

Council Review Action Group
Summary of Findings and Proposals

The Central Council set up this independent review in order to examine its activities and make recommendations for modernisation in the light of the current needs of the ringing community.

We have undertaken the review using Council Decision K as a starting point. This was adopted at the Portsmouth meeting in 2016 and clarified the Council's relationship with ringers, churches and other ringing service providers stating clearly that the *primary* role of the Council was the provision of support and services to ringers and to ringing.

We developed and then consulted upon Vision and Mission statements that sought to describe a view of what a good future for ringing would be like and what the role of a reformed Central Council should be in making that happen. Additionally, we invited general submissions from ringers giving their views on the Council including ideas for improvement and undertook a survey to see whether the views expressed were representative of those of a larger group of ringers. On the basis of this evidence, together with our own observations, we have identified a number of positive and negative themes in relation to the Council. We have further analysed these to identify underlying causes and propose changes that should address them.

This is a short summary of our findings together with our detailed proposals. Our full report is available online at cc-crag.weebly.com.

1. **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

While a minority of respondents did not see any reason for change, the overwhelming view was that radical change is essential. It is important to stress, however, that not all was seen as bad and that many commented on the hard work done by members of the Council. Indeed the majority did see the need for a Central Ringing Organisation (CRO) and the positive themes below emerged about the existing Council (more information is in the main report):

- A. It provides a single point of representation for ringers.
- B. It keeps an extremely valuable set of records regarding both practical ringing and the history of ringing.
- C. The maintenance of a comprehensive list of method names and definition is invaluable.
- D. There is a strong volunteer ethos.
- E. As the progenitor of the Ringing Foundation it has indirectly enabled ART to form.

- F. Its stewardship of, and continuing links with, the Ringing World and Dove's Guide is of great importance.

These points demonstrate the unequivocal need for a Central Ringing Organisation to continue, building on these strengths and developing new capabilities.

A number of common negative themes emerged from the feedback, however. These were seen as currently limiting the Council's authority and standing as well as its effectiveness:

- G. It communicates poorly with the ringing community.

There were more adverse comments about communication than any other issue.

- H. It doesn't promote ringing to the public well enough.

Many stressed the need to promote a different (more accurate) view of ringing and ringers to the non-ringing public.

- I. Most ringers think it is irrelevant to them.

There was a recurrent theme that the Council was perceived as irrelevant to most ringers and that it focussed on matters that were neither of interest nor relevance to the majority of them.

- J. It has no apparent strategy or vision.

The lack of an overall strategy or vision was commented on by a number of people. This was felt to inhibit adequate coordination between the different committees and prioritization of what the Council should and should not be doing. Others raised the simple question "What is the Central Council for?"

- K. It is ineffective.

A number of ringers, including some Council members, commented on problems with getting things done effectively with a tendency to dive into irrelevant details seen as part of the culture. A number of responses said that the size of the Council was far too big to operate effectively and to make decisions swiftly.

- L. It lacks a culture of accountability and doesn't follow through.

There was a repeated theme that the Council and its committees appear to be inefficient and sometimes fail to see important tasks through to completion. Various examples were provided as well as the observation that previous attempts to introduce effective accountability for committees or chairmen have failed, largely for cultural reasons within the Council.

- M. It seems closed, insular and inward-looking.

The Council was variously described as “impenetrable”, “opaque” and “inward-looking” with insufficient turnover in some committees. It was noted that most of the business transacted at Council meetings is about the Council itself or its activities and that it was frequently dismissive of work that was initiated outside of its control.

- N. It is defensive.

Regrettably the reputation for being defensive still persists quite strongly, despite the Council’s strong vote to initiate this review. It is also noteworthy that some of the submissions made in a personal capacity by people who are prominent members of the Council put much of the blame for the Council’s problems on a lack of new volunteers willing to join it. We should say however that the current officers of the Council have in no way been defensive in their dealings with CRAG.

- O. It can appear autocratic.

Some people commented that there is an impression given that “Council knows best” and that issuing top-down edicts took preference to engaging with those outside the Council. The name *Central Council* is felt by a number of respondents as having negative connotations, suggesting a Victorian governing body rather than a modern, open and forward-thinking body.

- P. It is inadequately funded.

Funding is seen as a major issue, with the ability of the Council to get things done being hampered by a lack of available funds. It is clear that for any CRO to function efficiently it needs enough money to run its affairs in a professional manner in order to provide a high quality service.

- Q. The need for Leadership.

