

The Pony Club

Strategy and Staffing Review

Final Report

November 2013



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1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1 In her Address at the Annual Conference in March 2013, the Chairman announced that there was to be a review of The Pony Club's strategy, to determine how best to meet the needs of its Members and volunteers. As part of this, it would also be necessary to look at the staffing required to deliver this strategy.
- 1.2 Following a competitive tender process, the Trustees appointed **TrioPlus** Ltd to carry out this exercise, with the following Terms of Reference:
1. To review the structure of The Pony Club's governance, committee, financial and executive management arrangements.
 2. To make recommendations that will assist The Pony Club to:
 - a. Realise its vision, mission and goals as defined in its strategic and operational plan for 2012–2016, in particular to:
 - i. Sustain and grow its membership;
 - ii. Draw on the strengths of its volunteers;
 - iii. Communicate its ethos and messages effectively, internally and externally;
 - iv. Assist its Members to develop their riding skills to the maximum of their potential ability;
 - v. Manage its financial affairs efficiently.
 - b. Balance the work of its volunteer and employed staff effectively.
 - c. Ensure its executive team is resourced to meet the challenges of the next decade.
 3. To comment on and make recommendations in any areas of significance that might arise during the course of the consultants' work.
- 1.3 At the project inception meeting with **TrioPlus** and the Board of Trustees on 18th April, it was agreed that all points in these Terms of Reference could be facilitated other than 2.a.i (re membership) and 2.a.iv (re riding skills), although it was hoped that advice and guidance may be given as a result of the review.
- 1.4 When commissioning us, the Board of Trustees expressed clearly that they were aware of many issues to be addressed, and that they were determined to take steps to redress the shortcomings identified during the Review. Similarly, many of the people we have spoken to, and in the surveys we have undertaken, have highlighted the issues we raise below. There is a palpable expectation of, and commitment to, positive action and consequent improvements.

2 Project Approach

- 2.1 The review has focused primarily on the improved support required for The Pony Club volunteer network which, in turn, has led to the need for staff restructuring and redeployment, and a further consequence is the refinement of management and governance arrangements. However, it has been necessary to look critically at the strategic context, direction and leadership, because these impact significantly on plans for improvement.
- 2.2 Briefly, our approach has been firstly to gather information, through review of documentation, by attending a series of routine scheduled meetings, and by conducting interviews with key individuals, including all the Trustees, most of the committee chairmen, all the staff, several Area Representatives, each of the BODs and other officers, and certain stakeholders.
- 2.3 Secondly, we arranged two online surveys:
 - District Commissioners, Branch Secretaries and other Branch officials;
 - Area Representatives.
- 2.4 Thirdly, we asked the Trustees to complete governance self-evaluation and skills audit questionnaires, and we critically reviewed The Pony Club's governance arrangements.
- 2.5 We facilitated a brainstorm session by the project board (Trustees plus Chief Executive) to help formulate strategic direction, focusing on key improvements and reforms.
- 2.6 We facilitated a similar workshop for all the staff, focusing on priorities for the future.
- 2.7 We reviewed the staff roles and job descriptions in the context of our proposals for improving support for volunteers, revised governance arrangements and the retirement of the accounts staff.
- 2.8 Quite deliberately, we have not spent time on the Centres because they are proprietary and do not generate comparable demands on volunteers as do the Branches. However, we do recognise the importance of Centre Membership and its latent significance for participation levels.
- 2.9 Although it is outside our remit (and indeed expertise), we have reviewed the IT development strategy, as its potential impact on the efforts, workload and efficiency of volunteers is significant.

3 Context of the Review

- 3.1 Throughout its long history, The Pony Club has performed an invaluable role as the promoter and organiser of equestrian leisure activity for young people, not just in the UK (it is affiliated to the British Equestrian Federation) but in 27 countries across the world. It is a voluntary organisation for young people and, in accordance with its charitable objects, The Pony Club:
- 3.1.1 Encourages young people to ride and to learn to enjoy all kinds of sport connected with horses and riding;
 - 3.1.2 Gives instruction in riding and horsemanship;
 - 3.1.3 Educates members to look after and to take proper care of animals;
 - 3.1.4 Promotes the highest ideals of sportsmanship, citizenship and loyalty to create strength of character and self-discipline.
- 3.2 Grass roots activities in the UK are undertaken in 345 semi-autonomous voluntary-run Branches and 570 Centres (mainly proprietary), organised into 19 Areas, and supported by 19 paid staff (including three students) based at Stoneleigh.
- 3.3 Membership currently stands at 29,400 Branch members (falling) and 13,600 Centre members (also falling). Branch activity depends very heavily on the effort put in by an army of volunteers. Numbers are not known for certain but are estimated to be at least 10,000.
- 3.4 Training forms a significant element of organised activity and members in both Branches and Centres graduate through a structured series of tests and achievement badges, all delivered and controlled by a cadre of qualified instructors and examiners operating within detailed, but ever-changing health & safety and child welfare regulations.
- 3.5 The Pony Club's innovative e-learning product, Pony Prep, has proved particularly successful.
- 3.6 The Pony Club annual subscriptions are regularly reviewed but not always increased, partly because unrestricted reserves are above the level recommended by the Charity Commission and partly because of resistance from the membership. However, this is strong case for a small annual increase instead of a periodic larger increase. It was last increased three years ago by 16% from £50 to £58 for Branch members (£24 for Centre Members) and the Board has recently agreed – quite rightly – a modest increase in subscriptions to £61 and £25, but this remains very low in relation to the cost of keeping a pony, equipping the rider and participating in competitions. Moreover, the insurance package is extremely valuable to members, who get £30m liability cover which would otherwise cost them a great deal more than the annual subscription if arranged personally.
- 3.7 60% of the annual subscription is levied to meet the costs of Head Office and those activities not undertaken by Branches or Areas. In response to

criticism about the costs of central administration, details have been published in the Bulletin and website and at this year's Conference.

