

EC 24/113

26 June 2024

For the information of all CSPA Groups and Branches and individual members

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING PARTY REVIEW OF AGM FORMAT AND GROUP REPRESENTATION

1. Group Circular **GC 943** (issued in September 2023) informed Groups and Branches that a Working Party was being established, to include a few local Group nominees, to review options for the format of the National AGM from October 2025 onwards. This was in response to **Remitted Motion A17/22** from the 2022 AGM which had called for the EC to consider having alternate years of an on-line AGM and in-person meeting.

2. The Executive Council (EC) had also decided to survey delegates at the October 2023 AGM on their views to inform the review. The results of the Delegates survey was circulated to Groups and Branches as an Annex to Group Circular **GC 947** (issued in December 2023).

3. The scope of the Working Party review was extended by the EC in December to also consider the **representation base** of the AGM, now that so many members in England and Wales were no longer allocated to a local Group due to local Group closures. In **England Regions** there were now 52% of members allocated to an Open Group; and 47% in 'No Group'; in **Wales** there were 17% of Wales members in a Group and 83% in 'No Group', as only the North Wales Group was still active. Overall it means that there are over half of CSPA members in England and Wales who are not represented by a Group delegate at the National AGM.

4. In both the **Northern Ireland Branch** and **Scotland Branch** all members are in a single Branch with no local Groups, so all members have direct access to the Branch officers for input to the AGM.

COMPOSITION OF WORKING PARTY

Les Calder (EC member and South-West Region Representative) – **Chair**

Mike Buckley (Sheffield & District Group)

Susan Hennah-Barham (EC member and Eastern Region Representative)

Civil Service Pensioners Alliance □ David Luxton, Deputy General Secretary
Grosvenor House, 125 High Street, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 9XP
Tel: 020 8688 8418 □ Email: david.luxton@cspa.co.uk □ Website: www.cspa.co.uk

Wilson McDonald (EC member and Scotland Branch Chair)
John McLaughlin (Bedford Group)
Tony McMullan (Northern Ireland Branch Secretary)
Les Priestley (National EC Representative)
John Thompson (Norfolk Group)
Mike Sparham (National Treasurer)
David Luxton (Deputy General Secretary) - **Secretary**

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

5. The scope of the Working Party, as determined by the Executive Council, was three-fold, to:

- Review the current format of the National AGM and consider alternative options, including: an on-line virtual AGM on alternate years; or a hybrid option combining an in-person and on-line AGM; taking account of the survey of delegates at the 2023 AGM (attached as **annex to GC 947/23**)
- Consider the extent to which members views are represented at the AGM, taking account of recent analysis showing a high proportion of members who are not allocated to a local Group;
- Review the extent of membership involvement and engagement with the AGM process and timetable of nominations and motions from local Groups (as set out in the current Rules and Constitution) and suggest recommendations for improvements.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

6. Taking account of the scope of the Working Party, as agreed by the EC, the Working Party agreed to the following Terms of Reference:

“The AGM Working Party Terms of reference are to:

1. **Review** the current purpose and format of the National AGM and consider alternative options including: an on-line virtual AGM; or a hybrid option combining an in-person and on-line AGM; taking account of the survey of delegates at the 2023 AGM (as attached as **annex to GC 947/23**); and other comments received.
2. **Consider** the extent to which members views are represented at the AGM, taking account of recent analysis showing a high proportion of members who are not allocated to a local Group; and consider alternative models of Group representation at the AGM;
3. **Review** the extent of membership involvement and engagement with the AGM process and timetable of nominations and motions from local Groups as set out in

the current Rules and Constitution and consider how membership participation and engagement can be improved, including on-line options, and suggest any recommendations for change.

4. **Prepare** a Report and recommendations for consideration by the Executive Council meeting on 18 April 2024.”