Throughout the submissions there were comments on the need for effective leadership at all levels in ringing. It is also inescapable that a lack of effective leadership within the Central Council was one cause of many of the specific criticisms of the Council. Any CRO must be prepared to tackle this issue and to focus on the development of effective leadership at all levels including within the CRO.

In our discussions with current and past leaders of the Council most have expressed their frustrations at the difficulty of getting things done, suggesting that it may well be the structure and culture of the Council rather than the attributes of any specific individual that impede effective leadership.

2. PRINCIPLES FOR CHANGE

The Council needs to change in a way that allows it to become the effective Central Ringing Organisation that ringing needs. In making the required changes, the following criteria must be met:

- A. It must be clear about what it is trying to achieve and adopt a strategic approach.
- B. At all times it must primarily serve and represent the interests of ringing and ringers.
- C. It must develop a direct communication channel and make it available to all ringers.
- D. It must develop the ability for any ringer who joins a direct membership channel to have some form of influence over the services and activities of the CRO in addition to the influence of affiliated societies.
- E. The day-to-day running of the CRO must be entrusted to a small “Executive” group, empowered to make decisions without further approval.
- F. The representative group (“Council of Representatives” in the proposals below) should confine itself to holding to account the leadership that runs the CRO. To be effective it is desirable that it be significantly smaller than the current Central Council.
- G. There must be fewer committees, and they must be held to account by the Executive.
- H. Any ringer, without reference to their membership or not of the Central Council may be nominated for a position on the Executive or on a Workgroup (committee).
- I. Lines of accountability must be clear and in keeping with best governance principles.
- J. All posts must have a maximum term of office.
- K. It should work closely with other ringing bodies to serve ringing and ringers.
- L. It should at all times foster strong and constructive relationships with community, church and bell owners.
- M. It must develop new and diverse sources of income.
- N. It must be willing and able to expend resources to deliver a professional quality of service including employment of a small professional support group.
- O. The current rules and decisions must be simplified.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The following proposals will allow the ultimate development of an organisation that:

- helps ensure a healthy future for ringing
- is in better contact with and more relevant to ringers in general
- addresses many of the governance and operational issues that underlie the problems we have identified.

To serve and represent the interests of ringers, our finding is that it is vital that the Council urgently establishes a direct relationship with individual ringers, which allows them both to benefit from and exert influence upon the Council's range of services and activities.

The full development of a direct membership organisation will require significant research, planning and consultation to ensure that it:

- offers services that will be attractive and valuable to its members;
- is financially sustainable;
- complements the services currently available from other societies;
- retains those positive features of the current Central Council;
- has the right balance of governance between society and individual membership.

On the immediate question of governance, our conclusion is that the existing Council could dramatically improve its ability to make and implement timely decisions by taking a number of steps to bring its structure and working practices in line with the standard governance model adopted by most UK charities.

Wherever the phrase Central Ringing Organisation (CRO) is used it relates to the future state of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

PROPOSAL A)

The Council will: -

- i) make the necessary rule changes by the end of May 2018 to replace its existing objects with the "Vision", "Mission" and "Activity" statements consulted upon by CRAG and
- ii) in the interim, through the Executive group, develop and publish a five-year strategy and strategic objectives based upon these and an action plan each year to cover the work required. The Executive will publish the first plan by the end of 2017, send interim reports of progress against actions to all Council members by email quarterly from November 2017 and make a formal report to the Council meeting in May 2018.

PROPOSAL B)

The Council will transfer management of its affairs, including the development and delivery of strategy, to an Executive of no more than eight people (including President, Deputy President, Secretary and Treasurer and no more than four other elected members).

- i) Any ringer will be eligible to stand for election as an officer or to the Executive.
- ii) The Executive will be formed as soon as possible (and no later than November 2017).
- iii) The Executive will be accountable to the CRO's members for
 - a) creating and delivering the strategic direction of ringing;
 - b) acting as advocates promoting the wellbeing and development of ringing and ringers in general;
 - c) promoting the development of technical and non-technical leadership skills amongst ringers;
 - d) working strategically, in partnership with other bodies, to ensure the delivery of those services needed by ringers.
- iv) Upon establishment of the Executive the role of the Administrative Committee will be limited to the organisation of the 2018 annual meeting following which it will be disbanded.
- v) All posts will have a term of office of three years renewable no more than once, except for the initial appointments as specified in (vi) below.
- vi) For the first appointments terms of office will be staggered to ensure that not all officers and Executive members retire at once. In the case of additional members of the Executive, the current Trustees will appoint individuals, each of whom will serve for one year only in the first instance and be eligible for re-election at the 2018 meeting.
- vii) The members of the Executive will also become the Trustees of the CRO for the purposes of running the charity.
- viii) In line with Charity Commission guidance, the Executive should be empowered to appoint up to two additional non-elected members, where they judge this to be necessary in order to achieve an appropriate diversity of skills, backgrounds or expertise.
- ix) The post of Vice-President will be re-titled as Deputy President to remove the implicit expectation that the post of President is preceded by a three-year period as Vice-President.
- x) The Executive will review the necessity for the post of Honorary Assistant Secretary in the light of these changes and the creation of a professional support group. The

postholder will in any case not be an automatic member of the Executive and will accordingly cease to be a Trustee.

