

SMWCRT Constitutional Amendments for AGM on 20th January 2019

Proposed additions to SMWCRT Constitution

In Section 3 - 'Membership', as a stand-alone paragraph after Section 'a. Member':

The provision of underground search and rescue will be provided by Team Members and by co-opting additional cavers where specialist expertise or additional resources are required. The team will maintain a list of 'Contactable Cavers' for this purpose.

New Section 'd. Probationary Member'

Any caver who is 18 or over who wishes to join the team may apply to be a Probationary Member. The probationary period will be 12 months from the time that the application is accepted by the Executive and details of what the Probationary Member is expected to undertake during the 12 month period will be provided in writing. At the end of the 12 month period, the Executive will consider the transfer of the Probationer to Full membership.

Probationary Members do not have any voting rights at Annual, or Extraordinary meetings of the team, nor are they eligible to serve on the Committee.

Explanatory Notes

1. Why are we doing this

A. Managing the Team

SMWCRT have for some time been looking at ways to enable the number of people held on the current Call Out List to be reduced to a more manageable number. Every few years it is necessary to contact all Team Members and check on their status in an attempt to ensure we have up to date contact details, to check their willingness to be called, and to determine whether they should still be listed. For example, at the last update we removed people who had moved abroad and some who were no longer caving. However, in a short space of time, with the constant addition of new Team Members (which is a good thing), we quickly get back to a situation where more than 200 people are listed.

Not only is this large number difficult to manage, but only around one third of those listed actively engage with the Team on a reasonably regular basis by attending rescue practices, training sessions, Team events and the AGM.

At the moment, we are by far the largest Cave Rescue Team in the UK and the number of people on our callout list is disproportionate to the amount of search and rescue work we undertake.

One of the key drivers for SMWCRT in making these changes is to ensure we remain compliant with best practice for running an effective Emergency Service Search and Rescue Organisation. Our existing membership system is not fit for purpose in this regard.

B. Insurance Implications

Over the last couple of years, it has been clear that the Liability and Personal Accident Insurance costs to MREW that large Cave Rescue Teams are creating is both a huge burden and unsustainable. It has been suggested by MREW, and BCRC Officers that Cave Rescue Teams of between 60 and 70 Team Members would be manageable in terms of insurance costs in the future and that the sizes of the larger UK teams cannot continue.

As a means of pre-empting potential actions resulting from these concerns, working in partnership with BCRC, we are one of a few teams that are seeking to address this pro-actively, rather than having to be asked to do so. Not only will this prevent us arriving at a point where we have an unmanageable deadline, but it shows our goodwill and understanding of the National challenges at a time when we are seeking to re-affirm our place within the MREW/BCRC relationship.

2. What we want to do

We are seeking to split the existing Call Out List into 'Team Members' and a 'Contactable Cavers' list. Team Members are those who we see at least once every two years at a practice, and the Contactable Cavers list will consist of those cavers who only want to be called for our larger rescues.

We also want to create a category of membership of 'Probationary Member' so that cavers applying to become Team Members will be asked to get involved with the Team by attending practices and Team events at least once in their probationary year after applying for membership.

At this stage, we only need these two additions to the constitution to be considered and, hopefully, agreed at the AGM on 20th January. This will then enable us to carefully implement a full solution based on the agreed constitutional changes during 2019. During this time we will be able to work out the details in consultation with Team Members.

3. What are the Implications for Team Members

A change of this nature will, quite rightly, be unsettling for members of SMWCRT. The solution we are suggesting should however mean little or no change for most current Team Members. All existing Members will be able to 'self-select' in terms of the category that is most appropriate for them.

It is important to stress here that this is an early stage in the journey to understand the detail of how this will work, but the initial thinking is:

- Implementing these changes will mean that nothing changes at all for those who will remain as 'Team Members'. It is likely that we will ask Team Members to attend a rescue practice at least once every two years as a minimum.
- For those who become 'contactable cavers', only their status under the constitution changes. They will still be called for a rescue, as they are now, and they are under no pressure to attend practises and events. Insurance on cave rescues for those on the 'contactable cavers' list will remain the same as it is now, where we co-opt cavers who are around when a callout occurs. The only thing that will be different is that Team Members will be called immediately, whereas 'contactable cavers' will be called when the extra resource is required. This may suit cavers with specialist skills or knowledge who currently can't commit the time to the Team. Any 'contactable caver' who wants to move to 'Team Member' status will need only to fulfil the criteria for a Team Member to transfer across to that category.
- Probationary members will be asked to get involved with the Team during their first year after applying for membership and will then need to continue to meet the criteria for a 'Team Member' after that.

As previously stated, if agreed by those present and voting, we would like to make the constitutional changes at the AGM in January and then plan and implement the changes to member status during 2019. Once the changes have been out in place, we will then roll out an ongoing review process to keep everyone's status up to date and ensure this new approach is working, as well as ensuring that Team Members are comfortable with the outcome.

Finally, SMWCRT is keen to learn what it can do to make it easier for Team Members to engage with the team and its operation and we will be asking for your input during 2019 to see what we can do to help all Team Members feel they are an important part of the Team through the input they can have. A new Team Member Handbook is due to be issued early in 2019 which we hope will go some way to helping with this two way communication.

Addendum

Definition of a Team Member as at 2018 AGM

This is a caver who is a full member of the Team and is listed on the SMWCRT Call Out list as willing to be deployed either underground or overground on a rescue. All Members will receive directly each and every communication that is made available to the whole team (providing email address changes have been notified to the Team). These will include, but are not limited to: Rescue reports, notice of the AGM and any EGM's, equipment deals, news of training, practices and social events.

Team Members will be encouraged to attend rescue training events, rescue practices and team events. A Member is expected to make themselves aware of the Team's policies and operating procedures and to support the running of the Team when they can. A Member has full voting rights at the SMWCRT AGM and any EGM's.