

## Annual General Meeting Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024, 7.30pm

Chair opened the AGM at 7.32pm and welcomed everyone to the 2024 South Central Hockey Limited AGM. Rich Beer and Barbara Reynolds were in attendance from England Hockey.

1. **Apologies for absence;** Tracy Rowley - Secretary of Buckinghamshire HA, Leslie Potter - Banbury HC, Jason Holford, Rachel Taylor - Wycombe HC, Mike Collins, Richard Wood - Chair of Adult League & Competitions, Ian Barber - Bournemouth HC, Julia Sharp - Thame HC, Lea Waine - New Forest HC.
2. **Minutes of 2023 AGM held on 20th July;** The minutes were circulated in advance and were approved by the Board as a correct record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

### 3. **Chairs Report.**

2023-24 has been another busy year, our third complete season as South Central hockey. We have come a long way in the three years. We are much more mature as an Area, more familiar with what we need to do and what the membership wants from us, but it will continue to evolve.

This year we shared with clubs the sub-committee reports ahead of the meeting, so I don't plan to go into too much detail as I am taking it that they have been read.

The sub-committees under the leadership of Richard Wood – Adult Leagues, Kate Porter – Junior Leagues, Simon Milford – Officiating, John Stuart - Masters and Mark Rutherford – Disciplinary, have navigated us through the season once again. The teams are in a strong position in readiness for the new season – South Central were the first Area to publish adult league fixtures for 2024-25 season, and the junior league fixtures are due to be published shortly; the structure of the junior leagues are determined by the number of teams who enter each year. Creating an inclusive environment to participate in hockey is what we are striving to, and ongoing dialogue with the membership will help us continually improve our offerings and the experience for hockey.

England Hockey will be releasing revised regulations soon and I urge captains to familiarise themselves with them to avoid unnecessary fines. We are just over nine weeks away from the start of the season so no doubt everybody is ramping up activity for September.

Moving on to indoor hockey, participation isn't huge, but some new teams joined in this year and an area for potential growth. Buckingham HC represented England at the European Indoor Championships earlier in the year and will be running a session for South Central membership in the autumn; they will be sharing experiences and some of their expertise about indoor hockey – watch this space for details. We saw some more Masters Area Representation success this year, Masters opportunity is huge.

We've again has lots of successes across our game; lots of posts across Facebook and X, keep them coming, and I know Stephen Smyth is quick to tag and share stories across the Area, although I might need to tell him that Guildford HC is not in our area! I am not going to even try to mention all of the teams that have won trophies or competed in Area or National Finals, or won awards at the England Hockey awards event, but well done to all and keep sharing the stories.

In May we held our branch EHO AGM for our members. The reports are all online and some of the statistics are impressive. I ask that you please make sure you look after the umpires, whether

appointed or club umpires, as like many volunteers we cannot play the game without them. Officiating will be a priority in our area strategy as there is a risk on the horizon that we may not have enough umpires to officiate all our games soon.

Our disciplinary team has been busy working behind the scenes this season, and due to significant reduction in the number of red cards / MMOs from our inaugural season, our team have been outsourced, busy working to support other areas who needed a bit more horsepower.

We continue to build the content of our area website, it will have a bit of a cleanse over the next month, and I have already mentioned our social media platforms. If you find something missing that could be useful or if you want us to share news reach out to us as we love to share your stories.

I agreed to jointly chair a GMS working group with England Hockey across the eight areas to see where we can improve the user experience or drive more functionality out of our system, and I provide updates to the England Hockey Board. I cannot go a whole AGM without mentioning GMS, but I am hoping that we can communicate some good news stories before the new season for match reporting and the transfer process, appreciate transfers are happening now. The area representatives are really getting stuck in to help improve GMS for all.

Finally, to wrap up the 2023-24 season, a big congratulations to Marlow Ladies 1s and Reading Men's 2s, our South Central champions, and the very best of luck as they venture into the English Hockey League.

