



OUTPUT FROM GENERAL COUNCIL AGM DISCUSSIONS

At the AGM on 5 April, General Council members were invited to participate in a workshop session on devising better ways of facilitating ongoing communication and engagement. Council members were asked to consider a framework for effective dialogue between:

1. *the Board and staff (the centre) on the one hand and members and volunteers on the other; and*
2. *between members and volunteers in different groups and areas*

and within each of the above, to consider the following questions:

1. *What sorts of issues would it be useful to discuss and exchange ideas or experience on?*
2. *What currently exists that should be retained/refined?*
3. *What suggestions do you have for doing something completely different and/or new?*

Council members recorded their thoughts on Post-it notes. These were put up on the wall and everyone was invited to add sticky dots to indicate which ideas they agreed with.

The first two sections summarise the outcome of the table discussions on engagement. In each case the numbers in the right-hand column show the number of sticky dots added to indicate support. The second two sections show reactions to the progress report on the governance review as a whole.

Communication and engagement between members and volunteers in different Groups and Areas

CHALLENGE		SOLUTION	
Groups feel Areas interfere too much and too bureaucratic		Get groups to come to areas to ask for support than areas enforcing on groups	4
Getting groups to report footpath problems to areas as well as HAs	7		
Lack of engagement from volunteers, areas not being able to fill posts – too much bureaucracy			
When there isn't a high-profile campaign in an area it makes it difficult to get support for voluntary roles		Can we do more to raise the profile of cases or highlight ways people can get involved – make it exciting	6
Need to ensure scope of area / group matches key stakeholders that need to be influenced and their part. Place-based issues		Creating more opportunities for people in vol roles to network with each other and learn from each other	12
Connecting groups / areas with groups / areas with possible solutions			
Vast majority of members are invisible. Only 20% engage at group level (walks)		Walk magazine may be sufficient for them – and exposure on TV / radio	
Challenge in recruiting new people to do stuff – with time and energy	2	In South-East, South-East Walker is excellent for sharing good practice	3
Communicating with non-email members	1	?	
Making comms/engagement of interest to members / vols		Targeted email – relevancy	4

Tacking bureaucracy		Find out from members which areas are frustrating	
East of use of Ramblers website - multiple logins (Walks Manager)	2	Better search facility. A seamless solution would be preferred	12
No integration with Wellbeing Walks into Groups/Areas	2	Invite members from other areas to meetings: guest or walks	1
Lack of exchanges between groups and areas except for GC	1	More social events to encourage networking	3
What are areas for?		Sharing best practise	2
Need tools / mechanisms to connect areas	2		
Cluster meetings work well, but should be expanded		Longer, more frequent cluster meetings. Occasional face to face meetings – could be part-clusters to limit travel.	4
Communication between members/groups and areas doesn't work well in all areas		Identify best practices – survey areas.	1
Mileage (area) – geographic		Zoom	2
App isn't working for everyone		Review and improve	
For large groups difficulty sending email – read as spam	1	Split group into three sub-groups	1
No experience of volunteers – only members			
Website – members no giving walk leaders contact details, not online, so emails go to webmaster / secretary			
No one size fits for area structure	1	Flexible area structure	16
No coordination of groups who share interests / locations e.g. national parks		Local collaboration mechanisms. Awareness of structure. Generic emails for groups/areas. Groups sharing minutes with areas.	4
Not enough free time to devote to/participate in area		Areas to reach out to groups	4
Finding documents (previously on Assemble)	2	Search engine on the website	9
Overly bureaucratic processes e.g. walk leader training		Database of experience people have as walk leaders Recognised walk leaders could approve other walk leaders locally	
Very different approaches to how areas are operated – down to area		Using the website to discuss monthly / quarterly topics	
Group 96 – means no interactions with other groups		Face to face area cluster meetings ---conferences Areas have various social activities as well as walking, active members	5
Different demographics e.g. in London e.g. over 40, single, no children, have time and resources – younger people are walking		Metropolitan working group to assess demographic challenges especially looking at younger groups – not all areas and groups are doing this	
Connecting with younger walkers		Connection with younger walkers at area / regional level	3
Not everyone has the equipment to access Zoom		In person meetings	1
Forums for exchange of ideas etc	1	Areas offer opportunity for exchange between groups. Clusters offer opportunity for this	8
Areas don't have sensible geographical borders		Re-draw the area boundaries. In-person cluster meetings once a year. Overnight General Council provides opportunity for informal engagement across groups and areas.	3
Old and creaky Areas		Smaller number of Areas limited to local authority	
Engaging younger people – they love walking but can't relate to the Ramblers	4	Role models / visibility, encourage young supporters to become representatives. Younger social media methods	3
27-year-old upset they couldn't qualify for 18-25 years		Expand definition of young	

