
Council

Minutes of a special virtual meeting by Microsoft Teams Saturday 21 March 2020 at 13:00

Present on Teams:	Craig Poxon	-	Chair
	Mary Barratt (from item 20)		
	Mark Bayada	-	MDC Chair
	Adrian Bond	-	Vice Chair
	Jack Davies		
	Kate Lindsley		
	Natasha Higman	-	Treasurer
	Sam Lee	-	EPC Chair
	Simon Soper		
In attendance on Teams:	Liz Ashley	-	Editor, Skydive the Mag
	Tony Butler	-	Chief Operating Officer
	Debbie Carter	-	Finance Committee Member
	Dr John Carter	-	Medical Adviser
	Angel Fernandez	-	Communications Manager
	Jeff Montgomery	-	Safety & Technical Officer & STC Chair
	Lise Moore	-	Finance Manager
	Martin Shuttleworth	-	Secretary-General (Secretary)
	Martin Soulsby	-	Vice President
Apology for absence:	Paul Applegate		

Item Minute

19/20 Special meeting

The meeting had been called at short notice in response to the effect on the sport of government advice and control measures to slow the spread of the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday 17 March, following government advice to avoid gatherings, all non-essential travel and mindful of our social responsibility, British Skydiving had postponed all its events including competitions, courses, physical meetings and skills coaching roadshows for the time being. There would be a formal review of the position on Monday 4 May.

The Chair thanked all participants for agreeing to be involved in today's meeting at such short notice in these unprecedented times. He had invited Dr John Carter, British Skydiving's Medical Adviser, to take part.

20/20 Declarations of interest

Mark Bayada and Simon Soper each declared an interest as both were employees of Affiliated Parachute Training Organisations. Therefore, they would not vote on any business affecting PTOs. The meeting agreed that other Council members who may work on a part-time, casual or self-employed basis at Affiliated PTOs, where this was not their primary source of income, would not be deemed to be conflicted. The Secretary confirmed the meeting was quorate (per Article 19.5 a quorum was five or more voting members).

21/20 Effect on Members

21.1 Statements

The COO had issued a statement to Members on Friday 20 March (Appendix 1) that had been published on the website and on social media. Council thanked him for this.

A paper setting out some issues for members, including on membership renewal and insurance, had been circulated in advance. The paper was discussed. Council agreed to the principle of seeking to assure that members they were unlikely to be disadvantaged by downtime in the sport because of the government's coronavirus control measures. Such an assurance was not entirely within our gift, as insurance was an integral benefit of most categories of membership, and that it involved liaison with the insurers through the insurance brokers, on which the COO reported.

COUNCIL AGREED that (i) the COO would publish an updated statement after this meeting; (ii) the Treasurer would publish a statement tomorrow about matters financial; (iii) the Chair would send a message to members by email in the week beginning Monday 23 March; and (iv) also that week, the COO/STO would write to update riggers and packers etc who worked behind the scenes in the sport, in relation to insurance cover.

Actions: COO, Chair, Treasurer, COO/STO

It would be important to maintain communication with members whilst the sport was inactive, and there were opportunities for digital training and coaching, webinars and looking back on past seasons.

21.2 Membership renewal

An option the COO had discussed with the insurers for jumping members was pro-rata renewal for such amount of the new membership year during which jumping was taking place. It was noted that some members may wish to use the lower level of third-party indemnity to jump overseas, and that these may be differences in when and whether jumping was taking place in different countries.

A small number of members had already asked for their advance subscription for the new membership year starting on 1 April to be refunded. Council agreed that this should be allowed, only up to 31 March, providing there was nothing in the terms and conditions of membership that prevented it.

21.3 Skydive the Mag

The Editor recommended that publication of the April issue of Skydive the Mag should be delayed as parts of its content were no longer applicable, especially the Club News section in which contributors looked forward to jumping resuming after the wet and windy weather that had delayed the start of the season so far this year. Members would need to be notified of any change to the production schedule by an electronic service message. The Editor also recommended that the June issue, assuming it could be produced, printed and distributed by Warners as planned, should be sent to all full members current as at 31 March, not just those who had renewed, as was usual. Warners had a conference call with the Editor, Vice Chair, Secretary-General and Communications Manager on Monday 23 March to discuss the position regarding the Mag, and Council would be kept informed.

22/20 Effect on Affiliated PTOs

22.1 Cessation of skydiving operations

Dr John Carter, Medical Adviser, had prepared updated advice last night. This had been uploaded this morning to the Council SharePoint folder, ahead of the meeting. Dr Carter said the situation regarding the coronavirus pandemic had deteriorated significantly over the last few days. The advice published on the British Skydiving website nine days ago was now seriously out-of-date in terms of the response to the magnitude of the problem and the control measures and advice being issued by the Government. With a heavy heart, Dr Carter cited his advice that he did not see how any Drop Zone could operate without conflict with Government advice. Therefore, he believed that all skydiving operations should cease for the time being.