- 3.8 Although great strides have been made through the creation of an in-house PR/Press/Marketing department, marketing activity needs to be stepped up. The activities of The Pony Club should complement those of BE, BSJ and other senior disciplines, and this would be aided by mutual agreement of a cross-cutting strategy, with particular emphasis on increasing participation (which would help to attract Sport England funding). Similarly, although many sponsors remain loyal and have supported The Pony Club long term, more proactive negotiation could generate better returns both for The Pony Club and for sponsors.
- 3.9 The Branch Operations Directors are a very valuable resource as trouble-shooters and their co-option onto the Equestrian Council is a sound move, providing an effective counterbalance between policy and practice and a useful conduit for developing sensible procedures and rule changes.
- 3.10 Inevitably, there are grumbles about inconsistency of advice – differing views emanating from various sources. All advice – and especially factual answers to specific questions – should be reliable and consistent across The Pony Club. A good start would be a regularly updated and authoritative Frequently Asked Questions section on the website. An application to BEF last year for funding to set up a help desk facility was unsuccessful and has not progressed further for want of resources.

4 Strategic Direction and Leadership

The Pony Club Purpose

- 4.1 In its Rules, The Pony Club describes its purpose as a voluntary youth organisation for young people interested in horses and riding. It is a Registered Charity and, as such, subject to charity legislation and to regulation by the Charity Commission. It is a recognised National Governing Body of Sport and, as an integral part of the British Equestrian network, it should comply with the governance framework and conditions advocated by Sport England and UK Sport, which increasingly are becoming conditions of grant funding.
- 4.2 The purpose of The Pony Club is:
- To encourage young people to ride and to learn to enjoy all kinds of sport connected with horses and riding;
 - To give instruction in riding and horsemastership and to educate Members to look after and to take proper care of animals;
 - To promote the highest ideals of sportsmanship, citizenship and loyalty to create strength of character and self-discipline.
- 4.3 During the course of our work all interviewees and respondents upheld the common purpose of The Pony Club, indeed many went much further and endorsed a culture of 'fun' in achieving the purpose.

Current Strategic Development and Leadership

- 4.4 The purpose of The Pony Club is clear and largely appears to be confirmed when talking to and surveying people, Branches and Centres involved in delivering at the local level. The 'product' – Pony Club training and education – appears to be sound at local level, notwithstanding that many Branches (in particular) appear to be under considerable pressure. The Pony Club also delivers a comprehensive competition programme in staging the annual Championships and a very wide range of local, area, regional and national competitions.
- 4.5 However, coherent or co-ordinated strategic direction and leadership is not demonstrated at Board (Trustee) or Equestrian Council level. Here we found a confused interpretation of leadership with a wide variety of individual agendas and opinions, inadequate understanding of the need to agree a common Pony Club Strategy and Direction, and not enough appreciation of collective responsibility and consistency of direction. Some are determined that The Pony Club should stay as it has always been, some wish to pursue a more radical agenda of modernisation, others appear to be at different points along the spectrum.
- 4.6 At present, The Pony Club has an annual Operational Plan through to 2016 but not a Strategic Development forward plan.
- 4.7 We found confusion between the Terms of Reference and the business actually being handled by the Board of Trustees, Management Committee, Equestrian Council and Area Representatives. All appear to be concerned

with management and day-to-day business rather than strategic thinking. We also detected a degree of tension and mistrust between the different bodies, again symptomatic of the shortcomings in leadership and strategic direction, and indicative of roles and responsibilities not being clearly defined or delineated.

- 4.8 The decision-making process is inefficient, preventing good ideas from Discipline Committees, the Training Committee and other areas of The Pony Club from being quickly worked through the structure for agreement.
- 4.9 Persuasive committee papers are not being put forward leading to logical decision. At Board of Trustees and Equestrian Council level, we found meagre evidence of discussion on where The Pony Club might be in five years time, what opportunities might be available to The Pony Club through external partners, where internally it was important to proceed quickly and make improvements, what are the absolutely key priorities for development and how they should be resourced in terms of making the business case for financial and human resource investment, and so forth. The Trustees, Management Committee and Equestrian Council appear to place limited importance on tracking strategic development progress of The Pony Club.
- 4.10 The Chief Executive officer (CEO) has played a very effective role in stabilising The Pony Club after a period of successive and unsuccessful CEO appointments, but strategic direction and proactive working with external partners now requires significant attention. The role of The Pony Club's CEO in future must be to steer the organisation's strategic direction and raise potential development opportunities within the Board of Trustees and other key Committees. The Pony Club is not enjoying success at the current time in its dealings at a strategic level within the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) and with other potential equestrian partners, and has minimal contact with relevant organisations such as Sport England, UK Sport and the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.
- 4.11 In summary, The Pony Club continues to play an important role in the training and development of young riders but the feeling is that it could do so much more if leadership was strong, if it had an agreed strategic direction that was seeking new opportunities and new partnerships, and if all of the main committees were pulling in the same direction with agreed and complementary roles and responsibilities. The Pony Club does not currently appear to enjoy the confidence of BEF and the other key equestrian organisations, and it does not meet the strategic planning requirements of Sport England and UK Sport.
- 4.12 The remainder of this section looks at the issues that contribute towards developing and agreeing a Strategic Plan and the work that The Pony Club would have to undertake to achieve it.

Participation

- 4.13 According to the National Equestrian Survey undertaken by the British Equestrian Trade Association in 2011, there are 1.6 million people who ride at least once a month in Great Britain. The research estimates that

760,000 (48%) of these riders are under the age of 24, 400,000 (25%) are estimated to be under the age of 16. This latter figure marks a significant drop since the survey was last undertaken in 2006 but is still on a par with results in 1999 when the survey was first undertaken. Reasons that younger people give for dropping out of riding include the cost of riding becoming too expensive for the household budget, a loss of interest, lack of time due to other interests, study and going to University/College, and loss or lack of access to a horse.