PROPOSAL C)

The new Executive will, by November 2017, realign the current committees into a significantly reduced number (single figures) of Workgroups, each led by an individual Workgroup Leader.

- i) Workgroup Leaders will be appointed by the Executive by February 2018. One criterion for appointment will be that they are considered to have credibility within the Workgroup's field of activity.
- ii) Each Workgroup Leader will report to a named member of the Executive who will be ultimately accountable for that Workgroup's performance.
- iii) Any ringer may apply to be a Workgroup Leader.
- iv) Workgroup Leaders will, in consultation with the Executive, appoint members for their Workgroups in such number and variety as needed, with selection being irrespective of a candidate's membership of the Council of Representatives or Executive. This work will be completed by May 2018.
- v) The continuing need for each of these Workgroups or for new working (including "task and finish") groups will be reviewed regularly by the Executive.
- vi) All Workgroup posts will have a term of office of three years renewable no more than once (except that some initial appointments may be for shorter terms to ensure that not all members of a Workgroup, or all Workgroup Leaders retire at once).

PROPOSAL D)

The current Council will from its meeting in 2018 be retitled the Council of Representatives (CoRe) and its functions restricted to matters related to the constitution of the CRO, the review and approval of the annual report and accounts, the election of members of the Executive and approval of any changes to the rules of the Council. It will not be involved in operations or in making operational (including technical) decisions but may act as a conduit for feedback from members and from affiliated societies as well as a source of advice to the Executive.

- i) Members of the Executive and Workgroup Leaders will not be eligible to be members of CoRe. Any member of CoRe who is elected to one of these roles shall be deemed to have resigned their membership of CoRe. Members of the Executive shall be expected to attend meetings of CoRe but shall have no voting rights.
- ii) CoRe will consist of Representative members only and the category of Additional Members will be discontinued. Existing Life Members will be conferred the title of "Fellows of Council" but will not have voting rights within CoRe.

- iii) The Executive should develop proposals by which the formal business meeting of CoRe will be made significantly shorter and more effective. These proposals should explicitly consider the feasibility of reducing the size of CoRe to 25-40% of its current size with each society retaining representation. It will consult on these proposals with affiliated societies with a view to implementation before the election of representatives to take up office in 2020.

PROPOSAL E)

The Executive will: -

- i) Develop plans to allow membership of the CRO to be opened up to all ringers, begin implementing these and report on progress to CoRe in May 2018.
- ii) Work with affiliated societies and others to develop direct communication links with individual ringers during 2017-18.
- iii) Every three years commencing May 2019, undertake a review of the CRO's rules and governance to assess whether they continue to be effective and aligned with best practice. In the event that control of the CRO remains vested in the CoRe, each review should explicitly include an assessment and recommendation as to whether it would be appropriate to transfer some or all of the powers of the CoRe to individual direct members.

PROPOSAL F)

The Executive will recruit a small group whose task will be to simplify the rules of the Council, replacing them with a short statutory set of rules supported by a set of operating principles and procedures. All of the necessary rule changes required by the foregoing proposals will be incorporated into this work. The new rules and supporting documents together with any other outputs of this group should be compliant with Charity Commission guidance. The Executive will report back to CoRe in May 2018 with a recommendation for adoption at that meeting.

PROPOSAL G)

Professional support.

- i) The Council agrees that the Executive should, where necessary, seek and be prepared to pay for professional support particularly in communications, public relations, the marketing of ringing and those aspects of ICT necessary to allow the smooth and professional operation of the CRO.
- ii) The new Executive will scope out the creation of a professional support group to carry out the administrative functions of the CRO and some of the support work

currently performed by committees and report back to CoRe with their conclusions in May 2018.

PROPOSAL H)

The Decisions of the Central Council will be replaced with a simple and permissive descriptive framework for ringing with only the minimal detail required to maintain the historical record. The Executive will appoint a neutral and respected ringer who is demonstrably independent of those responsible for the current Decisions to complete this work. The leader may assemble a group of ringers to assist with this task and will consult widely on their proposals before presenting them to the Council in May 2018.

