

Governance Review



Sent to: Council members

On behalf of myself and the trustees, thank you to those members who were able to attend the General Council conference on 6 December. It was a pleasure to meet Council members from across the country, and we hope you found the day constructive and informative.

The ideas and solutions developed together at the conference will play a central role in shaping the next stage of our proposals. Your contributions in the plenary sessions and workshops were invaluable, and they will directly inform the package of recommendations we bring forward for consideration at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 25 April 2026.

We wanted to share this update before Christmas, as promised, to reflect the progress made and the strong engagement from members. However, there is still important work to do to fully analyse and consolidate all the inputs from the co-creation process. This will ensure that the final proposals reflect the breadth of perspectives and the constructive solutions explored at the conference.

In the run-up to the conference, we knew that there was strong support for democratic reforms, but that there were some outstanding concerns, particularly about the changes affecting Scotland and Wales, the relationship between members and the Board, and the balance on the Board, particularly the question of regional representation. The conference looked in detail at proposals relating to the trustee elections process, and for gatherings and debates.

What we heard

The key messages are summarised below.

Trustee elections process

- The idea of England-only elected trustees was debated and received some support, but many members were in favour of four GB-wide elected trustee roles, alongside the Scotland and Wales elected trustee roles, on the basis that this would provide the widest choice of candidates and better reflect Ramblers' inclusive values.

- Regional representation within England was seen as impractical by most, but members supported a commitment to geographic diversity in communications about the elections.
- The election process was generally seen as sensible, with an emphasis placed on clear communication to ensure transparency (for example, written statements plus video introductions for candidates and online Q&A sessions).

Quotes from the workshops

- *“Need to spread awareness of trustee role and what’s involved.”*
- *“Strongest argument against restricting candidates by region: might miss out on exceptional candidates with required skills.”*
- *“Applications should be welcoming for first-time applicants – very clear guidance and support.”*
- *“Voting results must be communicated beyond the meeting to ensure members see feedback.”*
- *“Candidate statements should explain what Ramblers’ charitable objects mean to them and why.”*

Gatherings and debates

- There was support for the concept of gatherings with flexibility for regional/national variation, independent chairs, and member-led agendas.
- The term ‘forum’, ‘assembly’ or ‘conference’ over ‘gathering’ was favoured by many. In the final plenary session, there was a consensus in favour of “forum”.
- The idea of planning teams to agree agendas was welcomed with a variety of views on how these teams should be formed.
- There was some support for members having the biggest say in setting the agenda. The idea of a 40-40-20 split (member topics, board topics, external speakers) was suggested.
- The importance of clear processes for collating and prioritising themes from regional forums was stressed, and the idea of more frequent national forums was suggested.
- It was agreed that trustees should attend, and outcomes should be reviewed by trustees and responded to promptly via varied channels.
- Members suggested that forums should be used for a variety of purposes, including training, networking, and celebrating success.

Quotes from the workshops

- *“Seek questions in advance; time limits on speaking; plenary and group sessions.”*
- *“Board response expected within 3 months of the forums.”*
- *“Publish full reports but also executive summaries – iterative process.”*
- *“Concern: How outcomes are fed up to the Board?”*
- *“Without the gathering feeding into the Board, influence is impossible.”*

- *“Feedback needs to be timely to keep members engaged and promote attendance.”*
- *“Record reasons for decisions and publish promptly after meetings.”*

Timeline and next steps

The conference agenda did not include debate on the detail of the proposals for Scotland and Wales. Separate sessions to discuss these arrangements will be held in February.

In parallel, the staff team and trustees will refine the proposals in the light of the discussions at the conference and then the feedback from the meetings in Wales and Scotland.

We will share the updated proposals, along with drafts of the Articles of Association and Standing Orders, with you before the AGM papers are finalised, and ensure there is an opportunity to discuss and, if necessary, amend these.

The intention is that the final proposals will be presented to the General Council for decision at the AGM on 25 April 2026. Notice and papers for the AGM, including the required special resolution and final Articles of Association and Standing Orders, will be sent to Council members on 27 March 2026.

Then, as promised, following the AGM, we have committed to set up a separate collaborative project, building on the learning to date, to look at the operating model for Areas and Groups.

Thank you again for your engagement and commitment to shaping our future.

Best wishes
Lucy Robinson
Chair, Board of Trustees