- 4.14 In the overall survey, female participation stands at 73% and male 27%, figures that have been roughly consistent across all three surveys over nearly 15 years.
- 4.15 Until very recently, Sport England's Active People Survey has only gathered data for England from age 16 years plus. For equestrianism (which includes an element of Pony Club activity), the latest survey for 2012/13 records weekly participation of 300,800 and monthly participation at an additional 379,200. Active People also records a slight downturn in participation when compared with its earlier research started in 2006.
- 4.16 The Pony Club is open to membership by young people up to 25 years of age. It is understood that the majority of members are in the 8 to 18 age range. As at 2012, The Pony Club had approximately 30,000 GB and Northern Ireland Members across 345 Branches and approximately 15,000 GB and Northern Ireland Members in 580 recognised Centres. Membership has been steadily declining by 2-3% per annum over the past four years and it appears that this trend is continuing in 2013.

Strategic Direction

- 4.17 During the course of our research, and taking into account the survey work undertaken, we ran two interactive workshops: one with the Board of Trustees and one with the professional staff team based at Stoneleigh.
- 4.18 We asked both groups to identify the direction that The Pony Club might take over this next five year period. We also prompted discussion in some areas based on our findings. There was a lot of similarity between the answers received from both workshops. The results are summarised below.
- 4.19 **Pony Club Purpose and Quality:** Both groups were absolutely sure that they wanted to see the purpose and quality of The Pony Club experience upheld.
- 4.20 **Balance between Support for Branches, Training & Education, and Competition:** Almost inevitably this attracted a lot of debate but, based on the premise that The Pony Club is first and foremost a 'training organisation', opinion within the groups (confirmed by the surveys) was that more support should be provided for Branches, Areas and Centres, with more emphasis and support for Training & Instruction.

- 4.21 There was considerable debate around the competition programme, with some proffering a view that there is too much support for a minority of the membership whilst others felt that the current level of competition is about right. It was believed that the quality of some competitive opportunities could be improved and perhaps different methods of organisation might be explored. There was the feeling that competition should not be allowed to expand further without very good reason, as volunteers and the professional team are already under pressure.
- 4.22 **Membership:** There was a lot of debate around membership. Most thought that the reason for declining membership was the recession and this would certainly seem to be borne out by the National Equestrian Survey (as reported above). However, levels of activity in 2011 were still above those reported in 1999 and, if the survey figure of 400,000 regular riders in the under-16 category is really true, The Pony Club should have the prospect of a considerable market to exploit. The view is that there is an opportunity to halt the decline in membership, to explore new areas of potential membership, and to ensure that Centres are enrolling all of their young people who undertake Pony Club activities.
- 4.23 If a membership drive becomes a strategic priority, it needs to be well planned. There is already a Membership Working Group within the professional staff team but it needs the support of the Board of Trustees and the Equestrian Council to really gain impetus. A Membership Plan in its own right needs to contribute to, and be an integral part of, the Strategic Direction Plan.
- 4.24 It has been impossible to take into account all of the issues as part of our work but key issues that need resolution include the following:
- 4.24.1 The Pony Club needs to undertake research on an ongoing basis to really understand the thinking and motivation of its members, and also potential and lapsed members. Insight is required at the different age group levels. The thinking of young people today, particularly teenagers, is alien to many of the older volunteers and organisers in sport, and The Pony Club will be no exception.
 - 4.24.2 From this kind of analysis, The Pony Club could gain valuable insight into potential membership at Branch level, where it might provide quality support to promote, enrol, and sustain prospective members, and also within Centres, where perhaps the major drive would be to introduce prospective members to equestrian education and instruction.
 - 4.24.3 Perhaps The Pony Club needs to think more carefully about where it targets its initial membership activity. Would it be better to go after younger members almost as a follow-on from the successful 'Pony Prep', the fun and educational product, and accept that a small proportion of the older teenage members will aspire to move towards the specialist disciplines because that is where they perceive is to be found the kudos and higher performance of the sport? Are Centre members an easy target? In other words, where should The Pony Club's limited resources best be targeted?

- 4.24.4 In complete contrast, London 2012 and other medallists should be used to demonstrate how The Pony Club provided the basis for their individual success, putting them on the talent pathway to success. Also, how can the proposed 'Ambassadors' be used as role models and case studies to attract new members?
- 4.24.5 Finally, what is the strategy to ensure the retention of members, once captured, in terms of enjoyment and quality training and instruction?
- 4.25 It is worth bearing in mind that, if The Pony Club goes on a membership drive, it is essential that Branches and Centres are able to cope with an influx of potential new members and maintain the quality of delivery.
- 4.26 **Health & Safety, Child Welfare and Equality Policies:** Whilst we have been undertaking this work, The Pony Club commissioned a short audit of its policies and processes relating to Health & Safety, Child Welfare and Equality. We have had sight of the report and it does suggest that these areas of work need to be part of The Pony Club's strategic direction and that Child Welfare and Equality, in particular, could be further strengthened. The Pony Club should work towards attaining some of the recognised standards in the sporting framework through the Child Protection in Sport Unit and Sporting Equals.
- 4.27 We recognise that the current Chairman of Health & Safety Committee is highly skilled in this area of activity but The Pony Club is very reliant, too reliant, on one individual volunteer and there does not seem to be a great deal of qualified back-up available. We believe that succession planning, extra resource and back-up in this area should be a short-term strategic objective.
- 4.28 **Support for Branches and Areas, and Centres:** There was unanimous support for improved services both for individual Branches and for Areas. Support for Centres also needs to be reviewed and improved.
- 4.29 Further research is required but a systematic programme of ongoing support is required, particularly training. At Branch level, for example, discussion centred around enhanced District Commissioner training on an ongoing basis, not just one-off; similarly Branch Treasurer training for a position that seems to be becoming more onerous annually. Other support mechanisms include: more mentoring when a handover of position is scheduled; significantly improved processes and systems including consistent, simple standardised templates; improved Health & Safety, Child Welfare and Equality training; dedicated support at Head Office; fewer rule changes and simpler, less ambiguous interpretation; improved consistency of advice; improved simple communication; clearer job descriptions.
- 4.30 A similar exercise is needed at Area level where the workload is just too high for a volunteer network at present, and again for Centres.
- 4.31 **Systems and Processes:** This is perhaps more of an operational issue but merits becoming a strategic priority project for the immediate future

as it does require significant attention. Put quite simply, The Pony Club is not keeping up with the demands of members, Branches and Centres in particular, or with their expectations as technology advances. This applies to Area Representatives as well, where there are opportunities for more efficient working.