As a limited company, South Central Hockey is responsible for ensuring that the right framework, governance, and controls in place. The Board members of Hatty Wood - Vice Chair, James Mitchell - Finance, Steve Hills - Governance and Stephen Smyth - Operations work busily behind the scenes looking after the business side of things supported by Jenell Sparks who runs our governance meetings and keeps us on track.

I spoke last year about developing an area strategy, aligning with the strategy that England Hockey published last year. That piece has started, albeit a bit slower than I had hoped which is wholly down to me, but it's about bringing all stakeholders together to determine our ambition across the complete game, have metrics to measure our progress, but being agile if the future changes.

We now have three years' worth of knowledge, experience, and data to help us build on. I have always said that I thought it would take 2-3 years for things to settle down, now we need to decide where we are heading, what are our priorities, where we have risks and issues and how we course correct if we need to. We are currently chatting to several clubs to see if we can use their clubhouse to hold face-to-face meetings in September and October, one club has signed up, so that we can develop a balanced plan that benefits all our membership. Watch this space for more details.

We have some fantastic volunteers across our area and hockey, and as a sport, we are hugely dependent on them/us. Sometimes we just need to remind ourselves what we do for the sport and do not be too hard on ourselves when things don't go quite right. If you feel like you want to get involved, please do not hesitate to let us know. We are always looking for more volunteers.

I would like to express my thanks to the Board Members – Hatty, James, Steve, Stephen and Jenell – and the sub-committee Chairs – Richard, Kate, Simon, John, and Mark. They have done us proud along with their teams and have spent thousands of hours over the past season delivering for the Area and you, our members.

We are losing two of the team this year – Mark Rutherford who has 20-years in post of all things

disciplinary is stepping down and I hear that he can now be found on the golf course. And Steve Hills has decided to step down from Governance Director. Thank you both, your contributions and support will be greatly missed but we wish you all the best for the future.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and remember those members of our hockey family that we have lost during the last season.

#### **4. Finance Directors report, accounts and audit report.**

The Finance Directors report and accounts were circulated ahead of the AGM.

The fiscal year has been another busy one for South Central Hockey (SCH) Finance team, facilitated by one individual. We must remember that SCH started from nothing, many of the other areas started with a base of something and had money in the bank, whereas SCH started from nothing.

The Budget for 2023-24 was set with the intention of being break-even. SCH concluded the year with cash in the bank of £54,021 (PY £33,965) but mindful that just over £32k of this cash are donations from organisations in the South that have been superseded by SCH; an effect of passing of funds as opposed to P&L and budgeted funds that come out of the current organisation.

Revenue for the year was £106,519 (PY £100,221). As previously stated, we do not wish to fine any hockey club, we would prefer that money is retained within the clubs, but it is the only stick that we can use when clubs fail to complete the administrative tasks that other clubs do manage to do.

Total Capital and Reserves for the year for SCH £59,062 (PY £39,552). QuickBooks again has proven invaluable. GMS has not moved in terms of assisting Areas to manage their financial administration. SCH continues to work with the GMS team to ensure better features in this tool for all of hockey's administration tasks.

Activity that has occurred this year:

- Complying with HMRC and Companies House filing for SCH Ltd.
- Working with the scrutineer on accounts audit.
- Raising invoices to clubs for Membership, League fees and Appointed Umpire fees (840 invoices).
- Managing fines through Quickbook tool.
- Managing debtors through Quickbook tool.
- Paying umpires expenses (522 expense claims).
- Fiscally administrating schools for competitions and master's competitions.
- Paying expenses for pitch hire and other SCH hockey related invoices.

Despite the Finance Director having the ability to levy fines on late payments of invoices on clubs, no club has received a fine for this. Payments have been OK – some clubs should be quicker and not be chased – you know who you are!

