questions had been received about the accounts.

Proposed for acceptance by: Fg Off Michael Leaver

Seconded for acceptance by: Sqn Ldr Dr Matthew Koshy

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 an update, which included:

- The Board of Trustees
- The focus for 2024 and beyond
- A general Club update
- The 2023 Impact Report

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 515 volunteer days of their own time to support and contribute to the success of the Club during 2023.

The focus for 2024 and beyond

DM presented the focus for 2024 which included:

- The early repayment of the £5.5m bank loan taken out to part finance the Centenary extension, which included new bedrooms, the business centre and a fitness suite. The early repayment of the loan by 8 years will save £350k in costs each year.
- The requirement to build up a reserve whilst keeping prices affordable. The timeline for this will be discussed by the Board of Trustees later in the year.
- The need to always seek to use data to make decisions to ensure the Club evolves to meet the needs of current and future members. In 2023, the Club undertook a comprehensive Members Survey the results of which will be used along with other data to help the Board make long-term strategic decisions.
- Sustainability and the environmental impact of the Club, and what improvements we can make to make the Club more sustainable and carbon neutral.
- Trustee succession planning – with 4 new Trustees being required by the end of 2024. The recruitment process will start within the next couple of months with an advert going out to the Full Membership.

The 2023 Impact Report

DM presented the 2023 Impact Report which highlights the good work that the Club has done. A digital copy will be emailed to all attendees following the AGM and physical copies are available in the Club for Members to take with them.

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Report from the Chief Executive / Club Secretary

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

Club Staff

During the update on Club Staff, the points made included:

- The Club Executive Team consists of 5 people, with combined hospitality experience of approximately 170 years.
- Paul Sylva, a qualified accountant who has significant charitable finance knowledge has joined the Club as Finance Director, replacing Michael Harding who left the Club earlier in the year.
- The Club has approximately 118 "full-time equivalent" staff.
- Casual staff are employed in the Housekeeping and food & beverage outlets.
- 50 staff are from the UK, with others from the European Union and the rest of the world.
- Labour turnover in the Club is very low at 16% versus a hospitality average of 37%.
- Development continues to be a focus for the Club with an average of 25 hours of training logged per employee.

Membership

MP reported that the Club is pleased that the overall Membership level remains high, at just above 24,000 at the end of 2023.

Members (year-end)	Serving & Reservists	Former Serving	Widow/ers
24,037	20%	29%	3%
Honorary	Spouses/Partners	Family	Affiliate
3%	31%	9%	5%

Member Feedback

MP reported on the membership feedback scores, which are collated from surveys completed following a stay, or use of a Club function/meeting room.

- In 2023, the overall satisfaction score was 4.67/5 or 93%
- 73% of members who stayed at the Club last year came for leisure or family purposes.
- The overall bedroom satisfaction level was 4.27/5 or 85%.

Fundraising and Legacies

MP presented a Fundraising and Legacies update which included:

- A thank you to all those members who give up their time or money to support the Club.
- In 2023, members donated over £153k which was a combination of those who donate regularly as a Bronze, Silver or Gold Friend, legacies, general donations or gift-aid.
- The Friends of the Royal Air Force Club have to date funded the lobby refurbishment and the new front doors project, and provided a substantial contribution to the renovation of the façade.
- The acoustic pods in the Business Centre were made possible by legacy gifts.
- In 2024, the Club is fundraising to assist with the renovation of the Presidents' Room and to fund an apprentice Chef in the Kitchen.

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Club Events

In 2023, 34 Club Social events took place, with 1900 attendees. These events included speakers, such as Professor Brian Cox, Junior Officer events, Gourmet Dinners and fireside talks in the Library. Future Club events that are still available to book were reported to the Membership.

Marketing and Social Media

MP reported on the marketing and social media strategy of the Club which includes how the Club uses Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X (formerly called Twitter) to remain in touch with the Membership. The Club has good engagement across all its social media channels.