- 4.32 There is an agreed schedule for the delivery of already planned improvements to systems and databases but the developers are already 'fully booked' until 2015. If the proposed strategic direction of providing more support to Areas, Centres and Branches is adopted as a priority, it will require additional developer(s) and resources, certainly in the short to medium term. Similarly, there are plans to streamline and centralise the membership system which would be a major and much needed development.
- 4.33 We believe that the development of systems and processes should be accelerated as this should lead to improvements in efficiency and release some pressure and time for both volunteers and the staff to devote to enhanced support. Robust, efficient systems and processes will also ensure more consistency across the organisation.
- 4.34 A detailed Project Plan will be required and the development team should have very clear responsibilities, some servicing day-to-day needs, some dedicated to the longer term improvements. The outline and purpose of the Project should be communicated properly throughout The Pony Club to explain that developments will take some time, although there will be some quick wins. Acceleration of the development programme will lead to improved systems and methods of working. Once agreed, the Project Plan should be regularly reviewed, with each individual sub-project being assessed and risk-rated on an honest basis.
- 4.35 **Relationships with other Disciplines and Organisations:** Within the individual equestrian disciplines, relationships would appear to be quite good, in that there are crossovers on Discipline Committees, a lot of co-working at competitions and other events, and Pony Club personnel are often involved in a voluntary capacity or on committees of the senior discipline Governing Bodies.
- 4.36 However, as our Review progressed, we became aware that on a strategic level The Pony Club is not currently seen by most external bodies as a sufficiently progressive organisation with the tools and development expertise to contribute towards increased participation in equestrian sport.
- 4.37 The Pony Club attends BEF Committees, and indeed contributes to BEF programmes and initiatives, but at present BEF does not feel that The Pony Club has its governance at either a level of best practice or the levels now increasingly being demanded by funding bodies such as Sport England and UK Sport. BEF, and increasingly the disciplines, are being driven by Sport England (in particular) to meet challenging participation targets and they do not feel that The Pony Club is currently geared up to either impact on increased participation, nor to fully meet Sport England's Conditions of Grant.

- 4.38 The BEF framework affords The Pony Club very little opportunity to meet with officials at Sport England and UK Sport. We believe that The Pony Club should have a direct relationship with Sport England if only to fully understand their current policies, the opportunities for other forms of support, and other grant funding programmes. Similarly, Sport England should be far more aware of an organisation that is wholly focused on their 14-25 target market, particularly the 14-18 age range.
- 4.39 We believe that The Pony Club has higher priorities to address initially, as described above and in the rest of this Report. We do also believe that the new Chairman, and the Chief Executive, should at the appropriate time become much more proactive in talking regularly to the other equestrian organisations, BEF, Sport England and other relevant bodies and potential partners. When preparations begin in 2015 for the next Whole Sport Plan round 2017-2021, the express aim must be that The Pony Club is seen as a 'fit for purpose' strategic development partner that can take some lead in developing participation for young people and the initial stages of the talent pathway.
- 4.40 **Volunteers:** The Pony Club is hugely dependent upon its volunteer network. We think that a Volunteer Reward Strategy should be put into place along the lines of best practice that other National Governing Bodies adopt. We commend the Cubitt Awards but it is at the 'dedicated' end of the scale of volunteer support, 20 years, and we believe that there must be a much better reward or recognition process for equally committed volunteers who put in service of say 5, 10, and 15 years, and for those volunteers who make an outstanding impact.
- 4.41 **Ambassador Group:** From our research, it is evident that there is a very significant age gap between the active Pony Club member at local level and the individuals serving on the Board of Trustees, Equestrian Council, and other key committees. We would urge The Pony Club to take advantage of the proposed Ambassador Group to form a 'Young Pony Club' shadow Board to feed thoughts and ideas into the wider Pony Club structure. If managed and used properly, this could become a significant development, entailing a limited number of annual meetings but taking advantage of Skype communication and social media. In the medium term, it should also become a vehicle to find good younger contributors and potential longer-term volunteers who might join Discipline Committees and even become future Trustees.

Other strategic issues

- 4.42 During the course of the two workshops, some discussion centred around **Social Media** which is obviously very important to most Pony Club members (being of the younger generation). The Pony Club has a Code of Conduct and a very positive positioning on both Facebook (c.31,000 'Like') and Twitter (c.14,000 'Follow'). Younger members of the professional staff team who are social media-literate feel that generally The Pony Club's use of social media is very positive and the guidelines clear but almost inevitably some members (or their parents) choose not to comply with the stated policies and this causes individual incidents. Strategically, The Pony Club just needs to continue to take advantage of

the opportunities presented by social media and deal with infractions pragmatically.

4.43 **Rules** were discussed at some length. In the surveys, revisions to existing rules and the introduction of new rules were reported as a source of frustration at Branch level. All accept that Rules need to be in place, particularly in the interests of safety and child welfare, but the plea is to keep them as simple as possible, don't make them intimidating to members and competitors, don't make changes or additions unless absolutely necessary, and think more about the implications of one rule change for other rules. It was also suggested that organisational rules should be made available to members and parents in a common format at Branch and Centre level from day one, through a digital media pack or website stream.