DISCUSSION ON RANGE OF OPTIONS FOR AGM FORMAT

7. At the first meeting of the Working Party, held on 16 January 2024, the range of issues considered, within the agreed scope for the Working Party, were as follows:

1. Consider the purpose of the AGM:

- Elections
- Acceptance of the Annual Report
- Constitutional changes
- Formulating CSPA policies through Motions
- Campaigning updates
- Refresher training for reps (eg GDPR)
- Networking with other delegates and EC members and Officers

2. Can these elements be separated from the AGM?

3. Format of the AGM, taking account of Delegates feedback survey and other comments:

- Continue in-person AGMs?
- Alternate in-person with online AGM ?
- Consider biennial in-person AGMs (every 2 years) ?
- Hybrid AGM (some in person, some on-line) ?
- Entirely virtual AGM's based on Groups and Branches with on-line voting ?
- Separate elections from AGM and run elections on-line, and postal for those not on-line ?

4. How representative is the AGM?

- Number of members represented by Groups or Branches
- Number of members not represented by Groups or Branches
- Individual delegates (not in Group or Branch)
- Consider Regional representation to cover 'No-Group members with on-line contact for mandates?

5. Consider the Constitutional implications of any alternative options.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

8. During a wide-ranging discussion of these issues, together with the Delegates Survey results and the comments received from other EC members which had been circulated, the following points were made:

- The purpose of the AGM is to keep CSPA as a member-led organisation accountable through Groups and Branches;
- It was difficult to demonstrate accountability at the AGM with half the membership not directly represented, and only 51 delegates from 46 Groups in England and Wales; and 2 Branches (Scotland and Northern Ireland) representing around 40,000 members
- The key priority must be to retain the vitality of Groups and Branches and grow the membership;
- The primary purpose of the AGM is to formulate policies and be accountable to members, but there is no legal requirement to have an AGM, as CSPA's formal status is an 'unincorporated association';
- Moving to a model of 'one member-one vote' through member consultations would be very costly with postal costs;
- There would be no cost saving through holding elections by on-line voting, but it could increase participation;
- The view was expressed that the vast majority of members are not interested in attending or participating in CSPA activities but were content for others to represent their interest. Most members just wanted the affinity of membership;
- Moving to alternate years of an in-person AGM would make active participation less likely and would make matters worse;
- Separating out AGM functions of elections and motions would not make any material difference but would increase costs;
- Even the survey of delegates and observers only attracted 45 completed questionnaires out of 117 issued;
- The results of the survey showed that only 2 responses were in favour of a virtual on-line AGM, which was perhaps predictable as all the participants in the Survey were attending an in-person AGM;
- But, we don't have the views of members who did not attend the AGM;
- Could the AGM sessions be live-streamed on-line so that more members could observe the presentations and debates?
- It would be useful to have costings for providing live streaming of the AGM, and the National Treasurer agreed to investigate the costs;
- The AGM is the third largest annual cost to CSPA, next to staffing costs; and the cost of publishing and distributing The Pensioner;
- The cost-efficiency and location of the AGM is a management issue, not a Governance issue;
- The most valuable aspect of an AGM is the inter-personal involvement with other active members in the same room;
- A hybrid AGM with some delegates on-line and others in the room would not work well;

After discussion, it was concluded that there was a consensus to continue with an in-person AGM every year as the format.

DISCUSSION ON AGM REPRESENTATION OF MEMBERS NOT IN GROUPS

9. The Working Party discussed data from the membership system showing the high proportion of members in England and Wales that were now not allocated to an Open local Group – 48% in England Regions, and 83% in Wales, meaning that a total of 24,800 members did not have Group representation at the AGM. There were 38 Groups represented at the AGM, plus Scotland Branch and Northern Ireland Branch. The Working Party needed to consider how those members not in a Group could be better represented at the AGM.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Could the Regional Representative EC member act as a Regional delegate at the AGM for those members not in a Group, whilst still being an EC member?;
- There could be Regional delegates to the AGM in addition to local Group delegates from each Region;
- Individual members not in a Group do have the right under the Rules to submit a motion to the AGM, but that has not happened in recent times;
- A constitutional amendment is not required to allow an individual member with No Group to submit a motion to the AGM, but it would mean there would be no prior discussion before it was submitted;
- A few members at Regional level who are not allocated to a Group but wanted to get involved with CSPA could agree on which individual member should submit the motion and attend the AGM;
- Initiatives at Regional level could link interested members to liaise on some form of Regional representation;
- Find a way of engaging with members not allocated to a Group to participate at Regional level;
- Consider a mechanism for Regional representation at the AGM from members not in a Group;
- As there is already the right for individual members to submit motions, it was argued that constitutional changes were not necessary to facilitate some of the changes proposed, but there would have to be support and guidance arrangements in place.

EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

10. The Working Party agreed in January to the following **interim** conclusions, pending further feedback from Groups and individual members, through a General Circular to consult Groups and Branches; and to consult members through an article in the Spring 2024 issue of The Pensioner inviting comments:

1. An in-person physical AGM format should continue, not an on-line virtual meeting;
2. The AGM should continue to be each year and not alternate years, in order to keep members engaged, especially as pensions and related issues for members can change quickly;

3. Consideration should be given to live-streaming the AGM (as FDA union do) to encourage more members to engage, subject to the additional costs of streaming, although this would not offer the opportunity to participate, only to observe remotely;
4. If the financial costs of the AGM becomes an issue there is scope to suspend the AGM for one year if necessary, as happened in 2020 and 2021 due the Covid pandemic;
5. Moving away from a physical AGM would undermine the basis of being a member-led organisation accountable to members;
6. Holding a one-day AGM, similar to FDA union, (as was the case in CSPA pre-2001) was considered, but the savings in hotel accommodation would be wiped out by the costs of rail travel in peak times, and more expensive overnight accommodation from those travelling long distances to a central City venue;
7. Wider consultation was needed with Groups and Branches and individual members to gather more views on AGM options and the related issues under consideration. This should be by a Group Circular and an article in the Spring issue The Pensioner. The comments could then be considered by the Working Party at a follow up meeting in early March.

Consultation with Groups and Branches and individual members

11. Group Circular **GC 949** was issued in late January, and set out the range issues on which the Working Party were seeking the views of Groups, Branches, and individual members on the future AGM arrangements, and included the following questions:

- 1. How representative is the AGM and how can it be improved?**
- 2. How can the AGM best reflect the views of members in England and Wales who are not allocated to a local Group?**
- 3. How can we encourage wider interest and engagement with the AGM for policy decisions and elections?**
- 4. What would be the advantages and disadvantages if the policy motions and election processes were conducted at a general meeting every two years instead of annually?**
- 5. What are your views on different AGM formats, such as on-line “virtual” AGMs based on Groups and Branches with on-line voting (either annually or in alternate years)?**
- 6. Should the facility for individual members to attend the AGM (at their own expense or at a subsidised rate) be formalised into a set allocation of individual delegate places for members not attached to local Groups?**

7. In addition to the Group and Branch representatives, should there be additional places reserved for Regionally nominated members who are not in a local Group?

8. If your Group does not regularly attend the AGM, would the Group be likely to attend an event or AGM that is held on-line?

12. These questions were not intended to be an exhaustive list of options but would help to inform the Working Party and EC of the views of Groups and Branches. We also sought the views of individual members through an article in the Spring issue of the Pensioner, which prompted some individual member comments.

Questions asked of individual members

13. The questions posed in The Pensioner related more to individual perceptions of the AGM, as follows:

- Are you satisfied with the current format and representative structure of the National AGM?
- How can the AGM best reflect the views of individual members in England and Wales who no longer have a local Group in their area to attend?
- How can we encourage wider interest and engagement with the AGM for policy decisions and elections?
- Would you be interested in watching the AGM proceedings if it were live-streamed on the internet?
- What would you consider the advantages or disadvantages of holding the AGM every two years instead of annually?
- What are your views on different AGM formats, such as on-line “virtual” AGMs with on-line voting (either annually or in alternate years)?
- Should the existing right for individual members to attend the AGM (at their own expense or at a subsidised rate) be formalised into a set allocation of individual delegate places for members not attached to local Groups?
- In addition to the Group and Branch representatives, should there be additional places reserved for Regionally nominated members who are not in a local Group?
- If your local Group does not regularly attend the AGM, would the Group be likely to attend an event or AGM that is held on-line?