To date the Finance Director and Finance Admin role has been carried out by one person with no extra cost of admin staff – hence keeping SCH cost base low. The plea to all clubs / SCH leaders wishing to use the finance team is:

Clubs

- Make sure treasurer email address is correct in GMS and communicate the details to [finance@southcentral.hockey](mailto:finance@southcentral.hockey).
- Pay bills on time or contact us to discuss. Please do not just NOT pay.

- Ignoring bills until you are chased is not acceptable. Fines can be levied for late payment.

#### Umpires

- Ensure the SCH Finance Director has your BACS details.
- Claim expenses on time and certainly by the end of April 2024.
- Join EHO umpire membership program.

#### Other Stakeholders

- For any event undertaken (school tournament, Masters tournament etc) complete the 'Fiscal Control' form that has been published i.e., list what, how much, when etc.

This report discusses the P&L for the year and the balance sheet and proposed rate card for Season 2024-25.

#### Exceptional Comments:

#### Income

- £8,137 funds transferred from Buckinghamshire HUA to be ring fenced for umpire development, along with £1,000 from Surrey HUA and £3,171 from Berkshire HUA.
- Umpire income minus umpire expense contributed £11,192 (PY £1,651) most of this sum is from umpires NOT claiming their allowed expenses and better umpire allocation to matches i.e. less mileage.
- Junior indoor fees reduced by £2,040, SCH subsidised school hockey.
- Fines £4,560 (PY £3,617) higher owing to league administrators using Quickbooks to execute fines quickly.
- Umpire EHO member decreased by £738 due to reduced number of umpires and/or umpires switching to a lower membership package.

#### Expenses

- £1,000 grant to Buckingham Hockey Club ref their European Tournament.
- Consultancy £6,940 (PY £2,760) associated with non-committee members paid a consultancy fee for administration undertaken to manage hockey activities – notable change were costs associated with managing junior and schools' hockey.
- SCH again chose to pay the SCH Master Tournament fees this year and sponsor hockey for master's, no new kit was purchased this year although PY kit invoice in 2023-24.
- IT costs increased owing to Adobe for league management £238.
- SCH subsidised junior hockey with lower league fees and zero umpire fees.
- Paid £2600 for trophies and pennants.
- Technology relates to GMS, OMS, IT systems annual charges.
- No team claimed IOW travel subsidy that was agreed in last AGM.
- Donated £500 to support the Tex hockey Memorial Day.

#### **5. Membership Subscription Fees and entry fees for Competitions and Leagues for season 2024-2025.**

- No inflationary change to area membership and league fee.
- Umpire mileage expense unchanged.

SCH is running c£5K in excess over the modelled run rate to operate, so the options presented to the AGM are.

- 1) Reduce the membership subscription fee for 2024-25 season from £10 to £5 per team.  
or

- 2) Keep the membership subscription fees at £10 per team re-invest the money in club umpiring schemes, junior hockey, and state school hockey.

The Chair clarified that umpire fees as discussed were relating to neutrally appointed umpires, so not applicable to all clubs.

Questions were invited on the Accounts and fee proposals.

Question from the floor on behalf of Poole HC

*“How do clubs apply for the IOW travel subsidy? Can we still claim it for last season because we had two teams go to the Isle of Wight?”*

The Finance Director responded that clubs should apply to the Finance Director. There is an algorithm SCH put out at the last year's AGM of how the methodology will work. The Finance Director took an action to communicate to all clubs.

Question from the floor from Karen Mckinnon

*“What was the £1,869 on meals and entertainment this year when zero was last year?”*

The Finance Director responded that SCH have a lot of volunteers putting in a lot of their hours into hockey who are not paid or rewarded in any way. The Board deemed it appropriate to take out various groups of volunteers for dinner over the season to say “thank you” for all their time and hours in the year.

With no further questions a vote was taken. The Finance Director apologised that some attendees were unable to access the voting through the poll or QR code so votes could be emailed as an alternative and the ballot would remain open to allow clubs to vote. Clubs were reminded it was one vote per club and clubs would be notified of the result within the next 48hrs once the validation was complete.

