

Minutes of the 381 meeting of Council

Friday 13 September 2019 09:00–12:30 GMT

Venue: 14–16 Meredith Street, London, EC1R 0AB, UK

Present:

Judy Armitage (President, in the Chair)

Ian Roberts (Treasurer)

Maggie Smith (General Secretary)

Nicola Stonehouse (Chair of Communications Committee)

Amy Pickering (Chair of the Early Career Microbiologists' Forum Executive Committee), until item 3.5

Tadhg Ó Cróinín (Chair of Professional Development Committee)

Paul Kellam (Chair of Policy Committee)

Jodi Lindsay (Chair of Publishing Committee)

David Blackburn (Elected Member)

Deirdre Devine (Elected Member)

Charles Dorman (Elected Member)

John Morrissey (Elected Member)

Tracy Palmer (Elected Member)

George Salmond (Elected Member)

In attendance:

Mark Harris (Incoming General Secretary)

Chloe James (Incoming Chair of Communications Committee)

Sharon Brookes (Shadowing Chair of Publishing Committee)

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Joanne Morley (Chief Operations Officer)

Tasha Mellins-Cohen (Director of Publishing)

Sarah Buckman (Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes)

Maria Fernandes (Head of Professional Development and Evaluation)

Gillian Perry-Bland (Governance and Operations Executive)

1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new attendees

The President formally welcomed Council members to the 381 meeting. She also welcomed Mark Harris (incoming General Secretary), Chloe James (incoming Chair of Communications Committee), Maria Fernandes (Head of Professional Development and Evaluation) and Sharon Brookes, who was observing as part of the shadowing scheme. Apologies were received from Mick Tuite (Chair of Scientific Conferences Committee) and Stephen Smith (Incoming Chair of Scientific Conferences Committee).

The President observed that the 381 meeting of Council was the first to be held at the Society's new headquarters in Meredith Street.

2. Declaration of any new conflicts of interest

The President reminded Council members that they had a responsibility for declaring their own conflicts of interest and that they should notify the Society of any new conflicts that may arise. None were declared.

David Blackburn raised the question as to how often members needed to review their own conflicts, and if it was necessary at each Council meeting. The Chief Executive replied that new interests should be declared as and when they arose, and reminded Council that they would also be asked to review their full list of interests on an annual basis.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The Minutes of the 380 Meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments and corrections:

- Under item 3.1.1, paragraph 2, "involve" should be "involved".
- Under item 3.1.6, John Morrissey's name was misspelled.

4. Matters arising from the minutes and action points

The President observed that most of the actions were completed or in progress at the time of the meeting.

In relation to item 3.1.1, the Chief Executive reported that the Chief Scientific Advisor's office had advised that it was no longer working on AMR and had directed the Society to work with the Department of Health and Social Care.

In relation to item 3.1.2, the Chair of Communications Committee asked whether, in the light of the collaboration with the Lister Institute, Council would be minded to consider collaborating in similar ways with other organisations. Council agreed that, where there were clear benefits to both parties, such collaborations would be considered on a case by case basis. The President updated Council on the collaboration, reporting that the governors of the Lister Institute had approved the proposal and planning for the studentships was in train.

In relation to item 3.1.5, the Chair of Communications Committee further asked about arrangements for the negative strand meeting, asking whether a Focused Meeting would be the most appropriate way to assist. The Chief Executive explained that he along with the General Secretary would meet with the organisers of the negative strand meeting in October to discuss and determine the best

route forward, starting from the premise that the Society exists to support the microbiology community in advancing its science.

In relation to item 3.1.3, the Chair of Policy Committee provided an update on the Fleming Museum, reporting that both the relevant Head of Department and the Dean of Medicine at Imperial College would be keen to proceed, and that the Chair of the other interested party, the Imperial College Healthcare Trust, had arranged to visit the museum later in September. Following this visit, it was hoped that all parties would meet, and agree to proceed with a small-scale feasibility and options study, of the kind that Council had previously agreed to undertake.

5. Finance and Operations

5.1 Update from Finance and Operations Committee

Council noted the paper circulated in advance and the Treasurer summarised the key points from the meeting on 11 September 2019.

6. President / Chief Executive business

6.1 Update from President and Chief Executive

The President and Chief Executive reported that they had no update beyond what had been covered elsewhere.

6.2 Composition of Council and Committees

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chair of the Early Career Microbiologists' Forum Executive Committee observed that there was a discrepancy in her terms of service. Deirdre Devine also observed that there was a discrepancy in her terms of service.

The Chair of the Communications Committee raised a concern about the makeup of the Communications Committee. From January 2020 onwards the Committee would consist almost entirely of Members whose area of specialty of expertise was in prokaryotic microbiology. She and the incoming Chair of the Communications Committee would ask the Virology and Eukaryotic Divisions to put forward names for the Communications Committee, to serve as co-opted members for a year.

