

The Geological Society of London

COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting held on 25 November 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdown restrictions.

PRESENT: Mike Daly (*Chair*), Jo Alexander, Tom Backhouse, Andrew Bloodworth, John Booth (*Vice President*), Joel Gill (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Graham Goffey (*Treasurer*), Kathryn Goodenough, Jim Griffiths (*Secretary, Professional & Chartership Matters*), Chris King, Andrew Moore, Keith Myers (*Co-opted – Treasurer designate*), Bryne Ngwenya, John Perry, Nik Reynolds (*Vice President*), Sarah Scott, Gemma Sherwood, Jessica Smith (*Vice President, Regional Groups*), Helen Smyth, Rob Strachan (*Secretary, Publications*), Alex Whittaker (*Secretary, Science*) and Lucy Williams

APOLOGIES: Jennie Gilbert and Michael Kehinde

In attendance: Richard Hughes (*Executive Secretary*), Alex McPherson (*Director of Finance & Operations*), Alicia Newton (*Director of Science & Communications*), Maggie Simmons (*Director of Publishing*) and Christina Marron (*Executive Assistant*)

Library Review Item: Hazel Rymer and Neal Marriot

1. APOLOGIES

NOTED apologies from Michael Kehinde and Jennie Gilbert.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Re paper CM/78/20

NOTED Chris King (CK) is involved with two organisation that receive funds from IUGS and the charity that Joel Gill (JG) leads receive grants from IUGS also.

Tom Backhouse (TB) said he is discussing with Mike Daly (MD) how his FutureGeo project can work more closely with the GSL to mutual benefit . He said in a recent survey mailing to 2000 subscribers, of the 600 respondees 70% were not GSL members. He said he hoped the project could work jointly with GSL on projects and would be keep Council updated on developments. TB asked Council members to contact him if they had questions or concerns. MD thanked TB for his openness and encouraged him to develop the collaboration with GSL.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

Minutes were APPROVED.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Virtual Council and Staff meetings: MD said the first would take place on the morning of next Council: 27 Jan 2021.

Education Funds: Alicia Newton (AN) said she is in discussion with CK regarding a way forward and will present a proposal at the next Council.

Fellowship renewals: MD noted that non-payment had been agreed as a compassionate dispensation to the pandemic and was being followed up.

Informational interviews: MD had considered the career clinics but had concluded the Career Days were not the right avenue. He said it would be revisited in 2021.

AN

MD/AN

5. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS (*confidential to Council*)

Report of Officers Meeting (verbal)

Mike Daly (MD) said key matters discussed were around staffing, including:

- Redundancies and staff restructure.
- Other staffing matters

Report of Elections Committee (verbal)

President designate: MD said one nomination had already been received and there was a second candidate who had said she would stand.

Council Elections:

MD noted that eight Council members are due to leave in 2021. One place on Council would be taken by the President Designate, one for Treasurer for which Keith Myers (KM) is a starred candidate.

MD noted the Elections present an opportunity to reflect and reach out to people who could bring new energy and make a valuable contribution. He said further possible candidates had been suggested and encouraged that they should be followed up.

Use of social media to reach a wider pool: AN said social media links would be ready by the end of the week with bitesize videos from some Council members promoting reasons to stand.

Awards (CM/74/20)

MD presented the outcomes from the ballot. No comments were made.

MD noted that JG had brought to Council's attention a report regarding one of the recommended candidates. He said this would be a point for discussion for the next Awards Committee in May with a fuller briefing provided on the matter for the Committee to then make its recommendations.

Council APPROVED the Awards for 2020 in the list appended. Council were reminded that the information is confidential until the award winners have been notified and have accepted.

Council AGREED all funds should be awarded. MD will review and allocate accordingly.

MD

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

Executive Secretary's report (CM/75/20)

Richard Hughes (RH) said the critical business items were the library review and the lease: both agenda items.

A complaint was reported to Council (*confidential to Council*)

Director of Finance & Operations (CM/76/20)

Fellowship renewals: Alex McPherson (AM) said there was careful tracking of Fellowship revenue and figures were similar to 2019 (£773k): 2020 (£757k). He said the nominal difference could be the shift from annual or quarterly direct debit to monthly. This would be watched closely for indications of a drop in January-February.

CRM: AM said a big push was needed on the CRM upgrade in advance of Microsoft upgrades. Meetings were scheduled to discuss recent time slippages by Felinesoft. MD asked if the issue was a changing workforce. AM replied the main contact was

the same but technical support had varied. AM said he has offered opportunities for more collaboration dependent on Felinesoft's work on the initial upgrade.

