

**RAMBLERS SCOTLAND STRATEGIC COMMITTEE**  
**Minute of meeting held on Tuesday 27 August 2024, 5:45pm- 8:45pm**  
**Meeting held at the Melting Pot, Edinburgh**  
**and via Zoom**

**ATTENDANCE**

**RSSC**

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith	Convener
Beth Dickson	Vice Convener
Karl-Erik Wilson	Ordinary Member
Andrew Bachell	Ordinary Member
Mike Gray	Treasurer
Jacqui Thomson	Ordinary Member
Mike Dales (zoom)	Ordinary Member
Sue Thomas	Ordinary Member

**Staff**

Brendan Paddy	Director, Ramblers Scotland
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**Apologies**

Jarka Polednova	Ordinary Member
Terry Robinson	Ordinary Member

**WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting, introductions were made, and apologies were noted. The Convener reminded everyone of the organisational values, code of conduct, and the need for members to update the register of interests where applicable.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTE FROM RSSC MAY 2024 MEETING**

The Committee noted App 01a: the draft minute of the meeting held on the 14 May 2024. This was approved as an accurate record.

The Committee noted App 01b: all action points were complete

There were no updates required to App 01c: The Standard Register of Interests

**MATTERS ARISING/ ACTION POINTS FROM RSSC MAY 2024 MEETING**

There were no matters arising.

**FINANCE UPDATE**

The Committee noted App 02a: RSSC finance summary.

The Director provided an update on App 02b: narrative finance report. Our spending is broadly on track for the year, although there is a small overspend on office/room hire/storage costs, a small underspend on Scottish Council costs and a significant underspend on legal costs while the Glenborrodale case is paused. It was noted that there were significant funding cuts and risks in the coming year with the Equity Outreach work being dependent on continued Scottish Government funding, the planned closure of the Mapping Scotland's Paths project and concerns about resourcing of the Out There Award. The new business plan is predicated on our ability to attract

new external funding to deliver our new strategic goals and this is likely to be challenging, particularly in the current climate.

### **BUSINESS PLAN Q3 UPDATE & MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

The director highlighted areas where we were not on track to deliver planned projects and objectives in App 03: Q3 Business Plan Report. It was noted that three of these areas related to our ambitions to increase work with and on behalf of lower SIMD communities in line with the new strategy. The director said that this work was proving harder and slower than expected because of our lack of pre-existing links into these communities and our failure to secure new resources to fund capacity to build these partnerships. The director said he would seek to ensure realistic milestones were set for this area of work in the 2024-25 business plan and advocacy with and on behalf of excluded communities could be included within broader advocacy objectives. There was a discussion of what further role groups and volunteers could play to support this work. Progress had also been slower than expected on Mapping Scotland's Paths because attracting new volunteers had proved harder than expected and the project manager had spent a considerable proportion of their time seeking new funding. It was confirmed that despite the imminent end of active work on the project, plans were being made to ensure the map remained accessible and the data could be shared with interested parties. There had been some minor slowing of advocacy activity following Helen Todd's retirement, but Gavin Corbett had found his feet extremely quickly and work has since picked up significantly. It was noted that although the RAG rating for the objectives had been updated, the corresponding letters had not.

The director said that the membership growth in the spring and early summer, while very welcome, was largely a seasonal effect. Although recruitment was up, improved retention was the main driver of net growth. This was welcome because with many new members attracted through digital marketing, particularly on Facebook, there had been concerns that retention rates would fall. Committee members noted that anecdotally they had seen increases in new members who said they had found their local group through the website while searching for local walks or who were retired civil servants. The director noted that although the introduction of the new website had been challenging, the way group walks were now presented was significantly more attractive to potential new members. There was also a new corporate partnership with Boundless, a membership organisation for retired civil servants.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF STAFF CHANGES**

