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Communications Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on

Tuesday 2 December 2008 at 1330

at the BPA Office, 5 Wharf Way, Glen Parva, Leicester

Present:	Adrian Bond	-	Communications Chairman
	Paul Applegate		
	Paul Moore		
	John Page		
	Craig Poxon		
	Grant Richards		
In attendance:	Tony Butler	-	Technical Officer
	John Hitchen	-	NCSO
	John Horne	-	Vice Chairman of Council
	Lesley Gale	-	Editor, <i>Skydive Magazine</i>
	Helen Lucas	-	Membership Services
	Martin Shuttleworth	-	Secretary-General
	Martin Soulsby	-	Co-opted
	Weed Stoodley		
Observer:	Kieran Brady		
Apologies for absence:	David Ibbotson		

Item Minute

44/08 Minutes

Grant Richards proposed, and Paul Moore seconded, a motion that the minutes of the Communications Committee meeting held on Tuesday 7 October 2008 should be approved as a correct record.

Approved

45/08 Matters arising

45.1 Competition for Mag readers (minute 37.1)

Grant Richards suggested, and the Committee agreed, that the competition brief should be to award a prize for the Member who jumped from the most parachuting aircraft at BPA Affiliated Centres during the membership year 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 inclusive. Kieran Brady had kindly offered a cash prize. Lesley Gale would finalise the detail, including the arrangements for validation, with Kieran Brady. The aim was to circulate a pdf of the competition page before the February 2009 meeting and probably to launch the competition in the April 2009 issue.

Action: Lesley Gale

45.2 Functionality of the Mag website (minute 38.3)

Lesley Gale reported that the search facility on the Mag website was working again, but that it was not as easy to use as it had been before the change of website host. This was because of issues with technical compatibility – the new hosts had taken over an old site they, which they had not themselves written. Lesley Gale said that she wished to pursue the provision of a better search facility with the new hosts, to achieve the same standard as with the previous hosts. The Chairman asked if there were any statistics on the use of the search facility, and Lesley Gale said she would look back at her records.

Action: Lesley Gale

45.3 Print budget (minute 39.1)

Lesley Gale had circulated an updated budget with her Editorial Report (minute 46.2).

45.4. Separate itemization of the Mag element of the subscription (minute 39.2)

The Chairman confirmed that the Mag element of the subscription, which had been £17.50 since 1998, had been itemized as a separate element for VAT purposes. Debbie Carter, Treasurer, and Jon Gretton, Financial Administrator, had indicated that the VAT position was complex and that it was therefore better to leave the arrangements as they were. However, the Chairman noted that most other associations did not appear to itemize an element of their annual subscription for their Magazine, but simply provided their members with a 'free' membership magazine inclusive to their overall annual subscription. The Chairman asked whether Jon Gretton could kindly liaise with other associations with a view to finding out how they dealt with the VAT issue on their magazine, and report back to this Committee.

Action: BPA Office (Jon Gretton)

46/08 Editorial Report

Lesley Gale had circulated her Editorial Report in advance.

46.1 December 2008 issue

The mail out of the December 2009 issue had started yesterday. It had been brought forward to allow manual insertion of a non-standard size advertising insert that could not be mechanically handled. Lesley Gale reported that the DZ feature was due to have been about Bridlington, but because of the sad death of Dave Johnston of Bridlington, she had run the feature on LPS instead. Skydive Bridlington would now be featured in the February 2009 issue.

46.2 Budget

Lesley Gale's report included a table of performance against budget for the year to date.

47/08 Tender for Editorial Services Contract

Lesley Gale tabled a letter she had written addressed to 'Gentlemen and ladies of the BPA Council, Staff and the Membership'. The Chairman adjourned the meeting for reading time. The Chairman agreed with Lesley Gale and the Committee that discussion of her letter should be deferred until tonight's meeting of the full Council.

The Chairman asked that the meeting should go into an in-camera session. Lesley Gale said that, as a point of order, her letter should not be discussed during the in-camera session. The Chairman assured her that it would not be. Lesley Gale and those other than Communications Committee members and staff then left the room.