5 Proposals for Volunteer Support

- 5.1 The primary focus of this Review has been on proposals for providing improved support for The Pony Club's sizeable volunteer network. Given that the membership is predominantly young, from small children and up to 25 years of age, it is inevitable that the running of Branch activities relies heavily on adult volunteers, many of them parents of members but also a large contingent of ex-members who have willingly stayed on to help out.
- 5.2 The burden on volunteers has increased steadily over the years, partly because the range of competitive activities and disciplines has widened, but also because the sport – like so many others – is beset by necessary but burgeoning Health & Safety and Child Welfare requirements which have led to more rules, regulations and procedures for compliance.
- 5.3 With an increasing number of disciplines, the calendar of Pony Club events is becoming ever more crowded, and includes the annual Championships as well as numerous competitions at local, area and national level for individuals and teams within each of the nine disciplines.
- 5.4 Partially (but not wholly) because of difficulties in finding/arranging the right level of instruction (the instructor training programme is crucial in this respect), many Branches report a perceptible change in emphasis from youth training towards more and varied competitive events, leading to even greater pressure on volunteers, both in terms of organisation and by way of demands and expectations from a minority of members and their parents. There are 156 scheduled Area competitions alone.
- 5.5 Two confidential online surveys were undertaken: one was directed at District Commissioners and other Branch officials, and the other addressed to Area Representatives. Their principal purpose was to determine how best to support the army of volunteers upon whom The Pony Club depends to keep its activities running.
- 5.6 A total of 467 forms were received in response to the DCs/Branches survey which, with 345 Branches, represents an average of 1.35 per Branch. In all, 9,306 answers were received to the 22 questions, including 3,822 thoughtful and constructive comments, and the full report ran to 226 pages. There were 14 responses to the Area Reps survey, with 268 answers to the 20 questions, including 147 comments. The key messages from the surveys are summarised below.
- 5.7 District Commissioners and other Branch officials were asked about the most demanding pressures they come under in fulfilling their respective functions:
- Over-reliance on existing volunteers, parents unwilling to commit, lack of understanding about unpaid effort;
 - Disproportionate emphasis on competitions;
 - Over-bureaucratic administration and financial systems;
 - Inadequate communications systems.

5.8 Area Representatives were asked the same question:

- Timescale for Area competitions too tight before Championships;
- Attendance at four weekends of Championships;
- Pressure from parents to put children in teams;
- Uncoordinated training dates;
- Lack of commitment from instructors.

5.9 We asked how the respondent's role could be improved or made more effective:

- Reduced bureaucracy and administration, clearer and simpler procedures, more standardised forms/templates and other downloadable resources;
- Improved IT systems/databases;
- Handbooks for Area Rep and Branch roles;
- More training for DCs and other Branch officials (especially treasurers);
- Definitive, authoritative, expert advice and support on health & safety, child welfare and other risk issues;
- More promotion of The Pony Club as a youth training organisation;
- Guidance on parental responsibilities (ie. as volunteers) and on appropriate use of social media.

5.10 The Area Representatives offered further suggestions:

- Consistent guidance/decisions from all Pony Club forums (Equestrian Council, Board, CEO, staff);
- More dialogue between ARs to share experiences and agree common policies on Branch problems;
- More training of all types (eg. officials, IT);
- Better tools (AR manual, templates, IT);
- Area Training Officer/Coordinators [these have already been appointed by some ARs, and found to be of great value];
- Dedicated staff support at head office for ARs.

5.11 We asked for ideas on how to attract more volunteers:

- Incentive/reward system, eg. points, vouchers, complimentary tickets to events, subsidised courses, contribution towards petrol costs, references for jobs/college/university;
- Fair delegation of tasks, not exploitation;
- Requirement to volunteer an agreed number of days per year;
- Clearly defined roles/jobs/tasks;
- Offer training opportunities;
- Better information, eg. volunteer welcome pack, parents Q&A session;

- Keep asking but show more appreciation, recognition, and don't forget to say thank you;
- Less focus on competition and more on having fun;
- Cut down on rules and regulations;
- Rationalise the number and frequency of tests;
- Share volunteers with British Eventing, British Show Jumping and British Dressage.

5.12 Branches were asked about the relevance of the Area Representative at Branch level:

- There were a wide range of opinions, some ARs were very much appreciated, others were regarded as inactive or even invisible;
- The AR role should include advice and support for Branches, area competitions, training, tests, accreditation of Centres and instructors, liaison with HQ (although there is a need for pragmatism);
- Though stretched (especially if the Area is large), the AR should attend at least one meeting at each Branch per year;
- Some ARs seem strongly opposed to change, with a defiant attitude towards modernisation.

5.13 The Area Representatives were asked to explain their role (as they understand it):

- To provide a link between head office and Branches, and also between grass roots and the Equestrian Council;
- As a source of information/guidance for District Commissioners;
- To be aware of and understand wider Pony Club issues;
- To organise Area competitions, tests, instructors, courses;
- To provide, or arrange access to, extra support and encouragement when needed;
- Problem-solving.

5.14 The following suggestions were offered to improve the relationship between Branches and Area Representatives:

- The Area Rep role should be more clearly defined;
- Area Reps should consult with both head office and the District Commissioner before responding to issues;
- Avoid favouritism, be fair to all;
- Better communications and website;
- More frequent Area meetings, visits to Branches, surgeries, help with parents;
- Local training and encourage mutual (ie. inter-Branch) support.

5.15 Branches were asked about the relevance of head office (Stoneleigh) at Branch level:

- Again there was a wide range of opinions, some very complimentary, some very critical;
- Perception of the head office role is at best unclear, certainly misunderstood, often not valued and even considered irrelevant;
- Knowledgeable staff are not always available at the time of an enquiry;
- Disparities often arise between advice received from head office and that given by the Area Rep or DC;
- A perception of one-way traffic, in terms of rules, directives, burdensome administration, imposed IT systems.

5.16 Area Reps offered their own take on the relevance to Branches of head office:

- There was general agreement that head office provided centralised records, standards, stationery, merchandising, website, rule changes, advice, support and organisation of disciplines (including competitions);
- However, there were differing perceptions:
 - Head office provides the basis for the structure of Branches, background support and information;
 - Branches are responsible for running their own activities with little help from head office but much more from the Area Rep;
 - Head office is too remote, with inadequate communications;
 - Too much time is spent on the Championships.

