

# Swim England Sport Operations Committee

Minutes of the meeting held 6 October 2020, via Zoom

**Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting**

**Present:**

Neil Booth	Chairman
Joan Wheeler (JW)	Swim England Board Member
Ian Mackenzie (IM)	Swim England Member
Alex Harrison (AH)	Swim England Member
Jim Boucher (JB)	Swim England Member
John Hidle (JH)	Regional Chairs Representative
Emma Griffin (EG)	MARCOMMS & Operations Director
George Wood (GW)	Sports Development Director

**Staff:** Siân Breen (SB) Senior Operations Officer

## **Min No:**

### **1. Standing Items**

#### **1.1 Chairman's welcome**

The Chair welcomed the group, outlining how the interim meeting would ensure the committee was up to date given the rapidly changing climate, prior to the full meeting in November.

#### **1.2 Apologies**

Jon Glenn (Learn to Swim & Workforce Director)  
Pippa Jones (Swim England Member)

#### **1.3 Declarations of Interest**

None declared.

#### **1.4 Declarations of AoB**

None declared.

#### **1.5 Minutes from the meeting held 8 September 2020**

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

#### **1.6 Actions from the meeting held 8 September 2020**

1.6.1 The Chair confirmed that actions would be reviewed in November - providing appropriate time to enable completion.

### **2. Items for Discussion**

#### **2.1 Verbal update from all members of SOC in relation to their respective sport or business area**

2.1.1 JW summarised the last Swim England Board meeting which focused on safeguarding. A great deal of work is ongoing regarding the financial challenges and JW highlighted the approval to freeze membership fees. An interim Board meeting will be held at the end of October, prior to the December date which had originally been due to take place at the Swim England Winter Championships.

- 2.1.2 IM provided a number of updates from Water Polo:
- DCMS approval for the return to competition thwarted by new Covid-19 restrictions.
  - Open forums with the community began on 1 October and demonstrated a strong desire for information.
  - Majority of clubs thought to have returned to the water, however few have been able to obtain the same amount of water time.
  - Good working links developed with Water Polo England and BWPL.
  - Talent pathway being reviewed to ensure continuity between squads.
  - TeamApp being used by squads as, proven by Diving, it offers a secure, protected platform for communication. GW confirmed that a long term aim would be for all disciplines to utilise the same system, but at the current time the budget is not available to encourage this.
  - An elite Water Polo application has been created by British Swimming, David Meli (consultant) and for submission to UK Sport for funding. All the home countries have inputted and supported this although, if successful, leadership will necessarily come from one country. It is hoped a decision will be received by the end of the year.
  - Sponsorship has been received from the Swimming Trust for three small initiatives and an educational partnership arrangement is currently being explored.
  - Working with the Institute of Swimming to ensure awareness of the need for referee courses.

There was discussion on Stronger Affiliation and the need for flexibility around the level of coach required to achieve SwimMark in the current environment. The likelihood of loss of clubs was considered and it was agreed that the standards were correct to provide a safe and assured environment for participants. It was noted that clubs yet to engage with the process were being monitored and there is clear, ongoing communication regarding requirements prior to December. Where clubs do not comply, members will be offered another club.

- 2.1.3 AH confirmed that one Swimming Leadership Group (SLG) meeting had taken place since the last update to SOC and this predominantly focused on the return to competition framework. Meetings on this had also taken place with regional swimming managers and licensing officers as well as county swimming managers. Concern regarding publishing of confidential information was raised, with an instance being immediately resolved when noted.

GW confirmed that for the remainder of 2020 Cat. 1 members are to be upgraded, free of charge, to Cat. 2 if they participate in Level X. From 1 January 2021, Level X will only be open to Cat. 2 members. Counties will decide whether Level X times can be used to qualify for their events and the SLG will confirm the stance regarding regional level qualification.

- 2.1.4 JB queried the response timeframe of the Artistic Swimming return to competition submission to DCMS.