Facilities: matters (confidential to Council)

Management Accounts

AM said the current situation was encouraging and the full year forecast was expected to return a surplus. AM noted that there had been a reduction in costs due to the pandemic: service/office overheads, consumables, furlough claims (c.£168k). However, he noted that the most significant impact had been the gain in the investment portfolio and AM was predicting an end of year gain of £122k which means an anticipated surplus c. £44k. He said this may allow capacity to deliver some discretionary projects late 2020 to take some pressure of in 2021.

AM

He noted the accounts included a provision for some exceptional costs related to staff restructuring and annual leave holiday carry-over. He said the figures should be lower for 2021-22 which should create a small credit in next year to take pressure of the 2021 budget.

Keith Myers (KM) said he would like to look at reserves.
Reserves discussion (confidential to Council)

RH said it was very positive news to be expecting a financial surplus after two years of deficit.

Graham Goffey (GG) said the unrealised gain in the investment portfolio gave a substantial increase in the asset value to the society. He said however that this did not negate the need for staff restructuring which had been necessary as part of the Society having a better control over areas of income and expenditure that it could control. He said the Society needed to focus on these areas as investment portfolio would always have fluctuations.

Director of Science and Communications CM/77/20

Kathryn Goodenough (KG) asked when Nick Gardiner (NG) would be announced as theme leader. AN said there had been a press release last Friday and it would go out in the next newsletter as well as other social media.

KG to contact him in regards ES³.

MD said they hoped NG would be the convener of the William Smith lecture in 2022. AN noted from 2022 the meetings names would move away from the traditional names William Smith into thematic names, Energy Transition 2022 Meeting. MD queried if dispensing with the William Smith name would not be a loss in the recognition of the Society's major events.

AN said the change in names was to create two important themed landmark events. Alex Whittaker (AW) said the Science Committee's review had found that William Smith does not have the same traction for external stakeholders: it appears historical, gives no sense of a flagship event and gives no apparent connection to their field. KG agreed in the past there had not been consistent themes that attendees could connect to on a regular basis. Alicia said that once the events become established the phase three would be to find a series name that is forward thinking.

RH noted that the consensus seemed to agree the move to thematic names for greater clarity.

IUGS (International Union of Geological Societies) membership level (CM/78/20):

AN explained that the GSL pays a yearly subscription as the IUGS's adhering body for the UK. She said the UK is the second most active member in terms of numbers involved in sub-groups contributing their knowledge and time.

AN said the UK has the highest level of membership, level 8, since 2006 which gives eight delegate votes on some minor decisions and financial matters (on the main overriding resolutions all members only get one vote). AN said level 8 membership costs £34k, 49% is reimbursed by a grant from the Royal Society. AN noted the grant from Royal Society will run out 2022*.

*AN has since confirmed that 2022 is the last year GSL will receive the grant.

Apart from high costs, AN noted there were other issues in regards IUGS accountability, diversity and recently poor management for the Delhi IGC conference. AN said work is been done to address these deficiencies, and GSL supported a joint resolution (with US and Australia) requesting greater financial transparency. AN said they also seconded further resolutions from US on accountability and diversity.

AN said IUGS membership was discussed by the External Relations Committee and a recommendation made to reduce membership to either level 4 or 6 for less cost pressures but allow the same influence in terms of voting on resolutions. AN said level 4 was more financially sustainable, but level 6 may give more international presence.

Chris King said he felt the UK had a lot of soft power and responsibility and he would be supportive of level 6. Lucy Williams (LW) said it was important to clarify when the last subsidy would be received from the Royal Society and that in order to exert influence recommended level 6. KG noted the IUGS was still an important global body and moving membership from level 8 to 4 could cause consternation.

Helen Smyth proposed there should be a comprehensive article in Geoscientist to make members aware of the role GSL is playing through bodies such as IUGS and the contribution it is making internationally. KM said it would be good to demonstrate how the Society is investing its funds.

MD queried the Royal Society's viewpoint. AN said the grants team had not been concerned and had only asked for the reasons for the potential change.

AN

Council AGREED to a reduction to level 6 and requested a communication to IUGS voicing concerns around adequate monitoring of funded projects and diversity.

AN said a Geoscientist article could include other organisations and give Fellows the full scope of the organisations GSL is working with and supports. She said she would try to prepare an article to be included in the March edition.

AN

Director of Publishing (CM/79/20)

Maggie said that with regards the transformative Read and Publish agreement with Jisc, six institutions have now signed up. MS said a similar Read and Publish agreement has been made with CAUL for institutional subscriptions in Australia and New Zealand.

MS noted KG had been appointed as Chief Editor for their new journal ES³. KG said it had a great editorial board and asked Council to spread the word regarding submissions for 2021.