Comments received from Groups

14. Comments were received from 10 local Groups : Crawley & District; West Mercia; East Solent; Inner London; Southend & District; Wirral; Liverpool; East Devon; Bristol; Worthing & District. ***All the comments received from Groups are not included in this Report as they were comments to the Working Party and not intended for publication.***

Comments received from individual members

15. Comments were received from the following individual members: Janet Harris (ex-Weymouth Group); Norman Davis (North Wales Group); Lionel Beer (Twickenham Group); Caroline Glover (ex-Guildford Group); Brenda Allen (ex-Epsom Group). ***All the comments received from individual members are not included in this Report as they were comments to the Working Party and not intended for publication.***

16. The Working Party met again on 4 April 2024 to go through all of the comments received from Groups and individual members on each of the emerging interim conclusions to formulate final recommendations for the Executive Council to consider on 17 April 2024.

REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKING PARTY

17. The Working Party then made the following revised Recommendations to the Executive Council, (with commentary added on each recommendation):

1. The AGM format should continue to be in-person physical event and not a virtual on-line meeting;

There was an overwhelming consensus from the comments received (as set out in EC 24/57) that the AGM should continue to be an in-person event and not held as an on-line meeting.

2. The AGM should continue to be held each year and not every two years;

Whilst some Groups could see some cost saving advantages to the AGM being held every 2 years, the consensus was reflected in the comment received that “*there would be a loss of momentum ; a slow reaction time; and policy being overtaken by events*”

3. The AGM should not be live-streamed for members to view as the costs of doing so are excessive (at a cost of over £4,000) and would not likely to attract much interest from members;

Whilst there was some support from the comments received for the AGM being live-streamed, but the costs of doing so were prohibitive, even with some discount on the quote received, and there was a feeling that not many members would be interested in following a live stream of the AGM. It was noted that FDA union do live stream the General Secretary’s keynote speech of the and the guest speakers, but not the whole conference. It was also pointed out in discussion that CSPA do publish a summary of the keynote speeches and presentations in the printed report of the AGM sent out with the Winter issue of The Pensioner so every member can read what was said.

4. Holding a one day AGM in a central City was considered but was ruled out due to the costs of hotel accommodation that would still be required which would negate any savings compared to the current arrangements ; and would lose the social contacts between delegates at the AGM;

It was felt that apart from the expense of many delegates needing to book hotel accommodation too arrive on time; they would be in different locations and the advantages of being together would be lost but at the same expense as a residential AGM as at present, and would damage member engagement.

5. The rate at which local Groups have been closing is a concern for representation at the AGM (10 have closed in the last 12 months, and more are about to close). The Working Party recommends steps to improve the existing opportunity for members not covered by a local Group or Branch to attend and participate in the AGM by funding a number of individual delegate places, at the discretion of the EC, in addition to the existing right of any member not covered by a local Group or Branch to attend the AGM at their own expense. The number of funded places would have to be limited which could be determined by the EC each year. This would require a revision to Rule 7(a) (ii): "...individual members attending shall bear any costs involved...".

18. The Working Party did consider a wide-range of options for including members not in a local Group or Branch to participate in the AGM, including having an allocation of Regional delegate places; or having a formal Regional structure to include members in not allocated to an open Group; or simply extending the geographical spread of the open Groups to cover those not in a Group, but it was agreed that changes could not be imposed on Groups, merging Groups would have to continue to be by mutual agreement between the parties involved.