Club Manager Kathryn Cooper

MP requested that a formal note of thanks be recorded for Club Manager, Kathryn Cooper who has advised the Board of Trustees, that after 38 years of service, it is her intention to resign in the summer. Kathryn joined the Club in September 1985 working in various departments from Food & Beverage to Personnel (setting up the first department) before taking on the role of Assistant Club Secretary and then Club Manager. MP stated: *"It is hard to think of someone more passionate, dedicated and caring about the Club, its members, and Staff. Kathryn is known to all who have ever worked here as someone firm but fair, but always available to listen, provide advice, guidance and support whatever the challenge. Kathryn will be hugely missed by us all when she retires in a few months, but we will keep in touch. We really do thank Kathryn for everything she has done"*

The 2022 Business update and Balance Sheet,

In addition to the information presented by VS earlier, PS stated that:

- In 2023, the Club recorded an annual income of £11.5m, the highest it has achieved.
- A £1.2m surplus was generated in 2023.
- The Centenary Loan has been paid off in full.
- The Club has no free reserves, however, it will now start to build a reserves fund.
- In 2023 the financial performance of the Club was fully compliant with the loan covenants.
- The year-end cash balance is expected to be £1.3m

This concluded the 2022 Trustees Report.

4) Retirement of Trustees

DM reported that one Trustee has stood down since the last Annual General Meeting and are not seeking re-election. **Wing Commander James Poynton**, who, after 8 years on the Board, including latterly as Chair of the Arts & Heritage Committee has stood down as a Trustee following his retirement from the RAF. The Board, however, is pleased to advise that Wg Cdr Poynton is remaining as a Member of the Arts & Heritage Committee and thanks him for his contributions as a Trustee.

5) The Re-Election of Trustees

This agenda item was chaired by Trustee Air Cdre Dai Whittingham

Air Vice-Marshal David Murray is seeking re-election as a Trustee of the Royal Air Force Club for a period of 3 years.

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	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	AVM David Murray	Fg Off Joachim Wrang-Widen	Wg Cdr Dr Brian Ludlow	Online – unanimous In-room - unanimous

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Air Vice-Marshal David Murray has been re-elected as a Trustee for 3 years.

6) Appointment of new Trustees

DW reported, that following an extensive recruitment and selection process, 2 new Trustees are seeing 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	Air Cdr Paul Higgins	Gp Capt Jim Beldon	Major Katherine Adams	Online – unanimous In-room - unanimous
2	Flt Lt Neeraj Kapur	Air Cdre Barbara Cooper	Plt Off Stephanie Hayden	Online – unanimous In-room – unanimous, (with 1 abstention).

Carried by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Air Cdre Higgins and Flt Lt Kapur have been elected as Trustees for 3 years.

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

DM stated that, at the 2022 Annual General Meeting, Air Cdre Adam Wardrope was appointed as the Vice-Chair (Serving Officer) for 3 years, however, Air Cdre Wardrope has now retired from the RAF, and this vacancy is currently being recruited for. Air Cdre Wardrope is remaining as a Trustee and has also taken the role of Vice-Chair of the Arts & Heritage Committee.

	Name	Proposer	Seconder	Notes
1	Flt Lt Haig Tyler	Gp Capt Jim Beldon	Wg Cdr James Poynton	Online – unanimous In-room - unanimous

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Following a vote, Flt Lt Haig Tyler is appointed as Vice-Chair (Business) of the Royal Air Force Club for three years.

8) Appointment of the Chair of the Board

This agenda item was chaired by Trustee Air Cdre Dai Whittingham

Air Vice-Marshal David Murray is proposed as Chair of the Board of Trustees for the ensuing year.

Proposed for acceptance by: Wg Cdr Paula Willmot

Seconded for acceptance by: Wg Cdr Peter Martin-Smith

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person

Decision: Following a vote, Air Vice-Marshal David Murray is appointed as Chair of the Royal Air Force Club for the ensuing year.

9) Appointment and remuneration of the Auditors

Haysmacintyre have been proposed as the Auditors for the ensuing year and subject to their reappointment it is further proposed that they shall be remunerated in accordance with their usual terms and conditions.

Proposed for acceptance by: Flt Lt Neeraj Kapur

Seconded for acceptance by: Flt Lt Simon Arnett

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person.

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Decision: Haysmacintyre are reappointed as the Club Auditors.

10) The approval of the (updated) Articles of Association

This agenda item was chaired by Trustee Air Cdre Dai Whittingham

The Board of Trustees presented the updated Articles of Association for approval. The proposed changes are to confirm the same AGM and EGM voting privileges to those attending online and to those attending in person and to change specific male-gender references to more inclusive terminology.