5.17 The following suggestions were offered to improve the relationship between head office and ARs and Branches:

- Aim for simplicity in everything, especially rules and policies;
- Focus more on grass roots members, and less on competitive disciplines;
- Provide practical support for Branches and their volunteers, including training and workshops;
- Align head office staff to Areas in preference to disciplines (which has led to divided loyalties);
- Head office staff need a better understanding of Branches and how they work, gained through visits, attendance at meetings etc.
- By the same token, Area Reps and Branch officials need a better understanding of the head office role (including the Chief Executive's function) and of Pony Club finances (ie. how capitation is spent);
- Both head office and Branches need a better understanding of the Area Rep's role and their relevance to Branches;
- Across the board, there needs to be more awareness, understanding and appreciation of the Scottish and Northern Ireland perspectives,

particularly with regard to legislative and regulatory differences (eg. child welfare);

- There would be value in producing an Area Reps manual, and all new Area Reps should be assigned a mentor for their first year;
- Role and job descriptions for all staff and all officials published in the Year Book;
- Improved training – resources, events, workshops, mentoring;
- FAQs on the website;
- Clearer guidance on procedures;
- A consistent approach when dealing with parents, complaints etc;
- Improvements to IT systems and support, and improved functionality for the membership database;
- Streamline the committee structure, and hold some of the meetings locally so that travel is easier for some attendees;
- More consultation over appointments or employment for specific roles;
- Down-scale competitions and Championships.

5.18 Finally, all survey respondents were asked to comment on how The Pony Club could improve its support and services to volunteers:

- More recognition, thanks, incentives;
- Better information on the roles, benefits and rewards of volunteering/helping;
- Guidance on each job/role in a Branch or Area, and on recruitment and succession planning;
- Advice on organising activities, funding, DBS/H&S checklists, legal responsibilities;
- Manual for parents – what is expected of them, what they can expect from The Pony Club, explain the dependence on volunteers to run Branches and how it keeps down costs and subscriptions;
- Explanation of the rationale behind rules and the need for consistency and fairness;
- More localised training, peer support, cheap short courses, online training;
- Reduce the number and scale of competitions, and value the less competitive members more highly;
- Rationalise testing to mandatory and optional;
- Transparent accounting (and stop charging for postage on orders for Branch essentials);
- Simplify accounting procedures to reduce drop-out rate for treasurers;
- Encourage Branches to help each other by sharing the workload, eg. joint camps;

- Consider whether the current business model (relying on volunteers) is sustainable. Would salaried Regional Development Officers give better support to Branches?
- The relationship between head office and Branches must be improved. Distrust and misapprehensions should be dispelled by better mutual understanding;
- Stronger alliances with BEF, and all of the member organisations who come under the BEF umbrella.

5.19 The response to the surveys (which covered all Areas and equated to more than one per Branch) demonstrated the passion, enthusiasm and commitment present within The Pony Club structure and volunteer network. It was very encouraging to receive so many thoughtful and constructive comments/suggestions. Not all are practical, of course, and many relate to the culture of the organisation. However, there does seem to be such an appetite for, and expectation of, improved support for volunteers that it should feature prominently in The Pony Club's strategic priorities.

5.20 Some improvements are relatively easy and quick to introduce and will be immediately effective. Other changes that are needed will take a while to implement and even longer to bear fruit but appropriate steps should be taken nevertheless. All require additional or redeployed resources, with commensurate implications for staff (examined in more detail in section 7 below).

5.21 Proposals for 'quick fixes' include:

- 5.21.1 Frequently Asked Questions page (regularly updated) on The Pony Club website;
- 5.21.2 Welcome pack for new volunteers (backed up by regular recognition and thanks), including guidance on different roles, satisfaction and benefits of volunteering, how to deal with children and parents etc;
- 5.21.3 Guidance on how to get the best out of volunteers, including the allocation of important but not overly onerous tasks, the encouragement of team effort, taster sessions for new helpers, short courses, etc;
- 5.21.4 Q&A session and code of conduct for parents, explaining their role and expected behaviour; could even produce a handbook for parents explaining what is expected of them and what they can expect from The Pony Club, emphasising the dependence on volunteers (including parents) to run Branches and how it keeps down costs and subscriptions;
- 5.21.5 More centrally downloadable resources, templates, standardised forms, and clearer procedures/guidance on administration;
- 5.21.6 Role/job descriptions for Area Representatives, Area Training Coordinators, District Commissioners, Branch secretaries, Branch treasurers, and other Branch officials, setting out clearly respective responsibilities and relationships;

- 5.21.7 Handbook on various Branch roles and activities, including tips on organisation of rallies, camps, competitions, and emphasising the importance of encouraging everyone to help in some way (eg. first aiders, caterers, course builders, membership secretaries etc);
- 5.21.8 More interaction between Branches, encouraging mutual support and sharing of experiences, resources and best practice;
- 5.21.9 Readily available instruction and training in better use of IT tools;
- 5.21.10 Agreed protocol that ensures consistent handling of complaints (eg. from parents);
- 5.21.11 Photographs and contact details on main Pony Club website of all Equestrian Council members and all Stoneleigh staff, and (on Area websites) all ARs and DCs;
- 5.21.12 All new Pony Club committee members to be assigned a mentor.

5.22 Proposals for longer term improvements include:

- 5.22.1 Authoritative (ie. qualified) helpline for health & safety, child welfare and risk assessment issues;
- 5.22.2 Introduce improvements to databases and other IT systems (see 4.31 above) with online membership renewal, guidance on functionality and a better search facility;
- 5.22.3 Enhanced online registration, bookings and payment for events, rallies etc;
- 5.22.4 Enhanced online web ordering for supplies (eg. certificates, hat tags etc.);
- 5.22.5 Simple accounts software package for use by branch treasurers;
- 5.22.6 Extension of training for ARs, DCs, Branch treasurers, Chief Instructors etc. (including periodic refreshers), delivered at a more local level, and encourage more peer support;
- 5.22.7 Introduce enhanced recognition scheme for volunteers at shorter intervals than Cubitt Awards;
- 5.22.8 Consider the introduction of incentives/rewards for volunteers;
- 5.22.9 Offer short, subsidised courses locally (even online) for volunteers, with accreditation/certification by way of encouragement;
- 5.22.10 Introduce Volunteer Liaison Officer(s) to coordinate development of a pool of volunteers who can provide mutual support across Branches/Areas.
- 5.22.11 Revised Rule Book, simplified as much as possible, with fewer changes and careful consideration of practical application especially at Branch level (see 6.59 below);
- 5.22.12 When better supported, Area Reps to ensure higher visibility, at least one visit to each Branch per year, more frequent Area meetings or 'surgeries';
- 5.22.13 Role and job descriptions for Chief Executive and all other staff, and how they interrelate within The Pony Club structure, published in

Year Book to enhance understanding of the support mechanisms available;

- 5.22.14 Each member of Pony Club staff to visit a Branch and shadow the DC or other official to help them understand how branches work and to explain the work of head office;
 - 5.22.15 Occasionally hold Pony Club Board/EC/committee meetings at different locations around the country to facilitate travel for some members and receive presentation by local Area/Branches;
 - 5.22.16 Review scale and cost of the Championships and consider outsourcing organisation of the event, although it is acknowledged that The Pony Club has a contracted commitment to stage the event at Cholmondeley Castle for the next three year period.
- 5.23 It is acknowledged and recognised that to even begin to implement these improvements will require commitment, dedication, increased effort and additional resources, but the strength of feeling and expectations expressed by the 480+ respondents to our surveys are compelling reasons for decisive and determined action.

