

BRANCH LIAISON SECRETARY

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Branch Annual General Meetings

It has been a difficult few months since the start of the pandemic and this has affected all branches with regards to their activities including holding Annual General Meetings (AGMs). Some branches were lucky enough to have held their 2020 AGM before lockdown in March but may have difficulties holding physical meetings when their next AGM is due in the first half of next year. Other branches will not be able to hold a physical meeting where their normal date for doing so was after March 2020. So what should branches do under the circumstances?

There are a number of options that are possible and that would be acceptable in the shorter term while we are all still restricted with regards to meetings and some branches are already trying out some of these options.

- 1 Do not hold a formal meeting this year but let all branch members have a copy of the branch accounts (these have to be done anyway) and the branch reports for the previous twelve months. Branch members can also be notified of who is on the branch committee covering which roles, if there are any changes proposed, and can be invited to join the branch committee if there are vacancies. They can also be invited to comment on any aspects of the branch reports with a set date for responses. The reports, accounts and comments can then be combined into the equivalent of branch AGM minutes.
- 2 If it is possible (very unlikely so far given the current situation), hold a physical meeting in the usual way (see Officers Handbook section 6.07 for guidance on holding Branch AGMs).
- 3 Hold a virtual AGM (eg using Zoom) in the same way as you would hold a regular face to face AGM (see guidance as in 2 above).

Please do not forget to let me have a copy of the branch AGM minutes or equivalent once they have been prepared - for the record. Any difficulties with holding branch AGMs, please contact me and ask (contact details at the top of this newsletter).

Giving Notice of the Branch AGM

So, how much notice do you need to give branch members of the meeting? Under the present difficult situation with different levels of lock-down throughout the UK and the constant review of government guidance on Covid-19, it would not seem unreasonable for there to be some flexibility, within reason, on the usual notice for an AGM. The present uncertainty is making forward planning on holding a physical meeting for an AGM very difficult so it is a case where as much notice as possible should be given. You must still make every effort to ensure that **ALL** branch members are notified in advance, provided with the necessary reports and details of the current committee and any vacancies and co-options to be ratified. It may be that some members will not be able to attend a virtual meeting via the internet but they can participate using just audio as long as they have access to a telephone of some sort whether mobile or landline.

Branch Recruitment Awards

The Branch Recruitment Award for the branch that has recruited the most new members is continuing. The award is usually presented at the Officers Conference which is part of the Annual Members Weekend (MW) each October. However, as the MW has had to be cancelled this year and postponed until October 2021, the winner for this year has been announced in the December edition of the ***Railway Observer*** so please look out for this under **Talking Points**. As the results have now been published, I am happy to confirm that the winner is Hitchin Branch recruiting a total of 24 new members, followed by Chichester with 12 new members to their credit. Congratulations go to those branches. The count is already starting for next year so please continue to do your best, even in these difficult times, to recruit new members to the Society as we still have a lot to offer to those who have an interest in railways, who wish to share their knowledge and enthusiasm, and for all those who would like to learn more.

Virtual Presentations

There are people who are happy to give virtual presentations while we are unable to have physical meetings and you will have noticed the increase in virtual branch meetings advertised on the website. I have been given a contact for a gentleman who has already done some such presentations and who would be happy to pass on his contact details if anyone would them. I have not yet seen one of his presentations personally but you can ask about them from others who already know him. And there are quite a lot of other speakers out there who are also happy to give virtual presentations and this includes people working in the railway industry. These can be presented to any branch virtually as distance is, of course, no object for a virtual meeting.

Please do not forget that any member is welcome to attend any branch meeting and that includes virtual meetings. So if your branch has not yet tried virtual meetings and you are not in a position to set any up in the near future yourself, please remind your branch members that they can attend any virtual meeting they choose without having to travel. This may be of particular interest to those members who feel that they are 'not getting their money's worth' out of their membership when they cannot attend physical meetings. This will let them see that they have not been forgotten and that their interests are being catered for in the best way that we can under the current difficult situation.

There is help available if you have not yet tried setting up a virtual meeting before or do not feel confident in doing this yourself initially so please ask if you are interested and would like to provide this for your branch members. We can do this together.

Virtual meetings may not be the same as physical meetings but they are still a good way to keep in touch while physical meetings are not possible - sharing railway knowledge and interest, and this is something that we can continue to use into the future even when we are able to return to some sort of 'normal' activity. It may broaden the scope of what we can provide as well as enabling those who are not physically able to attend meetings to join in with more of our regular activities.

Inviting donations for virtual meetings

The good news is that it is now possible to invite donations for virtual meetings. While branches are not able to generate funds to cover branch running costs from meetings or sales, being able to request donations for virtual meetings is an option that could help to cover some of the shortfall in branch income. This has already been set up where the webmaster is aware that a branch has set up virtual meetings but if you are planning a virtual meeting and do not have this set up already, please contact the webmaster and ask. A portion of the donation goes to the payment facility provider and the rest is allocated to the branch. If you would like to know more about how this works, please ask on webmaster@rcts.org.uk.

Physical Meetings

The situation remains difficult throughout the UK at present with regards to holding physical meetings and the government has now issued guidance for England that applies from Wednesday 2 December 2020. Effectively this means that the RCTS cannot recommend the holding of physical meetings at present as nearly all of England will move to Tiers 2 and 3 from that date with the restrictions that apply. The restrictions that apply in Scotland and Wales are different and you should check on the .gov.uk website for more information for your area. There will be further information when the situation changes.

In the meantime, please take care and stay safe.

Kind regards

Irene