

**RAMBLERS SCOTLAND STRATEGIC COMMITTEE**  
**Minute of meeting held on Tuesday 25 November 2025, 5:45pm- 8:45pm**  
**Meeting held at the Melting Pot, Edinburgh**  
**and via Zoom**

**ATTENDANCE**

**RSSC**

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith	Convener
Karl-Erik Wilson	Ordinary Member
John Russell	Co-optee
Mike Gray	Treasurer
Jacqui Thomson	Ordinary Member
Navid Foroutan (zoom)	Co-optee
Jarka Polednova (zoom)	Ordinary Member
Terry Robinson	Ordinary Member

**Staff**

Brendan Paddy	Director, Ramblers Scotland
Claire Exley	Support Co-Ordinator (minute taker)
Tom Patt	Chief Programmes & Delivery Officer, Ramblers

**Apologies**

Beth Dickson	Vice Convener
Andrew Bachell	Ordinary Member
Mike Dales	Ordinary Member
Adrienn Hortobagyi	Co-optee

**1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Convener opened the meeting with a welcome, facilitated introductions, noted apologies, and reminded attendees of organisational values and the need to update the register of interests. Tom Platt, Chief Programmes & Delivery Officer of Ramblers, was also warmly welcomed.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTE FROM RSSC AUGUST 2025 MEETING and MATTERS ARISING/ ACTION POINTS FROM RSSC AUGUST 2025 MEETING**

The Committee noted App 01a: the draft minute of the meeting held on the 26 August 2025. This was approved as an accurate record.

The Committee noted App 01b, acknowledging that all action points had been completed, although the invitation to join the ASC remained open. John expressed interest in joining this sub-committee. It was also noted that one action point—submitting suggestions to Brendan by the end of September for the new President—was missing from App 01b. Brendan reported that no responses had been received.

The Committee noted App 01c, the Standard Register of Interests, and acknowledged that it had been updated.

There were no matters arising.

**3. FINANCE UPDATE**

The Treasurer provided an update on App 02a, the RSSC accounts summary of the full year. The accounts are now audited by the external examiner and ready for sign off by Scottish Council in March.

The Committee noted the increase in meeting venue and catering costs, which is partly attributable to meetings held outside regular business hours.

The Committee noted App 02b, the audited full-year accounts for The Gathering, an annual volunteer-run walking festival overseen by RSSC. Final approval is scheduled by the Scottish Council in March.

The Director provided an update on App 02c, the full-year finance report for Ramblers Scotland, noting that the increase in staff travel costs was due to wider team meetings held in London. Savings were achieved on office costs through a more economical membership arrangement with the Melting Pot.

#### **4. BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE**

The Director reported on the 2024/25 business plan (App 03), highlighting progress against RAG indicators, lobbying successes, and a request for additional resources ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections. A 2026 manifesto has been issued to influence future government priorities and support member engagement. Key updates included progress on access policy, strong work with lower SIMD communities, and positive outcomes in refugee and global majority engagement, including community champions and a new traineeship. Walk leadership Next Steps training continues here in Scotland, governance and succession planning remain strong, and communications and social media engagement were discussed, noting challenges without a dedicated marketing budget.

#### **5. ANNUAL REPORT**

The Director reported on App 04 the draft Annual Report for 2024/25. The committee were invited to submit any suggestions especially on any group successes. Andrew had pre submitted edits on ASC work, these were noted and will be incorporated into the final draft.

AP 01

#### **6. TOM PLATT, CHIEF PROGRAMMES & DELIVERY OFFICER**

Tom introduced himself as Ramblers' Chief Programmes and Delivery Officer and provided a high-level update on membership, finance, and programme delivery, including the rollout of *Safety on Group Walks*.

##### **Finance and Membership**

The organisation is on track against its three-year plan, with income exceeding expectations. Membership growth is at its highest level in 10 years, alongside strong performance in individual giving, corporate partnerships, and legacies. Digital, membership support, and legal and professional services were noted as areas being explored to ensure we are getting the maximum value from them.

##### **Programme Delivery**

Key initiatives highlighted included Walks for Women (North Wales), the Getting Started project supporting community-led walks and leader training, and wellbeing walks in West Yorkshire, all demonstrating positive impact within target communities.

##### **Safety on Group Walks**

Good progress was reported on walk leader certification, representing a significant organisational change. It was emphasised that uncertified leaders should not lead Ramblers walks. The Committee noted that clearer communication on liability, risk management, and the impact on volunteer roles would support understanding and buy-in. Members agreed that case studies demonstrating the safety rationale for group walks would be useful to circulate now that decisions have been finalised and rollout is underway.

Groups retain autonomy over budget allocation. While first aid training may be offered at group level, it cannot be mandated for all walk leaders due to lack of funding.

The Director reassured the Committee that certified walk leader numbers in Scotland are at a healthy level. The Committee supported the development of more advanced training for higher-level walks.

##### **Inclusion and Accessibility**

Terry advised that a clear process should be in place for visually impaired walkers to approach walk leaders to discuss inclusion and appropriate support. Tom thanked Terry for his contribution to the recent webinar with President Amir on visual impairment, which attracted over 100 attendees and

demonstrated strong engagement. Terry is happy to be contacted for further discussion if that would be useful.

### **Director of England**

This role was created during last year's restructure. There are strengths across the nations, with clearer lines of collaboration. There appears to be a shift in the narrative to better distinguish the work of the nations.

## **7. MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

The Director provided the annual membership update (App 05). Scottish membership is at its highest level to date. Although growth this year is not as strong as last year, it continues to rise. Groups are encouraged to reach out to new members on their lists to make them feel welcome, supporting retention.