6 Proposals for Future Governance

- 6.1 Governance was formerly vested in The Pony Club Council, a large and somewhat unwieldy body of 32 Trustees, but in September 2008 the Council (precursor of the Board of Trustees and Equestrian Council which emerged from the restructuring) adopted the principles expounded in the so-called 'Purple Paper'¹ with minor amendments.
- 6.2 The proposal for two Area Representatives to be Elected Trustees was agreed and the first two nominees were elected to the inaugural Board at the Council meeting in November 2008. At that meeting, all other members of the Council (apart from the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Chairman of Centre Membership) tendered their resignations, becoming in due course members of the new Equestrian Council and leaving governance in the hands of the new Board of Trustees.
- 6.3 Thus a new structure was approved which reduced the board of directors of the company (limited by guarantee, with charitable status) to a maximum of twelve Trustees, one-third of whom should retire annually by rotation, although there have only been seven in post (six at present) which makes this requirement impractical.
- 6.4 Proposals for the new governance structure that were set out in the 'Purple Paper' were not fully enacted explicitly or indeed implicitly, albeit on the advice of the then legal advisors to The Pony Club. Although there is some measure of consistency, the proposals are not mirrored fully in the revised (and extant) Memorandum & Articles of Association approved and adopted with effect from 21st November 2008, or in The Pony Club Rules. In fact, there is inconsistency between the M&AA and the Rules in a number of respects.
- 6.5 Below the Board of Trustees, according to the Rules but not the M&AA, sits the Equestrian Council. It comprises three members of the Board (Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer), all nineteen Area Representatives, the chairmen of all nine Competitive Disciplines Committees, the chairman of Training Committee, the chairman of Centre Membership Committee and the chairman of Health & Safety Committee, a total of 34 (supplemented recently by the co-option of the three Branch Operations Directors).
- 6.6 These are all deemed (and registered as such) to be voting members of The Pony Club company in accordance with Article 1.2. In such capacity, they exercise influence if not control over appointment of the Board, insofar as a Trustee must be a member of the company (and therefore the Equestrian Council, although this is not explicit). In point of fact, both the M&AA and the Rules make provision for non-members to hold office, even that of Chairman.
- 6.7 The Rules reflect the Purple Paper in that the Chairman of The Pony Club is to be appointed by the Board after consultation with the Equestrian

¹ The term 'Purple Paper' was used simply because the document was produced using purple stock.

Council, whose recommendation the Board is not obliged to accept. A similar arrangement applies to the appointment of Vice-Chairman. However, the M&AA empowers the Board to appoint a Chairman from among their number but makes no provision for advice from the Equestrian Council and does not even mention the office of Vice-Chairman. Neither does the M&AA stipulate the nomination of two Area Representatives as Elected Trustees.

- 6.8 In a further twist, the Board of Trustees is empowered to appoint a Treasurer but not necessarily from among their number and therefore not necessarily a Trustee. The Rules also provide for a Treasurer appointed by the Board, for a three-year term but eligible for re-appointment.
- 6.9 Finally, the Board may at any time co-opt additional Trustees to fill vacancies or to augment their number (subject to the maximum of twelve and to ratification – by the members, ie. Equestrian Council – at the next AGM). The Purple Paper proposed no fewer than three Non-Executive Appointed Trustees with particular expertise eg. legal, financial, property or merchandising, but the Board currently only has one.
- 6.10 The role of the Board of Trustees is described in the Rules but it needs formal Terms of Reference, as does the Equestrian Council, Management Committee and other Committees.
- 6.11 In the absence of these Terms of Reference, the Board focuses more on executive management of The Pony Club than on strategic direction and it duplicates in part the Management Committee.
- 6.12 In that respect there is also overlap with the Equestrian Council, although some key decisions – on equestrian matters – are taken in this forum rather than by the Board and the EC members have also asked specifically to be kept informed of financial issues.
- 6.13 Add to the mix the Area Representatives Committee and numerous other committees and the overall governance structure of The Pony Club comprises many of the same people, with inherent inefficiency and possibly disproportionate levels of influence.
- 6.14 The Audit Committee does not seem to be effective as currently constituted and a case might be made for its functions to be discharged by the Board (if and when its composition and terms of reference are revised). However, the Appeals process – whereby the Management Committee selects a small panel to adjudicate on complaints – is now more effective and no change is necessary.
- 6.15 However, although thresholds have been set for financial authorities, it would be sensible for the Board to agree a scheme of delegation for non-financial decision-making to facilitate their concentration on strategic rather than management and operational issues.
- 6.16 In the absence of a standardised format, stated purpose, clearly articulated subject for debate or decision, and with no formal presentation or explanatory remarks, Board and committee agenda papers mostly

comprise factual statements from staff and they rarely prompt any meaningful discussion (particularly if tabled). Standard templates should be introduced, including purpose of report, content, evaluation (quantitative and/or qualitative), conclusions, proposals, impact and wider implications, and recommendations.