Most things discussed today do not filter down to group level	1	Not just emails: personal contact from staff, trustees, maybe regional reps to specific areas and groups more regularly	
Team of expert volunteers members could contact for day-to-day stuff		Work out splits of responsibilities between staff and volunteers	
Comms across areas / groups		Clusters work well – increase them	2
One size does not fit all	1	Rural and urban – north of England. Different boundaries. Different comms methods and content.	1
Email comms – clear who it sends to		Have on the list who receives the email (the audience)	2
Doc library		Library out of date – needs to be updated and owners#	2
Members allocated to 96 Area less engagement, why does it exist?	1	No auto allocation to 96. Consider removing 96 entirely. Only when member has chosen.	11
Difficult to find time in one-hour three-monthly cluster meetings to everything we want.		More time, more face to face	
Who are they? (volunteers in other areas and groups)		Volunteer lists – available to other volunteers, permission required	
Devolution – context of comms is changing		Strategy of how areas / groups align / realign with LAs	
Consistency between areas and new unitary authorities		Strategy of how areas / groups align / realign with LAs	
Engaging affiliated groups			
Role of area: group participation in area matters		Newsletter feedback by group reps at area help market area role as hub / strategic partner / policy delivery to showcase what area does. Area reps and staff get out and walk with the groups. Regional meetings in person	4
How to link expertise in one area with another area (that might need it)		Meet regionally to discuss similar interests e.g. dealing with national parks, planning applications, large-scale infrastructure projects etc	1
Footpaths and walking are two different activities. Does walking group need an area? HA relationship does need an area	2	Fewer areas – they serve a purpose but there are too many and some in abeyance. Separate the purpose of areas to deal with footpaths etc but let the walking groups do their own thing.	5

Communication and engagement between the Board and staff (centre) and members and volunteers

CHALLENGE		SOLUTION	
Help desk – good way of communicating between centre and members but currently slow response		Call back system. Staff structure with their areas of responsibility	1
Members not fully informed....		Quarterly bulletin about progress with delivering the strategy to all member	
Groups need support on seeking funding locally		Regional offices and HQ staff to help with this	
Areas not an effective conduit of information		Review of size of Areas	2
General Council – good for engagement but		Have regional get-togethers – Wales, Scotland and four in England	1
Communicate content of Annual report inc. lack of communication from Scottish Office to areas		Summary of key points – successes/challenges. Quarterly report to Areas	6
Let members know Ramblers is not just a walking group	1	Expand volunteer comms to members	1
Staff roles and titles are not meaningful		Explain team roles and responsibilities	3
Top-down directive communication. Website not user-friendly	2	Encourage more participation	

Relying on centre to add walk leaders at different groups		A walk leader could be a walk leader nationally / areas	3
Supporting areas and groups without full committees		Designated regional engagement officers	6
No support or guidance from CO with new officer / struggling areas/groups		Group/area support resource	3
Too many generic emails		In person contact	2
Situations where some volunteers are excluded		Fit for purpose	1
Info from CO to areas / groups		Share org chart and who to contact for help	3
Who does what in CO, what does the board do, how does everything fit together (trustees, GC, ELT, Areas, Groups)	2	Messages passed down from areas to groups (top down)	
How do we communicate with members who don't use email?	1	Need strategy discussions at Area level and feedback successes	1
No website search function	5		
Shortfall in specific expertise		Fill gaps in experience by contacting Area Sec to find expertise within the membership	
Develop projects that meet the needs of members and volunteers (examples of poor engagement and implementation – Pathwatch, GDPR and Assemble)		Seek more input from broader membership earlier, pilot initiatives and engage by user acceptance and testing. Involve members to shape	
We are a grassroots organisation, and the centre and board need to support the members rather than telling us what to do	1	More engagement from members at the start e.g. staff restructure and outcomes. Newsletter from Board	1
Different needs between Areas (e.g. rural v urban)		Special interest groups / clusters focused on specific issues to agree solutions	11
Implementation of the common mailbox (Zendesk)		Ned to back with a case management system, SLT, work flow engine	1
Blank		Discussion forum to help groups and areas share and solve common issues	3
Org contacts		Know who to speak to / contact for matters and ensure an acknowledgement and response	7
How get people interested in our work – not always easily accessible		Encourage people to work on topic	
Area 96	1	How we ensure they receive communications and engage	5
Used to have direct contact for footpaths, unclear who to contact now		Provide an organisational chart and biogs to know who to contact	5
Staff are very busy working behind the scenes and that isn't always seen by members – results in conflict and lack of understanding about why a volunteer's issue is not being dealt with	1		
Blank		Do more footpath webinars – the one already done gained a lot of interest and increased support and activity	5
Delay in getting replies to email contact is too long		Being able to contact staff direct	3
Need to bring young people into discussions		Volunteer emails work well in getting info our	
Bureaucratic motions process		In person national meeting with more discussion rather than formal motions. In person overnight conference	4
Attendance of trustees doesn't work very well as they just give the party line			
Perception of a disconnect between the centre and what areas/ groups actually want	1	Regional conferences (by cluster) in person	12
Feeling of not being heard or listened to (e.g. ideas not being implemented)		Organisational chart of who does what	3
Information / communication is one-way (from centre to members)		Opportunity to put forward ideas online via the website e.g. a noticeboard or comments board. More use of the website by members.	7