Proposed for acceptance by: Air Cdre Dai Whittingham

Seconded for acceptance by: Wg Cdr Wayne Dennis

Carried unanimously by those voting online and attending in person.

Decision: The updated Articles of Association were approved for adoption.

11) 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"

12) Any Other Business

Questions answered in the meeting:

Question from Sqn Ldr Liam Cooper

I contacted the RAF Club Membership department in January to inquire about the possibility of introducing a digital membership card. I was pleased to learn that such a scheme is being actively considered. Would the AGM be able to comment further on any plans and a timeline to introduce this improvement?

Answer from David Murray

Planning continues on the project to provide an RAF Club app to complement the physical membership card. The membership survey last year provided some useful feedback on where it could be used. Working with the Club's new IT service supplier, we have reviewed several possible candidate systems - one looks very promising. As soon as the current focus on essential security, infrastructure and application upgrades is complete then the project will commence in earnest. This should be in the next 6 months. The Club only has one opportunity to get the App right for the Members so any underlying data work that has to take place first will be done so, to ensure the app is robust and able to meet the needs of the membership.

Question from Flt Lt Professor Nicholas Webborn

Please can you provide an update to the membership on the progress on accessibility to the club?

Answer from Miles Pooley

At last year's AGM we reported on the improvements that the Club had made in making the building more accessible. These changes included the refurbishment of our Old Park Lane entrance to make the step-free arrival a lot more welcoming than perhaps it was in the past. We are pleased that these changes continue to make it easier for members who require the step-free access to use the Club. There had been a proposal to install a lift at the Piccadilly entrance, however, due to the restrictions in space at the front entrance on Piccadilly and various electrical and mechanical components running underneath the steps, the concept of integrating a lift is a hugely challenging task that would also potentially prevent access to the front of the building for two months if works were to take place. There are also further obstacles that would need to be considered by the fire officer due to the volume of people using the front entrance. We are, however looking at improvements that can be made to the

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wheelchair lift at the rear of the Club and will update the membership if we can do so. Accessibility remains a priority for the Executive Team and the House Committee.

Question from Sqn Ldr Ivor Gibbs

This is a proposal to introduce an on going status of 'The Senior Club Member'. I suggest that this 'title' be given to the Club member who has been a continuous member for the longest. As a reward for his/her loyalty, in my opinion, it would be fitting to offer a lunch or dinner for two complete with a bottle of Club wine and overnight accommodation for one night and breakfast. I hope the Club Membership records can cope with this challenge. If not, perhaps the next Newsletter could devote a paragraph to the topic and invite bids for the title of 'The Senior Club Member'. There might be a situation where several members joined on the same day. In that case, the status should go to the oldest.

Answer from David Murray

The Board of Trustees have reviewed this proposal and has respectfully decided to decline it. The Club already recognises long membership with an invitation to the annual 25yr and 50yr receptions and lunches. Those reaching a half-century membership are also sent a celebratory tie or brooch. These existing and inclusive arrangements are very much valued and anticipated by Club members. It was also felt that introducing the idea of 'The Senior Club Member' might also be perceived by some members as perhaps, unnecessarily, adversely impacting the egalitarian spirit which the Club so carefully nurtures. The Club does not differ between those who have been a Pilot Officer or an Air Chief Marshal, or who are 20 years old or 100 years old and all Members are treated the same, which is a really important principle.

Question from Sqn Ldr S Evans

I was delighted to learn from Miles that the mortgage taken out following the building of the new bedrooms has been paid off early. This is good news and well done to all. A question if I may. Now we are coming out of the financial recovery and starting to look at building a reserve, could we return to real flowers in the Club? Particularly in the Front Hall and Cowdray Lounge?

Answer from Miles Pooley

For many years the Club had live flowers in the Cowdray Lounge, Reception and other areas. They are expensive and sadly don't look their best for very long. The Club found a sustainable alternative in the form of Floral Image flowers which are rotated regularly and we are charged £10.99 a month per arrangement (versus £85 per arrangement for real flowers). Some recent arrangements we have had are on the screen. However, the Club does use real plants and flowers in the Dining Room and in functions, so we haven't stopped using them completely and continue to use them in other areas on special occasions. When we begin the budget process for 2025 we will see if there is an opportunity to increase our expenditure in this area. However, our 5 year fixed-priced utility costs are coming to an end, Gas this September and Electricity early next year and we are anticipating a substantial increase on what we negotiated five years ago, so we need to continue to monitor our costs very carefully.