Council had no doubt that the obligation was on everyone to follow government instruction and advice. We all shared social responsibility to help save lives by doing just that. Council noted that British Skydiving had no legal basis itself by which it could mandate the cessation of skydiving activities because of the pandemic. Rather, it was on moral grounds of citizenship and social responsibility. The nature of the government measures, with possibly or even probably more to come, carried a sense of inevitability.

COUNCIL FULLY ENDORSED the Medical Adviser's advice, and asked that it should be circulated to DZOs and CIs in advance and published later today (see COO's message of Saturday 21 March at Appendix 2). The Chair thanked Dr Carter for the benefit of his advice to our members and our sport.

22.2 Request for financial support to Affiliated PTOs

A letter to the Chair and COO, dated 19 March, from Gareth Thomas, Director of Skydive Langar (British Parachute Schools Ltd) had been circulated in advance. In his letter, Gareth Thomas had asked British Skydiving to provide financial support to Affiliated PTOs impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, by considering making a hardship grant of up to £5000 for every Affiliated PTO together with a loan of up to £20,000 per PTO at a low rate of interest.

The Treasurer had prepared a paper and a spreadsheet on finance, both of which had been circulated in advance. The meeting therefore considered the financial position of British Skydiving.

23/20 Financial situation

The Treasurer explained that when British Skydiving stopped being eligible for financial support from UK Sport (exchequer funding), Council decided to increase the financial reserves in order to keep going in any difficult times. Without any public funding, Council needed to make sure British Skydiving could be self-sufficient and weather any storms by ourselves.

The latest published financial statements from June 2019 showed that past prudence had resulted in long term investments of £2.6m and short-term available investments and cash of £832,000 - what had been referred to on social media as British Skydiving 'sitting on £3m'. Much of these reserves were held in long-term fixed term investments. These brought higher interest rates but also meant that the money could not be accessed before the investments matured.

At March 2020, £2.2m of British Skydiving's investments were in long-term investments, the earliest of which did not mature until 2021. The cash balance in March also tended to be at its lowest, as the bulk of subscription income in a normal year being expected at the end of March and early April as full members renewed for the new membership year from 1 April.

With the spread of the coronavirus and risks of spreading COVID-19, we were now encountering the storm for which Council had been maintaining reserves. The Treasurer said she was very grateful to past Councils for saving for the future. Last week, there had already been a drop off in the rate of renewals.

It was entirely understandable that members were uncertain about when they would be able to skydive again in the UK. This also meant that the bank account was not being replenished at the usual rate at this time of year. To make sure there were enough funds to pay British Skydiving staff in April, we were already in the process of selling some of our short-term investments. Unfortunately, they were not worth as much as they were at their last official valuation at 31 December; however, we would be able to cover the cost of running the Association for the time being.

The financial support package announced by the Government for business was also helping, being able to defer payment of VAT or PAYE tax bills meant we did not have to sell as many investments at this low-value time.

COUNCIL AGREED to encourage all our Affiliated PTOs to pursue these avenues to enable them to remain in business and keep those of their staff who are part- or full-time employees. An online information and advice-sharing forum was being set up by the Communications Manager, accessible to all PTOs to share Government guidance and local experiences between the members of the DZO Specialist Interest Group. We would continue to add to this as information is released by the Government and other authoritative sources to provide a single source of information which is easy to use and access. Council allocated a budget of up to £5K per annum for the software licences for the software for the online forum for DZOs. Proposed by Mark Bayada, seconded by Tash Higman and carried unanimously.

Mary Barrett suggested that Council consider engaging a business adviser who could help Affiliated PTOs negotiate their way through the variety of Government grants and schemes and help available from financial institutions and other sources. In discussion it was noted that different PTOs had very different business circumstances in relation to what assets they owned or rented, and their business models, and that no one individual would be likely to be an authoritative source of information and advice on them all. Business advisers would be likely to be in high demand just now, and there may well be some less scrupulous who would may charge for advice that was plainly and freely available from Government or other official sources.. Council agreed that the best approach for at least the time being was that of the

online information and advice-sharing forum for PTOs that was being set up by the Communications Manager,

While there was a lot of government and banking support available, Council did not believe it to be appropriate, at the current time, to provide financial support to any Affiliated PTOs. As with many others in the leisure industry, our sport was seasonal and if government support stopped as the country got back to 'normal' before being able to build summer fat to keep us going through the winter, the situation would become more difficult.

COUNCIL AGREED therefore to only start considering at that time, later in the year, whether and what kind of financial support (and associated risks) we - as the National Governing Body of our Sport funded by the subscriptions of individual skydivers, and responsible for sporting, safety and training matters - might at that time be in a position to provide.