Risk of digital exclusion (e.g. if Walk magazine goes online)	2		
Clarity of area work v group walk. (We only have areas cos that's how finance is allocated?)	2	Ensure clarity of who to contact in staff and that we know what the delay will be for a response (board hold staff responsible here).	2
Disparity between how different areas operate		The upcoming governance workshops	
Co-ordinator for all footpath issues / gov changes around the UK	1	Ensure rights of way experts are replace by experts. Ensure someone in each area is filtering all relevant info down for footpath opps etc	2
Communication: fewer staff and trustees means fewer people to visit areas and groups		Ensuring trustees and staff visit / get involved in groups ad areas (esp. AGMs)	6
Ensuring members stay involved throughout governance review			
Knowing what all the roles cover, both trustees and staff		Diagram of roles, description of who does what (on website)	4
Clarity of overall strategy objectives in normal language		More published info (on website)	
Hard to find info on staff and trustees on website and how to contact them	4	Walk magazine could feature trustees	6
Board perceived as secretive?	2	More centralised comms from trustees	2
Difficult to contact a trustee		Allocate a trustee to contact each area	
Length of response times from centre to volunteer queries	3	Is there an SLA?	1
Regional representation on board for Wales and Scotland	4		
Insufficient feedback on outcomes of campaigns		More detailed info on campaigns (emails, Walk mag)	2
Communication between staff and members could be improved further	2	More timely responses from staff to member / group / area queries. Better info about who to address queries to: Zendesk, reg co-ordinators, specialists? Publish org chart on web?	3
Information about IT / process changes not always communicated well to groups/areas		Improve communication flow from staff. NB Help desk has been super!	

Things I agree with:

Two national in person meetings: GC AGM in April + Theme Day represents greater networking	1
Reduction in number of trustees – each trustee to have specialist skill set	3
GC should hold the board to account. Return to 2 day. Allow visitors. Move location	1
Area / Group structure should be flexible to fit local situations	5
Move meetings in person around the country. Business elements can be separated	4
Formal motions not the best way of holding General Council	3
There is still a role for Areas (new name needed)	6
Formal business can be done online – removes barriers of participation and takes less time. More face-to-face events to engage people and allow discussion. Make more visible – young Ramblers don't even know about Areas and GC	
Align RoW “regions” to LAs/HAs	2
Footpath / access volunteer teams organised by Highway Authority	2
Voting for trustee for each England region	2
No need for Area oversight of walking groups	
Return to hustings so candidates can be questioned	1
Reform Area structure – larger area and more flexible	

In addition to online clusters, have smaller group face to face sessions twice a year	
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Things I disagree with:

Nations are different from regions in respect of governance	1
Birmingham is not the centre to use for GC. The NEC is a poor venue. Discouraged from attending	3
Return to hustings or possibly video alternatives for candidates unable to attend. But answering a series of questions set by GC members not the vague questions currently set by the board. Existing written statements and videos useless for judging candidates	
Online GC	2
Digital walk magazine. Many things work better. Magazines don't	6
No to digital magazine	2
One member one vote. Orgs which do this typically have turnout no more "democratic" than present system	
Trustee candidates should have general skills to enable them to take an overview of the organisation, not necessarily particular skills	3