47.1 Responses to the invitation to tender

The Chairman tabled a document he had prepared which listed the organisations and individuals that had notified the BPA of their intention to submit a tender for the next Mag contract. The invitation to tender had been published in the Mag for October 2008 and on the BPA website. In addition, a number of hard copies of the invitation to tender had been sent out, usually accompanied by example Mags and other BPA publications. The list of intents to tender comprised 12 responses from those to whom the BPA had sent invitation packs; 2 from organisations to whom the BPA had not sent an invitation pack; and 2 from BPA Members. Where organisations such as publishing companies had responded, the Chairman had included in the document he had circulated, general information about these companies taken from their websites. He said that there had been responses from individual BPA Members, a BPA Member in a consortium, and from publishing houses ranging from small operations to major international publishers. He said there had been an exciting quality and quantity of responses. He then adjourned the meeting to allow time to read the responses to tender document.

The Chairman reported that two organisations that had notified of their intents to tender had asked for a pre-tender meeting. However, the Chairman had indicated that this would not be possible. He said that instead, once the tender specification had been issued in the New Year, a period of two or three days would be set aside for bidders to request clarification or further information from the BPA on any matter relating to the tender.

Costs were then discussed. The Chairman reported that the total current cost per issue of the Mag was approximately £21K, this amount being divided broadly equally between (i) editorial services and (ii) print, design and mailing.

The Chairman reported that, following consultation with the full Council on an earlier draft, and his inclusion of the feedback that had been provided from that process, he had e-mailed the final draft tender specification to the full Council before today's meetings. He called attention to its principal features, including the specification of a minimum service level. Grant Richards proposed, and Paul Applegate seconded, a motion that the tender specification should be approved for issue.

Carried unanimously

The Committee noted that Lesley Gale had not signified her intent to tender. Craig Poxon said he had not foreseen that Lesley Gale would not be involved, and believed that the tender process would be devalued without her being part of it. It meant, in effect, that the current arrangements for 'Skydive the Mag' were not being put forward for the new contract period. This put the BPA at risk of losing the best Mag it had ever had. The Committee was surprised and disappointed and decided to encourage Lesley Gale to tender because she had a strong track record that the Committee was keen to see go forward into the tender process.

John Horne referred to an e-mail from John Smyth, Chairman of Council, that had been circulated in advance. In this, the Chairman of Council had suggested putting the tender process on hold for a limited period, so that the new Council of 2009 could discuss the position with Lesley Gale and decide whether there was a way to proceed with her continued involvement or, if no agreement could be reached, then to resume the tender process.

The Chairman of this meeting did not support the Chairman of Council's suggestion, and said that it was not a matter to be postponed for next year's Council but something that needed to be resolved today, as the process was already well in progress, and documented to outside parties including deadlines. The Committee agreed, and decided to negotiate with Lesley Gale to seek to encourage her to tender.

The meeting returned to open session and Lesley Gale and others rejoined. The Committee discussed with Lesley Gale the reasons that she had not put in an intent to tender. Lesley Gale outlined her reasons including problems with scheduling as a consequence of her current contract ending with the June 2009 issue of the Mag, which she said had created uncertainties for her in the second half of the year and meant that she could not commit to the Mag (and turn down coaching and other work because of it) when there was no certainty that she would win the new contract. Lesley Gale said that she did, however, wish to continue with the Mag – but she could not do so in the circumstances she was now in.

Lesley Gale said she believed the tender process had already had an effect on her running of the magazine, as when her most recent Editorial Assistant had left in February, she believed she was not in a position of re appoint someone as the current contract period would finish in June 2009 without guarantee of continuation after this date. On top of this, a new assistant generally took a period of training before they could make any real contribution; therefore, she had decided not to replace her assistant. This had put extra strain on her workload and administrative tasks had piled up.

In addition, the timetable for submitting a tender bid clashed with the editorial and production schedule for the February 2009 Mag and made it difficult for her to do both. On balance, she had come to the view that it was better for her to take the firm options of work that had been offered to her in the second half of 2009, after her current contract to provide editorial services to the BPA had come to an end.

Grant Richards reiterated the reasons for and expressed the hope that, from a business perspective, he hoped Lesley Gale understood why the BPA had gone down the tender route. It was not just for the Magazine – the same process was being applied to all subcontracted services to ensure the delivery of best value to the membership. It was best business practice and risk management to benchmark contracts against the marketplace, and the point had been made before that this Committee would leave itself open to criticism had it not decided to do this. Grant Richards said that, with this as background, no-one doubted the good job that Lesley Gale

had done, and therefore he could not understand why Lesley Gale had not signified her intent to tender because with her track record, her tender would be a strong one. He also pointed out that the previous contracts had usually been annual contracts, therefore the issue of continuity for an assistant had in fact always been subject to contract renewal.