24/20 Effect on staff

COUNCIL AGREED to support our British Skydiving staff who were either unwell or self-isolating in accordance with government guidelines. As an employer, Council would take advantage of the Government's changes to Statutory Sick Pay and top that up so that the affected members of our staff team did not earn less as a result of being safe or ill.

Unlike our Affiliated PTOs, British Skydiving did not itself operate sport or leisure facilities. As such, Council did not expect to have to cease trading as a result of COVID-19. Council did, however, need to ensure that British Skydiving as an organisation was fully prepared for when skydiving operations began again and would investigate whether if we were eligible for loan schemes operated through the banking system or the Government's Job Retention Scheme announced yesterday by the Chancellor of the Exchequer which covered 80% of employees' salaries during a business shutdown.

Council thanked the staff for their continuing hard work and work out-of-hours during these challenging times for us all.

25/20 Dates of future meetings

The next virtual special meeting was agreed for one week's time, Saturday 28 March 2020 at 13:00 by Microsoft Teams.

Previously scheduled meetings were for Tuesdays at British Skydiving HQ, Leicester LE2 9TF: 16 June, 15 September and 24 November. However, physical meetings were suspended whilst government restrictions on social distancing remained, so these dates were now reserved for virtual meetings by Microsoft Teams.

The meeting closed at 15:07 (duration 2:07).

Appendix 1

Statement to members issued by Tony Butler, Chief Operating Officer, on Friday 20 March 2020

Dear Member

None of us has ever known anything like what we're experiencing right now. I know you'll be as concerned as I am about the health of your loved ones and the livelihoods of those around you.

Normal life, and economic activity, is effectively on hold for the duration – whatever that might be.

Sport and recreation, including skydiving, is impacted as much as everything else.

I'm writing to assure you that, through this exceptionally difficult and challenging time, our members' interests are, as always, at the heart of everything we do.

We should all follow government advice to get through the Coronavirus pandemic, please do everything you can to keep safe and protect your family and friends.

Our sport, as every other, is battening down the hatches until the government tells us we can start to return to something more like normality – although it may be a new normal, the nature of which none of us can yet know.

We are setting up an online forum for our Drop Zone Owners and Operators Specialised Interest Group to share news, views and best practice so that we can help each other through these tough times. All businesses, including Drop Zones, are facing unprecedented economic challenges. The value of a community approach is clear, DZOs, members and all those connected to us are a family and we need to pull together in these tough times.

The new membership year beginning on 1 April will be like no other. We'll be looking at how to ensure our members don't lose out on subscriptions for times when there is likely to be much less or no skydiving taking place. We have approached our insurers to discuss the situation where no skydiving is taking place and there is the possibility of a pro-rata refund. We'll be using the British Skydiving website and social media channels to keep you up-to-date with vital information and engaging content for a lay-off at home. We want to use the time on our hands productively to help us all bounce back from this when the restrictions begin to clear. We'll be with you all the way and we want you to be involved.

The Council of British Skydiving is holding a special video meeting on Saturday afternoon 21 March to discuss the current situation that is affecting us all and we will report on the outcomes afterwards.

Please share with us on social media your questions or concerns. We're unlikely to have anything like all the answers, but as a community brought together by our passion for our sport, members may have ideas, insights or information to share that you feel may be of benefit to the family. Let's all stay safe, and get through this together.

Take care

Tony Butler
Chief Operating Officer

Appendix 2

Statement to members issued by Tony Butler, Chief Operating Officer, on Saturday 21 March 2020

Dear Members

The Council of British Skydiving held a video meeting today to consider the effect of the unprecedented government restrictions to control the spread of COVID19, not only on our sport but also to our members and our Affiliated Parachute Training Organisations (PTOs). Having considered the latest advice (Updated COVID19 Advice) from Dr John Carter, British Skydiving's Medical Adviser, Council recognises that skydiving, as an activity within the sports and leisure sector, cannot take place under the government's current restrictions on gatherings and advise people to stay at home where possible. Council recognises our social responsibility and duty, as a skydiving community, to play our full part in helping to keep ourselves, our families, friends, neighbours and wider society as safe as possible and to help the NHS concentrate its limited resources to save the lives of those most severely affected.

Therefore, British Skydiving must strongly advise that no skydiving activity should take place until the government eases its current restrictions.

British Skydiving will be putting out a fuller statement on the financial matters affecting the sport and PTOs followed by a message to all members from Craig Poxon, Chair of British Skydiving. We shall also be providing more specific information and advice for riggers, packers and others who work behind the scenes in our sport to ensure that they are able to continue the vital work and services that they provide to the community.

British Skydiving Council will hold another video meeting next Saturday, 28 March, and I shall update you all then.

Let's all stay safe, and get through this together.

Take care

Tony Butler
Chief Operating Officer