The convener noted that there had been some significant changes to the original proposal and that some of these were very much in line with the feedback provided by RSSC. Despite not being given a formal role in the process, and some initial scepticism about the extent to which they could influence the proposals, the Committee's efforts had contributed to a more positive outcome for Ramblers Scotland and the CEO had written to thank the convener for the role they had played. Committee members thanked the convener for his leadership and hard work in achieving this result. The director noted that the major changes from the original proposal were the retention of a support role filled by Claire Exley, which included a governance remit, and the retention of dedicated communications capacity that would continue to be based in Scotland, a role filled by Danny Carden, although this would report to a Ramblers GB line manager with a dotted line to the Ramblers Scotland director. Other changes that were confirmed included that the support role would also pick up reactive enquiries from volunteers and groups (replacing original plans that group support would be primarily provided through an online portal), the development role filled by Jeannie Cranfield would now focus primarily on external outreach, the Out There Award would be led by Sam Knight on a GB basis, and the Mapping Scotland's Paths project would not continue. In response to questions from committee members, the convener clarified that the core staff numbers would remain the equivalent in Scotland and Wales, and that there were some other significant changes at GB level but that these were beyond the remit of the committee. Committee members remained concerned about the lack of formal involvement in the process at an early stage and the centralising agenda implicit in the initial proposals that was not part of the strategy. There was a discussion regarding the creation of an England programme team and the potential

risks and benefits of this from a Scotland perspective. Committee members raised questions about Ramblers finances and reserves and the convener highlighted the reserves policy and that the change process was partly to ensure reserves remained at an appropriate level. Committee members asked whether this was now the final changes to the structure and the convener said that was the intention. Committee members raised concerns about the morale of staff after the change process and the risk of losing valued team members. The director acknowledged this risk and explained the steps he was taking to seek to mitigate it. There is now an ongoing process to address questions raised about the new grades/bands at GB level.

The convener identified key issues arising from the conversation that RSSC would continue to monitor including:

- The workloads for staff especially in the revised support, development and communications roles, given the additional responsibilities they have been given.
- The morale of the Ramblers Scotland staff.
- How effective communications are delivered in Scotland within the GB structure.
- How effectively Scottish groups are being supported in the new structure.
- The level of resourcing for the Out There Award and the impact this might have on the ability to continue to deliver the award in Scotland.
- Governance issues resulting from the fact that RSSC is responsible for work delivered in Scotland but some of this work is now being delivered by staff reporting to GB managers.
- How the paths outcome of the strategy (outcome 1) will be progressed in Scotland. With the ending of active development of the Scottish Paths Map, we have a very limited capacity to deliver path improvements and information in Scotland.
- The need to attract additional external funding to fully realise the strategy in Scotland, at a time when the funding environment is extremely challenging.
- Wider issues about the role of RSSC, which does not seem in practice to be in line with what is set out in the MoU, which can be addressed through the governance review.

The Convener will meet with the Chair of the Board of Trustees, the CEO and the Chair of the Ramblers Cymru Committee to discuss the fallout from this process for the nations and how we work together more effectively in future.

AP01

## **RAMBLERS SCOTLAND BUSINESS PLAN 2024-25**

The director explained that it had not been possible to discuss and agree a draft business plan with the committee this year in time for the August meeting because of the uncertainty created by the change process and the new approach to GB business planning. Now that those processes are close to a conclusion it is clear that major areas of work in Scotland in the coming year will include: a campaign for resources for access with some collaboration with GB colleagues, continued work on improving equity of access to the outdoors subject to Scot Gov funding and the challenges noted above, reactive support for groups and volunteers, Next Steps walk leader training, governance support, general access campaigning including access for all, OTA delivery subject to resourcing & Scottish, and communications activity subject to clarification about staff capacity with Danny Carden's new line manager. We will not be continuing the Mapping Scotland's Paths project and there will be a significant reduction in capacity for proactive support for groups and volunteers. The director will prepare and circulate by email a draft 2024-25 Ramblers Scotland Business Plan and campaign priorities will also be discussed with ASC.