19. The consensus reached was that we should recommend extending the existing right of members not attached to a Group or Branch to attend the AGM, but to make available a number of funded places to attend the AGM, whilst not interfering with the existing right of any member to attend the AGM at their own expense. The wording of a proposed Rule change could be referred to the Constitution Working Party or referred back to the AGM Working Party.

6. Provide the support necessary for individual members not covered by a local Group or Branch to submit motions to the AGM either through nearby Groups that remain open, facilitated and enabled through the Regional Representative, or submitted directly as an individual member attending the AGM through a funded place or at their own expense.

20. The Working Party discussed at length how members not attached to a Group or Branch could submit motions to the AGM. A formal Regional structure was considered but it was felt to be a step too far and instead the Regional Representative should be the facilitator for members not covered by a Group or Branch to help advise individual members on submitting a motion to the AGM (as they are permitted to do so under the existing rules); and liaising as appropriate with local Group or other interested members not attached to a Group in that Region.

Executive Council Review of Working Party Recommendations

21. The six revised Recommendations of the Working Party were considered by the Executive Council at its meeting on 17 April 2024, which led to some being referred-

back to the Working Party to reconsider. The EC also made the point that the overall report of the Working Party and its recommendations could not be considered in isolation to a range of considerations, including:

- Recommendations from the Constitution Working Party
- CSPA Financial considerations
- Addressing the “democratic deficit” due to local Group closures

All of which required a strategic approach to looking at future AGM arrangements.

22. The EC view was that **Recommendation 6** needed to be reconsidered. If there were individual members not allocated to a Group who were interested enough to want to submit a policy motion to the AGM, then they should be encouraged to help re-establish closed Groups in their locality. It was felt that the Recommendation needed to be explained more fully, and highlight the potential risks of individuals submitting motions without any form of local discussion.

23. The Working Party had a further meeting on 16 May 2024 and put forward 5 final recommendations to the Executive Council, which were endorsed the Finance & General Purposes Committee (F&GPC) of the Executive Council at its meeting on 20 June . The F&GPC also agreed to issue a **summary** of this Report with the 5 Recommendations as a Group Circular (see **GC 958**, issued on 25 June), and place this full version of the Final report on the Members-Only area of the CSPA website.

Summary of Final Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The AGM format should continue to be in-person physical event and not a virtual on-line meeting;

Recommendation 2. The AGM should continue to be held each year and not every two years (subject to overriding cost considerations);

Recommendation 3. The Working Party recommend that the keynote speeches at the AGM (of the GS address; and key Guest Speakers) should be video recorded, subject to value for money, and uploaded to the CSPA Website for member viewing.

Recommendation 4. Holding a one day AGM in a central City was considered but was ruled out due to the costs of hotel accommodation that would still be required which would negate any savings compared to the current arrangements ; and would lose the networking contacts between delegates at the AGM

Recommendation 5. The Working Party recommends steps to improve the existing opportunity for members not covered by a local Group or Branch to attend and participate in the AGM by funding a number of individual delegate places, at the discretion of the EC, in addition to the existing right of any member not covered by a local Group or Branch to attend the AGM at their own expense. The number of funded places would have to be limited on cost grounds as determined by the EC each year.

The Working Party noted the following Rule change, as recommended by the EC's Constitution Working Party would be put to the 2024 AGM in a motion submitted by the EC:

Rule 7 (a) (ii). Delete: "...and individual members attending shall bear any costs incurred"

Insert new Rule 7 (a) (iii): The EC shall have discretion to meet from central funds the reasonable expenses of members attending who are not covered by a Group or Branch, with due regard to the overall cost.

Insert new Rule 7 (a) (iv) Other members shall bear their own costs, although the EC shall have the authority to meet part of the cost at their discretion."

24. The Working Party concluded that the above recommendations would not require an EC policy motion to the AGM, other than the proposed Rule change above. The Report is being made available before the end of June to provide Groups and Branches the opportunity to submit motions about the Review before the deadline for motions of midday on Friday 5 July.

David Luxton
Deputy General Secretary
(Secretary of AGM Working Party)
26 June 2024