## 6. Election of Directors and Postholders.

It was clarified that under the Area Articles, every year, at least two positions on the Board must be available for election. This year the positions for election are Chair and Finance Director.

The Chair announced postholder election results.

The following Director nominations have been proposed and seconded, unopposed. With no objections received Jacqui Barlow and James Mitchell were duly re-elected.

Position	Nominee	Proposer	Second
Chair of the Board	Jacqui Barlow	Hatty Wood	Steve Hills
Finance Director	James Mitchell	Jacqui Barlow	Stephen Smyth

The following Postholders nominations have been proposed and seconded, unopposed. With no objections received Richard Wood, Kate Porter and John Stuart were duly re-elected.

Position	Nominee	Proposer	Second
Chair of Adult Leagues & Competitions	Richard Wood	Dani Sweeney	Mike Robson
Chair of Junior Leagues & Competitions	Kate Porter	Judith Barton	Martin Jackson

Chair of Masters	John Stuart	Stephen Smyth	Jacqui Barlow
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The Board have accepted the recommendation from the Branch EHO AGM and duly appoint Simon Milford into the role of Chair of Officiating.

The Area disciplinary administrator is not a balloted vote. It is appointed by England Hockey and, following the news that Mark Rutherford has decided to step down, the Chair announced that Alan Dow has been appointed into the role with immediate effect.

The Chair re-stated that Steve Hills has recently decided to step down from the role of Governance Director. This was after the nominations window for consideration at the AGM was closed therefore after this AGM we will be seeking interest for nominations, we will publish the job role on the website, social media and contact clubs and counties to ask for expressions of interest.

The Chair congratulated those who have been elected.

## 7. AOB

Anonymous item was received ahead of the AGM.

*“England Hockey is now pushing a Right Athlete Right Environment approach to player development, with the idea being that junior players can find the hockey opportunities to suit them, and the clubs need to keep this in mind and ensure all players are looked after and protected.*

*My experience of this so far as a chairman is that this is a bit of a wild west between club, county, EH and the talent system, with communication between all parties happening largely through whispers: we often won't know our players are partaking in other opportunities unless they themselves tell us, and our junior players often won't be aware of opportunities available until deadlines have passed. This makes it tough both to safeguard players from being overplayed, and also to genuinely support their development by finding them the right opportunities to grow in good faith.*

*My question is whether South Central could do more to provide a road map of the opportunities available to young players, and support the communication back to the clubs from the parties in question that take these players on? I personally believe it is oversight from EH relying on clubs to be proactive in handling all communication, and that while the system could work really well in our area due to the sheer volume of clubs it is currently not optimized to be easy for anyone involved. If we'd like to be an excellent region for player development, I'd like to see some overarching vision for the area (although I'm not sure EH has strictly set it up to act this way!)”*

The Chair responded that SCH operate in a complex environment, there is a lot of hockey across all age groups especially our junior community. Some of the comments made in terms of making sure we don't wear out players at a young age is relevant.

A discussion was held including contributions from Rich Beer, England Hockey. The consensus conclusion of which resulted in an agreement to review the complexities of the question and respond with a rounded answer post AGM. The one thing that does bind it together, which is particularly relevant for SCH and the clubs, is the centralised calendar, which is carefully designed to deliberately identify what activity should be done on which day and create clashes where there's necessary clashes. It is the stakeholder's responsibility to expect the organisation involved in the provision of hockey to comply with the calendar, we need to think about the young person at the centre of this.

Question from the floor on behalf of Stoke Green Hockey Club.