7. LEASE (CM/80/20)

Lease matters (confidential to Council)

8. 2020 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, BUSINESS PLAN PROGRESS AND YTD OUTTURN (CM/81/20)

RH said progress on the 2020 business plan had been impacted by a number of factors: Covid-19 and the transition to remote working, the work on the strategic options and restructuring process, as well as HSE requirements for the re-opening of both sites.

RH updated on follow up projects from the Strategic Options project: one theme leader, Nick Gardiner, was in place and the advert for the Geohazards leader had gone out; the Fellowship benefits and categories review was making good progress; headway had been made on the digital strategy but there were issues with regards capacity and skills; the work on the mission, values and purpose statement was in progress but had been put on hold due to staff restructuring; and finally the visual branding project proceeding well under Jenny Boland, Development Officer

9. 2021 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET(CM/82/20)

Business Plan 2021 (separate Excel sheet)

RH said the Business Plan 2021 was restructured around the strategic options priorities, and had already been presented to Standing Committees for feedback. He added that BH plans need to be updated once staff were communicated to regarding the lease.

Budget 2021

AM said the both the 2021 budget and COLA proposal had been reviewed and approved by the FPC. He said the forecast operating budget for 2021 showed a deficit of £14k but after deployment of funds, endowments and restricted funds there would be a £36k surplus.

AM said lower levels of income were forecast for 2021 including a 10% reduction in Fellows and 3% in chartership, as well as lower income forecast for the Lyell Collection and Publishing House, major gifts, events and conferences.

AM said in line with this forecast expenditure would also be lower due to reduced activity in events and lower direct costs as a result as well as the significant reduction in staff costs by c.£400k in 2021. AM said further reductions should be made through the procurement of services and utilities, a reduced number of payment processing platforms, the depreciation policy review and optimisation of office equipment.

AM said regarding capital expenditure the largest items were the website, CRM platform management and marketing, and provision for IT to support hybrid working. AM said there was also contingent items list in case of financial headroom appearing.

Annex B: AM said a 2% increase in COLA was proposed by FPC. GG noted the paper presented to FPC had proposed 1% with room for 0.5% increase at 6 months but that FPC had felt that it should be 2% in consideration of the restructuring and additional workload for staff.

Keith Myers (KM) noted the depreciation schedule ratification should accommodate this. John Booth (JB) asked if auditors had any views on the allocated depreciation. AM said it would be discussed with auditors and agreed it needed to be updated in particular with a move to ebooks / digital stock.

Council APPROVED the 2% increase in COLA.
Council APPROVED the 2021 budget.

10. RISK REGISTER (CM/83/20)

AM said the paper was to NOTE.

AM

He confirmed the risks associated with Brexit had been carefully reconsidered by SLT and noted the intention to invest in Risk Management software to link up all items and have better risk management control.

MD proposed breaking the Burlington House risk down into its various components. NOTED by Council.

11. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/84/20)
NOTED by Council.
12. ELECTIONS
- 12.1 *Fellowship (CM/85/20)*
Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at the Ordinary General Meeting on 25 November 2020.
- 12.2 *Chartered Geologists (CM/86/20)*
The applications from Fellows listed to become Chartered Geologists had been approved by the Chartership Panel and were AGREED by Council.
- 12.3 *Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/87/20)*
Council AGREED to elect as Candidate Fellows and Junior Candidate Fellows those applicants listed.
- 12.4 *European Geologist (CM/88/20)*
Council APPROVED those applicants listed as European Geologists.
- 12.5 *Chartered Scientist (CM/89/20)*
Council APPROVED the applicant listed as Chartered Scientist
13. LIBRARY REVIEW (CM/90/20)
Library Review (confidential to Council).
14. CLIMATE STATEMENT(CM/91/20)
AN explained that the Society had previously published climate change statements in 2010 and 2013. After an open letter in 2018 to the Society, the GSL and the UK Paleoclimate Society convened an expert panel to prepare a new statement reflecting the latest scientific evidence about past climate change. This was presented to the Science Committee whose comments have been incorporated. AN said the statement was presented to Council for APPROVAL and alongside a proposed draft GSL summary position statement for Council's review.
- AW thanked Caroline Lear and the panel. He said the statement had been peer-reviewed.
- Further discussion (confidential to Council)
- Council APPROVED the scientific statement and AGREED to the GSL considering issuing a statement that would complement the scientific statement.
15. AOB
LW asked for all Council dates 2021 to be sent out.
- DATE OF NEXT MEETING
27 JANUARY 2021 – virtual
There will be a business meeting during the afternoon of 27 January 2021, with an Ordinary General Meeting following.
Other Council dates for 2021: 7 April, 23 June, 22/23 September and 24 November
AGM: 25 June (11.00am)