6.3 Membership report

The Chief Executive drew Council's attention to the membership report, which he observed was a slimmed down version following a more extensive report at the July meeting. Council noted the

paper circulated in advance, which included an update on the Membership Engagement Implementation Plan.

The Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes reported that member numbers fluctuated and had reached a total of 5080 on 12 September 2019. She also noted that the President's roadshow events may have had a positive influence on member numbers.

6.3.1 New members

Council approved the list of new members, noting that many were internationally based and extended the Society's reach beyond the UK and Ireland.

6.4 Prize Panel recommendations

The General Secretary gave an update to Council on the recommendations for Prize Winners for 2020. She reported the Prize Panel had consisted of herself, David Blackburn, Deirdre Devine and John Morrissey. The meeting had been conducted by teleconference.

The General Secretary gave a brief overview of the number of nominations received for each Prize Medal and details of each of the winners.

Council noted the Prize Award Panel's recommendations for the 2020 Prize Lecturers and 2021 Prize Medal winner. Council was informed that in cases where there were two prize-worthy nominees for said prize, runners-up had been selected to mitigate against the possibility that a prize winner was unable to present the lecture on the relevant dates. The Chair of the Publishing Committee asked if runners up could reapply next year. The General Secretary confirmed that runners up would not automatically be reconsidered but could be nominated again in subsequent years, so long as they still met the criteria.

6.4.1 Unilever Colworth Prize

Council accepted the panel's recommendation that Associate Professor Manu Prakash, Stanford University, be awarded the 2020 Unilever Colworth Prize.

6.4.2 Fleming Prize

Council accepted the panel's recommendation that Professor Edze Westra, University of Exeter, be awarded the 2020 Fleming Prize.

6.4.3 Marjory Stephenson Prize

Council accepted the panel recommendation that Professor Julian Parkhill, University of Cambridge, be awarded the 2020 Marjory Stephenson Prize.

6.4.4 Peter Wildy Prize

Council accepted the panel recommendation that Professor Graham Hatfull, University of Pittsburgh, be awarded the 2020 Peter Wildy Prize.

6.4.5 Prize Medal

The General Secretary explained that while the panel would normally bring forward multiple nominations for Council to vote on, in the case of the 2021 Prize Medal only one nomination was

considered to meet the standards of the award. Nevertheless, the panel was enthusiastic about the nominee.

The Prize Panel had considered the matter and agreed that there was sufficient microbiology of sufficient importance and strength within the nominee's portfolio, notwithstanding the fact that in a long career, she had also worked on systems that were not microbiological. The Chief Executive reminded Council that winners were briefed that the audience for the Prize Lecture comprised microbiologists of various specialisms, and that the lecture should be addressed to such a constituency. The General Secretary reminded Council that the Prizes Panel can only deliberate over nominations they receive.

Council accepted the Panel recommendation that Professor Joan Steitz, Yale University, be awarded the 2021 Prize Medal. It was further agreed that Professor Steitz would be asked to discuss her prize lecture with Steve Griffin, who nominated her, to ensure that in everyone's interests, the lecture would be suitably microbiological for the Society's membership.

6.5 Improving the governance systems of the Society

The Chief Executive introduced the paper, stressing that although it drew attention to shortcomings in some of the systems the Society was operating, there was no implication that any individual was at fault. The paper had resulted from several meetings and conversations about how the Society might continue to achieve more of its ambitions, building on the work done in the years to 2019, including some observations by Council members at the previous meeting.

It was agreed that incoming Officers could benefit from more detailed and formal induction about their roles, and that clearer communication would be given about the role and expectations of Committee Chairs, both from the Secretariat and from Council.

The structure, remits and number of the activity Committees were considered. The General Secretary expressed a view that 'policy' was too narrow a definition to describe the activity of the Policy Committee, which was really focused on expressing and amplifying the impact of microbiology and of members' work, not solely talking to politicians. The Chair of the Communications Committee agreed that there was a need for a more integrated committee structure, as Committees were working in silos. The Chair of the Publishing Committee suggested that each Chair was given five minutes to speak at each meeting of Council to help members understand activities within each area. The General Secretary explained that this was in place in the past, but that time at Council was so limited that it had been dropped, and that reporting was now done in a more joined up way.

David Blackburn agreed with the view expressed in the paper that the entire Committee structure needed to be reviewed to ensure it could deliver on the strategy and ambitions of the Society.

It was agreed that the structure, remits and number of the activity Committees were not necessarily optimal for their purpose and should be reviewed and updated to better reflect the Society's strategy.