**Action: GW to liaise with the Head of Public Affairs to obtain an update on the Artistic Swimming submission to DCMS.**

The Artistic Swimming Leadership Group had noted the difficulties in operation without the administration support Swim England provided prior to the pandemic.

- 2.1.5 The Chair provided an update from the Club Leadership Group, noting concern on the lack of engagement from the North East region who had sent neither a representative nor apologies to the previous two meetings.

The Group had been reorganised following Swim England's restructure, with revision to the Terms of Reference providing regions more freedom in selection of their representative.

The main pieces of ongoing work were described:

1. Process for the affiliation of new clubs – survey undertaken with regions demonstrated comparable system but a lack of consistency. Regions are in support of the proposal to create a standard application form which will include due diligence actions for the applying club. There was discussion on the devolvement of affiliation responsibility to counties and it was noted that the Group could only recommend completion at regional level.
2. Guidance document for clubs considering or undergoing merger - case studies of problematic issues will be provided and the document is expected to make the process easier.

The work of Helen Weeks (Club Governance and Standards Manager) on presentations to Welfare Officers regarding their relationship with Club Chairs was commended. Due to the transient nature of Welfare Officers it was recognised that this would need to be repeated annually. A presentation to Club Chairs regarding the relationship between the roles of Club Chair and Welfare Officer in respect of club governance and disputes is also being designed to ensure clarity on the issues that are within the remit of Welfare Officers.

- 2.1.6 GW outlined recent information on factors affecting the organisation:
- Opening of pools: social distancing and reduced opening times affecting footfall and consequently, in some cases, viability.
  - Club survey: approximately half of clubs responded and, of those, almost 40% were running with less water time. Support will be offered to clubs with no access to water following consultation with the Regions and the Business Engagement team is approaching 53 operators to understand their schedule for re-opening pools.
  - Membership income: first quarter figures were similar to 2019 but since May the usual addition of new members and uplift from Cat. 1 to Cat 2 has not been seen.

The latest timeline for Level X was confirmed, with more information to be disseminated by mid-October and Leader Boards to be open from November. Very low level local competition will be planned as the following stage, followed by multi-club activity. The need to share the roadmap for return to competition as soon as possible was recognised and EG confirmed this was the major seam of the Club comms plan.

Virtual activity is expected to continue for the immediate future, enabling action as long as pools are open. This also relates to Talent activity, with the virtual camps that took place over the weekend likely to continue into 2021, alongside some water-based activity where feasible. GW gave an example that the Diving Talent Games in January are being planned virtually.

There was discussion on increasing costs of lifeguard provision by operators. In relation to pool operators, it was noted that pilots would be required when restarting

local level competitions in order to demonstrate safe, successful activity to operators.

GW confirmed that the DiSE programme had launched and was underway. Given the level of work involved and the limited amount of face to face teaching in the few months, the team were unsurprised that a small number of students had withdrawn. Effects of this on finance is being monitored, with funding received on a monthly basis. Some places have been re-filled from a waiting list but the deadline to do this will soon be reached after which students cannot be replaced.

The committee noted the hope that the high performance Artistic Swimming and Water Polo UKSport funding applications would be successful.

- 2.1.7 The membership communication plan to February 2021 was outlined by EG, focusing on Level X and the return to competition in an attempt to retain as many Cat. 2 members as possible. Contact will also be made with club secretaries to ensure they are up to date with developments.

A great deal of action is ongoing with regards to parliamentary lobbying for sector funding. Briefings are currently being issued to all MPs ahead of a parliamentary debate on Thursday to ensure understanding on the importance of swimming to the health of the nation.

There was discussion on availability of documents on the website and access to out of date versions.

**Action: EG to ensure website has only October 2020 version of Low Level Competition Definition and up to date versions of the International Permit application. Also ensure 2021 membership fees are easily available.**

3. **Notice of agenda items for the main SOC meeting on 17 November**  
3.1 Items noted - presentation by Youth Advisory Panel Chair on the role of the Panel and the financial impact of Swim England National events
4. **Any Other Business**  
None