Data shows that just over 53% of volunteers are female, compared with at least 10% lower representation among walk leaders. Scotland has slightly more volunteers than the GB average. Analysis of SIMD indicators indicates that three-quarters of members are from more affluent backgrounds, highlighting a gap against the strategic aim of engaging people from less advantaged backgrounds in walking activities.

Mal noted that Beth asked that RSSC discuss group engagement. In Beth's absence, the Committee agreed that we should use the informal January meeting to explore this topic in-depth.

Andrew raised a question by email regarding why membership growth had plateaued since spring. The Director was unable to provide a clear explanation as to why this was the case.

## **8. THE RAMBLERS CONSTITUTION**

Mal provided a brief summary of the governance review, including member consultations. Proposals had been expected to be ratified at the EGM on 6 December. Mal thanked those who responded. Feedback included strong support for democracy reforms, concerns over structural changes in Scotland and Wales, Board-member relationships, and board diversity. There was support for all members voting in trustee elections, AGM reforms, and a simplified nomination process. Concerns were raised in England over trustee allocation (1 Scotland, 1 Wales, 4 across nations), seen as unfair. Broad support exists for reform, but insufficient consensus meant proposals will not go to the EGM. Instead, all General Council members will be invited to attend workshops on 6 December to discuss the governance review, with proposals progressing to the General Council AGM in April.

In Scotland, seven responses highlighted concerns over the proposals that include RSSC becoming an advisory committee and its governance relationship. Mal will circulate these responses. Workshops will also be held in Scotland (8 February, Edinburgh) and Wales (two weeks later) to build consensus; no objections were noted in Wales.

Concerns remain about the impact on RSSC, as Scottish Council and constitutional changes are interconnected. The CEO and the Chair of the BoT will attend these workshops.

Mal updated the Committee on recent email exchanges with Andrew, who had requested that correspondence between certain individuals, and himself regarding the governance review be circulated to RSSC. Mal noted that the emails implied the Board of Trustees was not acting in good faith, which is not the case. In his opinion the tone and content of the emails did not reflect Ramblers' values and therefore as Convener he had declined to circulate the email trail to all RSSC members. He confirmed that he was happy to circulate the consultation responses which included responses from the individuals in the email trail and covered the same substantive points. Andrew expressed concern that this was an attempt to close down debate, which Mal refuted.

Andrew requested that it be minuted that his request to circulate the emails was declined and that he believed members' correspondence had prompted a re-think on governance of the nations, as in his opinion earlier attempts to raise the issue appeared not to have been acted upon. Mal added that the BoT had followed the planned and extensive consultation process which has seen the proposals evolve throughout.

## **9. SUB COMMITTEES / WORKING GROUPS**

AP 02

## Board of Trustees Update

The Convener provided a brief update on recent Board of Trustees meetings. Minutes are published [here](#).

The Board discussed volunteer recruitment and engagement, as well as the ongoing affiliated club offer. A disciplinary investigation resulted in a member's expulsion; such matters are rare but taken seriously.

**Access Sub committee** – The Committee noted App 06, the notes of the last meeting.

**Scottish Council Subcommittee** – Jacqui reported that the venue is booked for Saturday 14 March at the John McIntyre Conference Centre, with the theme of access. Tom Bowser of Argaty Red Kites has been approached as the external speaker. Edinburgh Group and Edinburgh Young Walkers will assist on the day.

**60th Birthday Sub committee** – App 07: Jacqui updated on the year's activities, culminating in a Civic Reception at Edinburgh City Chambers for key volunteers. Thanks were given to Danny for communications and to the subcommittee for their work throughout the year. This sub committee has now been discontinued with thanks from RSSC.

**The Gathering** – App 08 summarises recent meetings and plans. The 2026 event will take place 24–27 April in Pitlochry, with registration opening next week.

**Search/Co-option Sub committee** – Recruitment adverts were issued externally via Goodmoves, generating strong responses. Beth has undertaken much of the interviewing. Vacancies include Convener, Vice Convener, and four Ordinary Members. Mal encouraged newly appointed co-optees to stand for election and submit paperwork if wishing to join as Ordinary Members of RSSC.

## 10. AREA AGMs

Mike provided an update on the recent Area AGM for Forth Valley, Fife, and Tayside. Attendance was poor, highlighting a need to address member disengagement. Discussions focused on what members would like the Area to become, emphasising that there is an opportunity for it to reflect membership priorities.

The Grampian and North Strathclyde Area AGMs fall on the same day; Mal will attend the Grampian AGM. RSSC members are encouraged to attend all AGMs.

Members Day for Lothian & Borders is not an AGM but a more social event.

## DATES OF NEXT RSSC MEETINGS

The next informal online meeting is on Tuesday 20 January 2026 6-7pm, topic; group engagement  
The next formal meeting will take place at the Melting Pot on Tuesday 17 February 5:45pm

## AOCB / ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

Andrew in a written update submitted in advance of the meeting, reported that he and Mike had attended the recent Scottish Outdoor Access Network conference, which marked 20 years of access legislation. He noted that Brendan was the only speaker who spoke with passion about both the past and future, and that he represented Ramblers Scotland exceptionally well

**Minute taken by: Claire Exley, Support Co-Ordinator, 16 December 2025**

## ACTION POINTS

**AP01** Gavin to incorporate Andrew's ASC updates to the Annual Report

**AP02** Mal to circulate all Scottish responses to the governance review to RSSC



Signed..... Date: 19.12.25