*“As a one team club, we have a number of youngsters playing for us. The pitch we prefer to play on, Herschel Grammar school, which we book through AITC, we now find that the costs are relatively high and we're struggling. Is there a way to approach SCH for a subsidy for the pitch hire?”*



James Mitchell, Finance Director, responded that he has not come across a club who's not managing to balance their books in terms of membership or match fees to make sure they cover off the cost of the pitch. SCH will support clubs and will review governance and pricing for Stoke Green HC to ensure that players and teams do pay their way to make sure the sport is covered financially. However, if there are players in an area that cannot afford to play hockey, then we as a hockey community should try to support them i.e. there are some clubs in the area that sponsor membership for some young players, to give players free hockey. If Stoke Green HC has disproportionate number of players who are struggling financially, then this is clearly something that SCH should discuss to ensure Stoke Green HC stays viable.

It was agreed that Stoke Green HC (Raj) would write to the Finance Director with a proposal.

Question from the floor from Michelle.

"Regarding the Finance Director's proposal earlier, investing in umpires and junior schools. Is there a plan? Even a high-level thought of what that looks like, to consider options."

The Finance Director responded that we have invested in state school hockey.

The Chair responded that we do not have action plans at the moment, but we need to develop them in the next few months aligned to England Hockey's strategy that was published last year. Clubs will have their views, so we intend to hold workshops and roadshows in the early season for get input to ensure we get a balanced view, for example, how do we grow participation at all levels.

The Chair of Officiating added that there is a draught document currently circulated amongst the Officiating Committee which will be submitted to the Board for approval to share with clubs about re-investing donations received for umpiring.

Question from the floor from Michelle.

"Is the cup competition going ahead this coming season?"

Phil Gibbs, representing Adult Leagues & Competitions, responded the South Central Cup is on hold pending England Hockey's revised cup structure before further consideration. There are only a certain number of dates available with an already busy centralised calendar.

Richard Beer, England Hockey, added that there is an established championship structure. The plans next year are to increase the minimal number of games you get on entry. The issue that England Hockey raised is that the dates proposed by South Central clashed with the central calendar as championship dates are scheduled when there are no league fixtures. The championships are organised by grade, so it is designed for all levels of the games. We need to agree the right plan that can fit into the overall calendar.

Cameron Dunlop commented that with regards to the proposed South Central cup, it could accommodate a cup competition for some of the tiers where there are five leagues deep, so for the lower teams within the grades. Still keen to run it if we can get to an agreement with England Hockey.

The Chair concluded that the team would explore the opportunity to run a separate South Central cup competition without undermining what England Hockey are doing, ensuring that it can be accommodated with in the calendar.

Question from Ruth Wharton, Pool HC.

*"Can South Central clarify the position with regards to development teams. We were under the*

*impression that there was more flexibility for development teams, for example, rearranging fixtures if short of players.”*

Phil Gibbs, representing Adult Leagues & Competitions, responded that development teams are at the behest of the ALMC. The only difference between normal teams and a development team is you can play an under 13 player, and development teams cannot score points. The ALMC decided that it is not something that they support presently as there is plenty of junior hockey for 12 year olds and there are concerns for player safety. It will be referred to in this year’s joining letter.

Anonymous comment

*“One reason for the reduced umpire participation was a decision from England Hockey to charge umpires membership for taking neutral appointments. It is another fee on top of club fees, etc.”*

Richard Beer, England Hockey, responded that when the governance changes were made, membership fees were paid to be a member of an area officiating committee or a hockey umpiring association as was, but there were some areas with no umpiring fee, it was inconsistent across hockey. The England Hockey Officiating AGM is scheduled in August where anyone who is a member, free or paid, can voice their views and influence fees charged. Hockey has been through a significant governance change and there are still some areas that need more improvement, but Area Directors and Committee Chairs have done a huge amount of work to move hockey forward and we will continue to listen and talk to these points raised. The fee includes insurance; there is an ongoing debate about the level of insurance needed, but we need to ensure that umpires are properly covered and have access to the relevant information and training.

As no other business was raised, members were thanked for their attendance, volunteered were thanked for their contributions to hockey and the meeting was closed at 8.52pm.