The publication and maintenance of this framework will be the responsibility of the Executive.

PROPOSAL I)

The Executive will also, during the period 2017-2020: -

- i) Review the name and branding of the Council taking into account a broad range of opinion from the public, ringers in general and other interested parties and then bring forward to CoRe recommendations for any change to the name of the Council, or any alternative working name, that it may have.
- ii) Consider how the annual meeting of CoRe may be incorporated into an annual ringing festival which will be open to all ringers and plan future meetings accordingly.
- iii) Consider what benefit remains from continuing to work to the current triennial cycle of business.

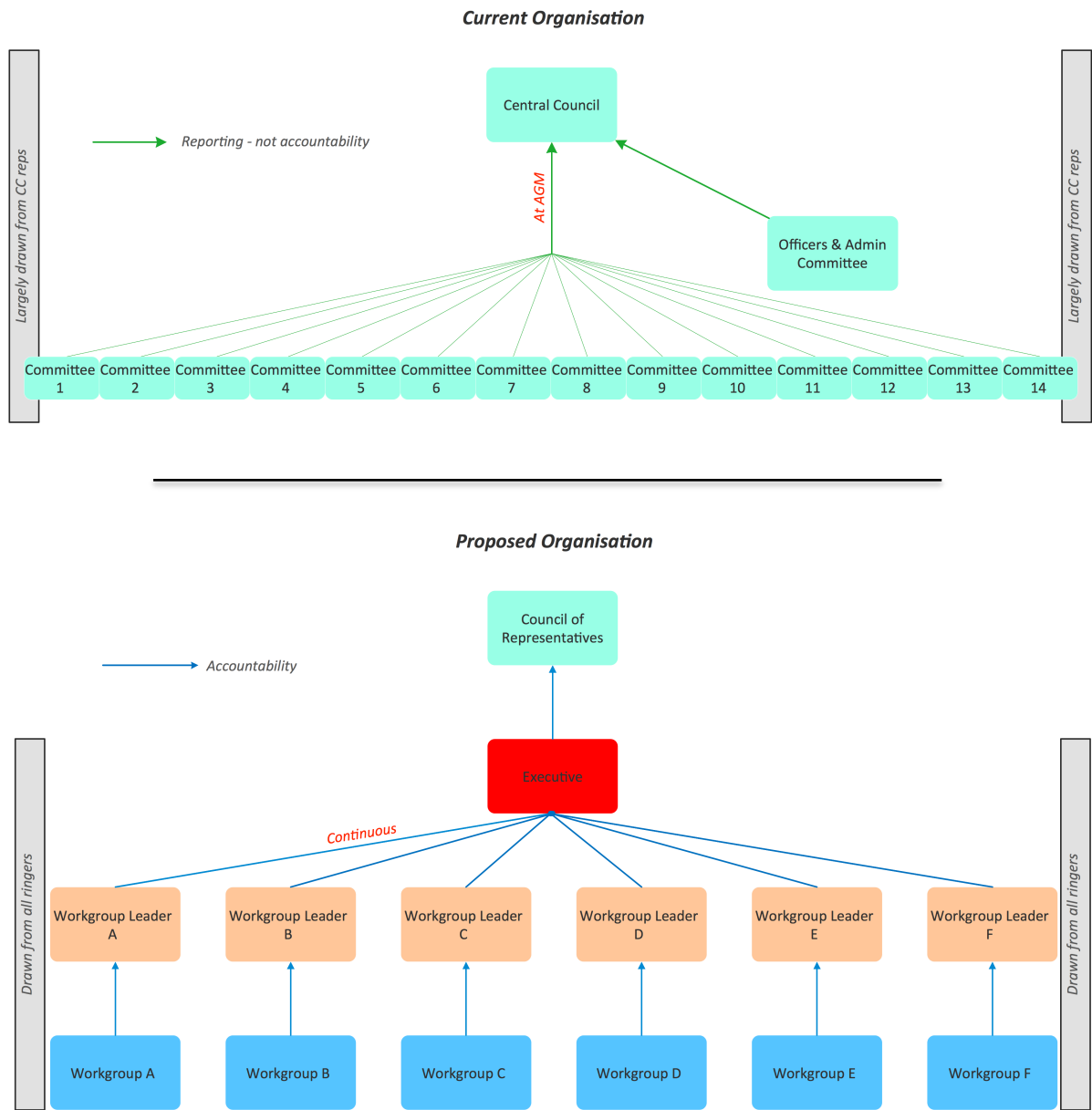


Figure S1

Comparison of Current and Proposed Organisational Structures