John Morrissey referred to a meeting of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee which had been held on 3 September 2019, during which it had been noted that the lack of fresh blood, and therefore fresh ideas in committee membership, could potentially hold back the Society's ability to deliver on the strategy.

Council agreed that it was not possible to define the optimal membership of Committees until their remits have been considered in more detail and potentially updated, but the proportion of elected members should certainly increase on those Committees where there was only one elected member. There was a strong case for the inclusion of non-members who bring specific expertise that cannot reasonably be found among the membership of a scientific membership charity, but little or no argument for the inclusion of microbiologists who have chosen not to join the Society.

Council agreed that the Committees needed greater coordination. One solution could be for one meeting each year, activity Committees should all meet on the same day and have a joint session with a shared agenda. Scheduling such a session would be difficult and would need to be done well in advance. The Chair of the Communications Committee raised the question of the timing of meetings, to ensure that incoming members of committees engage with their work relatively quickly, as in some cases it can be up to a year between being appointed and their first meeting.

Council accepted the proposals in paper 381-07 and the Chief Executive was instructed to bring further plans to the December 2019 meeting of Council. The President asked that Council members send ideas they may have in respect of Society governance, including radical suggestions, to her and to the Chief Executive.

The incoming Chair of the Communications Committee requested that the Society retain the shadowing scheme, as she had found it invaluable as a mechanism for understanding the role of Committees and Council, and the role of Chairs.

6.6 Outcomes of AGM and Society Showcase

Council noted the outcomes of Annual General Meeting held on 12 September 2019.

6.7 Future arrangements for Federation of Infection Societies (FIS) Annual Conference

The Chief Executive outlined the history of the FIS conference, explaining that it was of value to the Society as a key mechanism by which the Society reach the clinical microbiology community. He added that the Councils of the Healthcare Infection Society and the British Infection Association had already approved the proposal, as had the Society's Scientific Conferences Committee, subject to proper diligence about the risks, particularly the financial risks.

David Blackbourn asked why the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy had pulled out; the response was that it had become frustrated by the lack of progress in resolving issues with the conference. The views expressed by the *ad hoc* group of clinical members that had been chaired on behalf of Council by Deirdre Devine in early 2019 strongly suggested that there was still value in FIS

to the clinical community, and also for early career microbiologists in the healthcare system who because attendance at FIS was a positive way of them collecting mandatory CPD points.

Council approved the recommendation in respect of future delivery of the Federation of Infection Societies Annual Conference through a professional conference organiser, subject to proper diligence about the risks, particularly the financial risks.

6.8 Digital community resources

Council approved the Publishing Committee recommendation for supporting digital community resources.

6.9 Society partnerships and publishing as a service

Council noted information regarding two proposals which had been received for the Society to publish journals on behalf of others. It considered its general approach to such potential opportunities and discussed preferences for pursuing such opportunities, and its appetite for the legal and governance consequences of publishing material not considered 'primary purpose' in Charity Law. It was agreed that publishing outside of 'primary purpose' was not at present desirable.

In respect of the proposal to bid for the contract to publish a primary purpose title, the Treasurer expressed concern about the lack of an agreed plan for growth in publishing, against which to judge the current opportunity. The Chair of the Policy Committee observed that the potential liability was unquantifiable, but the upside was that the Society could gain a relationship with 800 microbiologists with interests of relevance to the Society's strategy. The President was unsure whether the 800 SIMB members, based primarily in the United States, would be willing to join the Society. George Salmond explained that he had been a member of SIMB and that it was culturally very different from the Microbiology Society.

The Chair of the Communications Committee said that she had originally been keen on the opportunity but due the lack of financial information available at the time of the Council meeting had become more sceptical.

The General Secretary reminded Council that the business case and bid had not yet been produced, and that simply bidding for the SIMB journal – on the Society's own terms – would not commit the Society to publishing it. The Treasurer observed that preparing bids cost time and money, whatever the outcome. The Chair of the Policy Committee asked that Council commit to a broader discussion on publishing strategy that would permit us to better serve our members.

Council voted four in favour, and six against, preparing a bid to SIMB for the contract to publish its journal, and consequently instructed the Chief Executive not to bid.

Council requested a clear, detailed and comprehensive plan for how to grow the publishing portfolio, including considering books and other products, so that future potential opportunities could be judged against agreed plans.

7. Summary of progress

7.1 Summary of Progress – Strategy 2018–2022

The Chief Executive summarised the paper provided to Council in advance. Council noted the paper.

8. Committee Business (for information only)

8.1 Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee minutes, April 2019

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

8.2 Publishing Committee minutes, May 2019

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

8.3 Scientific Conferences Committee minutes, January 2019

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

9. AOB

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.48pm.