Weed Stoodley observed that some Members did not want a Mag at all. By putting in place the tender process, the BPA was assuring the best value arrangements for its Magazine and this would help to hold off the naysayers and be good for the long-term future of the Magazine.

Lesley Gale said that although tendering may well be best practice in business and commercial organisations was not necessarily best practice in member-run, third sector not-for-profit voluntary organisations such as the BPA. Organisations such as the BPA were a quite different animal, which relied to a far greater measure on goodwill. This could not be reduced to the wording of a commercial contract although this decision had caused her many sleepless nights before she had decided to walk away from the new tendering process.

In discussion, Lesley Gale said that she had no problem in her costs being benchmarked against those of other potential suppliers. As Editor over 14 years the financial performance of the magazine was demonstrably performing well, and she believed, delivering best value to the membership, issue upon issue.

Craig Poxon asked Lesley Gale whether it might encourage her to tender if the Committee were to put in a buffer in the schedule of the tender process. He suggested that the Committee could consider extending Lesley Gale's existing editorial services contract to cover all issues of the Mag in 2009, up to and including the December 2009 issue. This would offer Lesley Gale certainty for the whole of 2009. Lesley Gale said she was unfortunately not in a position to make an instant decision but would certainly be prepared to think about it.

Grant Richards then formally proposed, and Paul Applegate seconded, a motion that Council be invited to extend the deadline by one week, to Friday 5 December at 1700, for Lesley Gale to notify the BPA whether she wished to tender for the next Mag contract. This was on the understanding that if Lesley Gale were to tender (and only in that case), the BPA would extend Lesley Gale's current editorial services contract from its scheduled finish date with the June 2009 issue to a revised finish date with the December 2009 issue.

Carried unanimously

The open session of the meeting then resumed. The Chairman informed Lesley Gale of the Committee's decision, as above, and Lesley Gale thanked the Committee for their flexibility. She said that, if she decided to tender, she would notify the BPA before 1700 on Friday 5 December. **[Note:** Subsequent to the meeting, the BPA received an intent to tender from Lesley Gale by e-mail at 1546 on Friday 5 December.]

48/08 Communications Action Plan: 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009

48.1 Publish a new BPA website

Stage 1, the new BPA website, was now complete – Action Plan target achieved - and Hcoms, the contractors, would be approached for a debrief meeting ahead of stage 2, development of the new BPA database, which would be overseen by the Development Committee.

Target achieved

48.2. Prepare to publish a new Mag website

This was on hold pending the debrief on the new BPA website (minute 48.1) and completion of the Mag tender process (minute 47).

On hold

48.3 BPA Skydiving Calendar 2009

The calendar had been issued free of charge to Members as an insert to 'Skydive the Mag' for December 2008. The Committee was pleased with the calendar and thanked Lesley Gale for her excellent work in producing it.

Target achieved

48.4 Explore the feasibility of creating an historical image archive of British parachuting

Martin Soulsby, who was spearheading this project, had circulated a paper in advance. He reported that there were two issues on which he was currently concentrating – a digital rights management framework, and categories for the classification of images. Rights management was concerned with ownership of the copyright of the images, which would be particularly important if they were to be sold or licensed, especially where the photographer was still active. It was possible that some images might be donated or bequeathed to the BPA by their photographers or current owners, which would mean transfer of copyright to the BPA. This was an area that Martin Soulsby was still researching.

Action: Martin Soulsby

48.5 Investigate the possibility of introducing a new, more durable type of membership card

The Chairman reported that he was looking into various alternative types of membership card, and thanked Craig Poxon for an example he had forwarded. He said that the most cost-effective solutions appeared to be pre-printed cards that could be personalised at the Office with an individual Member's details.

Action: Chairman

49/08 End of session

As this was the last meeting in the current calendar year, the Chairman thanked all those around the table, Committee Members, Editor and staff, for their contribution to the BPA and the work of this Committee during the year.

The meeting closed at 1652.