AP02  
AP03

## **RAMBLERS SCOTLAND GOVERNANCE**

There was a wide-ranging discussion of governance arrangements to help inform the GB led review. Committee members expressed a range of views about the value of Areas – which were valued by some as a means of bringing members from different groups together but not necessarily for their formal constitutional and administrative roles. There was general agreement that the revised MoU was helpful but concern that it was not being followed by the BoT and ELT in practice, and discussion of the possible merits of RSSC having more formal powers in a revised constitution such as the delegated powers of board sub-committee. There were a variety of views

expressed about Scottish Council, with a sense that bringing people together was valued though more excitement could be achieved through substantial discussions and/or external speakers. There was a recognition that although our formal structures at group level could sometimes be cumbersome and needed updating, they did set us apart and made our groups more resilient than less formal groups. The director highlighted the significant amount of staff time involved in organising Scottish Council and the costs, and RSSC agreed that the subcommittee should meet soon and, although Scottish Council 2025 should proceed in person, they could discuss reducing venue and catering costs. There was some uncertainty as to how Ramblers board members were nominated & elected – [three members can nominate a candidate and General Council elects board members](#).

AP04

## **SUB COMMITTEES / WORKING GROUPS**

### **Board of Trustees update**

The Convener provided a brief update on the last Board of Trustees meeting held on 19 June. Issues covered included: impact measures, business planning and budget 2024-26, organisational design, evolving a supporter model, safety on group walks, membership fees, 2024 General Council motions and a member expulsion. The Convener clarified that he did not believe that evolving to a supporter model was intended to remove membership, rather it was aimed at providing more flexible ways to engage with and support Ramblers particularly financially for those who do not want to become members.

**Access Subcommittee** – minutes are available. Preparing for a potential SOAC review, lobbying on private level rail crossings & core paths, continued concern on access resources, awaiting the paper on rewilding and access, discussion on shortcomings of Scottish national parks, ongoing case work.

**Scottish Council Sub-committee** – should meet asap with support from Claire to address planning for an in-person event based on the 2024 model but potentially with cheaper venue/catering.

**60th Birthday working group:** has yet to meet, a volunteer led activity.

**Future of the Gathering update:** App 06 summarises recent meetings.

Could the names of non RSSC members of committees and working groups please be added the table circulated with the papers.

AP05

### **Area AGMs**

The Convener had indicated he will attend all Area AGMs if possible and encouraged RSSC members to indicate which AGMs they might be willing to attend other than their own, although there is no requirement to do so. Staff also asked to support for a briefing pack and attendance at AGMs.

AP06

## **DATES OF NEXT RSSC MEETINGS**

There are informal meetings provisionally scheduled on 24 September and 29 October. Some members indicated they would not be able to attend the September meeting. Convener to canvas availability for September meeting and determine whether to proceed. Director to invite Gavin Corbett to give his initial impressions of our position and opportunities in October. All RSSC members to suggest any topics they would like to cover or staff members they would like to hear from at future informal meetings or items for the November meeting to the convener and Claire.

AP07

AP08

AP09

The next formal meeting of RSSC will be held on Tues 26 November, at 5:45pm at the Melting Pot in Edinburgh

## **AOCB / ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

None

**Minute taken by: Brendan Paddy, director, 27 August 2024**

**ACTION POINTS**

- AP01** Convener to meet the Chair, the CEO and the Ramblers Cymru Conveners to discuss how we work together.
- AP02** Director to circulate draft Ramblers Scotland business plan by email for comment
- AP03** Director/Gavin Corbett to ensure ASC included in discussions of campaign plans for 2024-25
- AP04** Scottish Council Sub-Committee to meet asap now there is clarity about staff support for governance
- AP05** Claire Exley to add non-RSSC members to the table of all sub-committees & working groups
- AP06** RSSC member to indicate which Area AGMs they could attend
- AP07** Convener to canvas availability for September informal meeting.
- AP08** Convener to invite Gavin Corbett to speak to the October informal meeting
- AP09** RSSC members to suggest topics for informal meetings and agenda items to convener/Claire



Signed..... Date: 09.09.24

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, Convener, Ramblers Scotland