Question from Flt Lt Simon Jones

I have a question about Guest Bedroom Rates, which seem to have gone up so much over the past 6 or 7 years. Having gone back through the payment receipts given at check-out when one settles the account:

In 2016, a Guest Rate for a Single Room was £112.50. Today this is £186.00, a 65% increase.

In 2016, a Guest Rate for a Double Room was £181.00. Today this is £268.00, a 48% increase.

The CPI index would suggest a single should now be £148.02 and a double should be £239.00. It is getting to the point that it is somewhat embarrassing having to explain to one's friends and family that they are having to pay so much more than I do as a Member, and does make one wonder about even booking guests in. When do the Trustees view the rates dropping for Guests?

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Response from Miles Pooley

On average, 16% of the bedroom inventory at the Club is occupied by Guests of members. Bedroom rates for Club Members have typically increased only by the rate of inflation each year but Guest rates did increase after the pandemic for various reasons. The demand for club accommodation from Guests of members is also significant, as typically if they were not staying at the Club they would be staying in a central London hotel and their average rates have increased massively since the pandemic. Currently the Marriott Hotel in Kilburn are charging the same rate as we are for a guest double rate but that is nearly 3 miles away from Central London. The Hilton Park Lane and the Athenaeum Hotel which are a short distance from us are charging £470 and £525 respectively for their basic double room. The new Peninsula Hotel on the other side of Hyde Park Corner is charging £1300 tonight for their basic double room. The Club invested over £8m in the new wing in 2018 and 5 of the 7 floors have bedrooms utilising the space. In addition, we are now spending approximately £250 k a year renovating existing bedrooms. With all our other costs having increased since the pandemic significantly, the bedroom rates for Members who are after all the beneficiaries of the Charity are kept as low as possible and they would have to pay more if the guest rates were reduced. In addition, Guests do not pay an annual subscription to be a member of the Club. We do, however, continue to review our Guest Rates to make sure they remain competitive.

Question from Mr Gerd Wengler

Is there any chance that dogs might be allowed to stay with the owner at the Club? I don't mean service dogs, but regular pets.

Answer from David Murray

David Murray answered this question, noting that he was a Dog Owner. The Club welcomes service dogs, which typically undergo extensive behaviour training before taking on their role. However, for various reasons, we do not allow other dogs. Each time a service dog stays, the bedroom requires a more rigorous clean which is a much longer process than the standard checkout cleaning. I have also learned of a recent dog that stayed and chewed a Dining Room Chair so badly that it needed to be replaced. Additionally, the Club must consider issues related to noise & disturbance to others, potential damage to the room and potential allergies of other members. At present, we have no plans to change our policy but thank you for your question.

Question – Flt Lt Christopher Forbes-King

Reference is made in the club rules to the RAF Club notice board for promulgating information to members. Within the confines of data protection would it be possible for an electronic version of the notice board to be published on the members area of the RAF Club web site. This would enable members including those who do not have regular physical access to the club premises to keep abreast relevant current club matters.

Answer from Miles Pooley

I am pleased to advise that the information displayed on the Club Notice Board is identical to that we publish on the Club website and via the regular e-news. There is one exception in that the (prospective Member) election list is published and printed 2 weeks before an election during a Board of Trustees Meeting, with the information placed on the Club noticeboard. We have never put this on to the members section of the website and I am going to ask the Membership Committee to review this. Apart from the election list, the Board highlights any current promotions and Club Social events, etc., all of which are available on the Club website and via the e-news.

Question from Sqn Ldr Matthew Koshy

Would it be possible to have a bigger Club Shop instead of the Cabinet that currently holds the merchandise next to Reception?

Response from David Murray



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We will look at what improvements can be made to how we display Club Shop Items at Reception. We are very limited to the space available so please leave this with us.

Closing remarks from Chair

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have had no further questions online or from the floor so that concludes the 2024 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 Claire Dakin, the Director of Fundraising.

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

The meeting ended at 1857hrs