

Communication from GRG to the Membership. Oct 2018

On going since 2014

We the Governance Review Group were created in 2014 to carry out a review of the governance structures of Scouting Ireland and report back on what (if anything) might need to be done to allow Scouting Ireland to make a declaration of compliance with the principles of The Governance Code for Voluntary Bodies. The initial report from the GRG set Scouting Ireland on a path to reform its organisation at national level. There were weaknesses in governance which needed to be resolved.

The GRG reviewed the existing national structures and explored the Association only and Company only options as well as the current structure of Company and Association. It presented a substantial report on all 3 options to the National Management Committee from which the NMC chose the company only option as being the best.

This decision was independently reviewed by Arthur Cox Solicitors who concluded that the decision made by the NMC was correct. It was the best way to structure our organisation to comply with the various laws and principles of good governance required from organisations of our size. The last of the changes required to allow us to fully transform to a company only are before you at this National Council EGM for decision and we urge you to support these and move Scouting Ireland forward as a organisation that is open and transparent and complies with good governance practices. Scouting Ireland needs to retake the space we once held, of an organisation that can be trusted and one that upholds the highest standards expected of a charity such as us.

Support for Groups

The GRG's main focus on making these changes has been on the Scout Group. The Scout Group is the primary arm of Scouting Ireland and everything else is just there to support the work at local level. We want our Scout Groups to be focused on the delivery of Scouting and the youth programme locally in the knowledge that the national organisation is there to provide support, if required.

We were acutely conscious of the need to keep this as simple as possible and to not have wholesale changes at Scout Group Level, so we only proposed the minimum changes to comply with good governance. We would hope that the new department structure when up and running, including the refocusing of the county and provincial support teams on supporting the Scout groups only, will streamline the support for the Scout Groups and will make it easier for them to access support in many ways. This work will continue, and a full review of the Scout Group structure needs to take place in the future to explore with the membership what is the best structure for our Scout Groups.

Accountability

Foremost and key to the new proposals have been the separation of the oversight and the operations of the organisation. This means that the members of the board overseeing and directing

the work of the organisation differ from the ones actually doing the work, be it in youth programme or any other department. In fact, this is the same as it now is at Scout Group level where the Scout Group Council are the ones overseeing the work of the group and thus leaving the Scouters and scouts to run the group including the Scout programme and the events. The good governance model and the one expected of all charities now, is that accountability for compliance with all statutory requirements is clearly separated from the operations and these are key and very clear in the GRG proposals.

One of the reasons that Scouting Ireland is undergoing the current issues is exactly because of the confusion and conflict that exists at present where the people expected to have oversight of the organisation are the same people who also run the operations of the organisation. Thus, we have the unworkable situation that the people with oversight responsibilities are actually, overseeing themselves and that is not good governance in any person's language and the GRG proposals address that significant weakness.

Current Issues and Governance

It has been unfortunate that the current issues affecting the organisation are taking place during the time when the Governance proposals were being developed and discussed by the membership.

Although we have endeavoured to keep these two separated as two different items worked on by two different teams one being the current issues being dealt with by the existing board of Scouting Ireland and the other being the Governance Review Group proposals. Both have been muddled together unfortunately.

Although the GRG didn't have any say in the ongoing issues affecting Scouting Ireland the questions relating to these issues were consistently raised at GRG workshops and presentations. All we could do is concentrate on what we were tasked with doing and continue to discuss the changes proposed.

In fact, the current situation that we currently find ourselves in nationally is in fact the best reason for the governance proposals to be approved, as under those proposals these issues would be less likely to arise. It would be different members with oversight than the ones who were tasked with the operations. So, we would urge that you would consider the GRG proposals on Governance on their own merits not as a protest to what is currently going on, as that has nothing to do with good Governance in fact it flies in the face of it.

Youth Participation Empowerment / National Youth Assembly. Adult & Youth Charter

We have had at least 4 different sessions at different times in all provinces over the 4 years of the Governance Project. We have listened to the membership; we have taken on board proposals and ideas that members have suggested. We have answered numerous questions on the various issues raised in an effort to explain them better because we understand that these are complex issues and it can take a while to understand them all.

We have produced 15 Governance bulletins to date which give the detail behind the proposals and we have done as much as possible for volunteers to get the proposals explained and re-explained to the membership.

We have met with the various entities of the organisation including our youth members. We have listened to proposals from them and have tried to make them fit into a good governance model without affecting their say in the organisation. We have hopefully achieved this but of course more refinement of this can take place as we move forward. We have now in place for the first time ever a youth charter, which details what Scouting Ireland will provide for a youth member and vice versa what, we expect from a youth member in Scouting Ireland. This mutual agreement is the partnership that we should look to as an example of what needs to happen in all areas. We now have an extra vote reserved for youth members in Scout Groups bringing that up to 2 (all 5 can be youth if chosen) and we have a new national youth assembly . We need to encourage youth empowerment at local level and also make sure that we listen to and react to what our youth members are saying and do that on a partnership basis where both are given the same respect and voice.

We are working on an Adult Charter that will be similar to the youth one, to the extent that it will detail what Scouting Ireland will provide for our Adult Scouters and on the flip side of this what SI expects from an Adult Scouter.

Clean Slate – a reboot

If these proposals are ratified at the AGM, we will in effect be rebooting Scouting Ireland. There will be a clean slate. We will have a Constitution that brings us in line with what is expected in governance of organisations of our size. We will be clearly defining who is responsible for oversight, policy and management control from operational delivery of services and support.

We will be more transparent and accountable to all our stakeholders , most importantly our youth members, their parents, our adult members and Government.

The main focus of these proposals is on the support for our Scout Groups and enabling them to conduct their scouting in the full knowledge that the support behind them is there, is real and can be accessed easily. Working together with these proposals gives us the chance to restart to reboot and to make Scouting Ireland an organisation that is at the forefront again of youth work on the island of Ireland. We would urge you all to vote for the proposals and let's all work together in the true Scouting spirit to better our organisation and bring back the fun in being part of Scouting Ireland.

We on the GRG team would like to thank everyone we interacted with over the last 4 years as we travelled on the Governance trail. We can say that we were always treated with respect in all the interactions we had and enjoyed discussing and debating the future of Scouting on this island with you all. Although at times it was tough going, especially over the last 5 months when we were asked to accelerate the proposals, we always felt it was important to get feedback from the membership and to bring that into all our proposals if possible, because we respect that this organisation belongs to all of us and it is important that everyone has their input.

So, from Martin, Jimmy, Mark, James, Fiona, John, Fionán, Conor and all the others who helped over the last 4 years we thank you for being Scouts.

Governance Review Group