- 6.17 Management accounts are presented by the Treasurer at each Management Committee meeting, and demonstrate close monitoring of performance against budget, including comparison with the previous year. However, greater understanding and more informed debate is required. A similar lack of awareness and understanding applies to the IT strategy, its implementation and its importance in delivering key developmental objectives.
- 6.18 The roles and responsibilities of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Trustee respectively all need to be properly defined and understood. Moreover, the Chairman's working relationship with the Chief Executive needs to be clarified, explicit and effective.
- 6.19 The Trustees' individual self-evaluation of their governance of The Pony Club through the Board provided the following indications:
- 6.19.1 The Trustees concede that their understanding of the Board's role and responsibilities, its consensus and unity in decision-making, and their focus on policy and strategy all left room for improvement;
 - 6.19.2 They acknowledge shortcomings in monitoring and assessment of performance, both of the Board and its committees and of the Chief Executive, exacerbated by inadequate terms of reference and role descriptions;
 - 6.19.3 The Board currently contains insufficient range of expertise and diversity to make it a fully effective governing body, and it needs improved procedures for the recruitment of Trustees.
- 6.20 Succession planning is vital for all voluntary positions. The process for appointing the successors to current office- and post-holders is far from clear. Voting requirements are ambiguous. Terms of office are generally for three years, albeit renewable, but it would be sensible to limit this as far as possible to two or three consecutive terms.
- 6.21 The Board of Trustees currently has at least one vacancy (following the resignation of Jeremy Franks) but should augment its ranks with at least three more members to introduce missing or additional expertise (see below). It would also alleviate dependence on a few key individuals. Recruitment of additional independent members could be considered and should perhaps include someone with greater influence in the wider equestrian world to represent the interests of The Pony Club (somewhat overshadowed at present by the more senior member bodies of the British Equestrian Federation).
- 6.22 The skills set of the Board needs to be enhanced, partly by training, and additional Trustees should be recruited to provide requisite expertise.

Skills analysis and TrioPlus observation indicate weaknesses currently in strategic planning, leadership, management, communications, marketing, commercial experience and finance.

- 6.23 Although an outline procedure exists, a comprehensive and interactive induction programme is required for new Trustees/Board members, with their roles and expected contributions clearly explained and an appointed mentor.
- 6.24 The 2011 audit reported the absence of a Register of Interests and this must be created and maintained, even though a requirement is included on all agendas for Trustees and committee members to declare any interest, financial or otherwise. A Code of Conduct for Trustees should be adopted as well.
- 6.25 Although described in the Year Book, the roles and responsibilities for Area Representatives are onerous, but lack objectives and annual targets. Performance is not monitored formally (the surveys indicate that some ARs are under-performing or even ineffective). There is some anecdotal evidence that decisions taken at AR or EC meetings are not always conveyed or enforced consistently at Branch level.
- 6.26 Role descriptions for Branch Operations Directors do not appear to exist, and those for District Commissioners are listed in the Year Book but are not universally followed. Although the duties and responsibilities for Regional Centre Co-ordinators are set out in the Rules, it is not clear whether they are provided with formal terms of contractual engagement.
- 6.27 The Rules are very detailed and are regularly reviewed in response to changing circumstances and interventions, but revisions – usually drafted by the Treasurer – are agreed through a very convoluted process that involves several tiers of committees and final ratification by the Board of Trustees (acting through the Equestrian Council in equestrian matters). Separate Rule Books are produced and printed for each of the nine disciplines which, whilst it may seem more convenient, certainly generates more work and can lead to inconsistency.

Roles of the Chairman and Chief Executive

- 6.28 The relationship between the Chairman and the Chief Executive of any organisation is critical and a cornerstone to good governance and the effectiveness and future leadership, and it must be addressed as part of the outcome of this Review.
- 6.29 To provide clarity going forward, we have laid out below some of the key duties of both a Chairman and a Chief Executive that must be incorporated into revised role/job descriptions, which should also detail the specific Pony Club requirements for each individual.
- 6.30 Under commonly accepted best governance practice, the Chairman of an organisation should ensure that:
- 6.30.1 The Board carries out its essential functions effectively and efficiently, making certain that:

- The Board takes full account of any external guidance or legislation in reaching decisions;
- All planned business is dealt with and a conclusion is reached in each case;
- All decisions by the Board are clearly and accurately minuted;
- The Board delegates sufficient authority to its Committees and to its Chief Executive;
- The Board takes urgent actions or decisions where it is necessary to do so;
- Regular reports on the organisation's financial performance are put before the Board and that Board members understand what the reports are telling them;
- The Board takes professional advice when necessary;
- There is an awareness of how Board and Committee business should be conducted, that at Board level the focus is on strategic issues and that agendas and meetings are managed, prioritised and time bounded.

6.30.2 As part of his/her general responsibilities, the Chairman has a duty to:

- Ensure that Board members contribute fully at Board meetings, during Committee work and provide informal feedback and encouragement;
- Foster a team approach;
- Expect that Board members support the Chairman under collective responsibility;
- Identify any training requirements for him/herself, other individual Board members and the Board as a collective.

6.30.3 The Chairman, whilst retaining the right of constructive challenge and criticism, must develop an effective working relationship with the Chief Executive to:

- Oversee the implementation of Board and Committee decisions;
- Agree the annual targets of the Chief Executive;
- Undertake the annual performance assessment of the Chief Executive;
- Manage the timely and orderly recruitment of a new Chief Executive when required;
- Ensure that, as a non-executive director, the Chairman retains the right of constructive challenge and criticism.

6.30.4 The Chairman will represent the organisation externally as appropriate.

6.30.5 The Chairman will take a lead as appropriate in the handling of any delicate issues involving senior volunteers.

- 6.31 Similarly, best practice expects that the Chief Executive of an organisation has overall responsibility for the executive management and is personally accountable to the Board for the exercise of that responsibility. The Chief Executive is:
- 6.31.1 Accountable for the management arrangements, including the senior management structure;
 - 6.31.2 Responsible for proactively assisting and advising the Chairman and the Board on policies and forward Strategy;
 - 6.31.3 Responsible for ensuring that the wishes of the Board are carried out;
 - 6.31.4 Responsible for drawing the Board's attention to matters it should consider and decide;
 - 6.31.5 Responsible for keeping the Board fully informed of any issues that may have potential ramifications for the organisation;
 - 6.31.6 Responsible for ensuring that the Board receives regular Reports on the organisation's financial and non-financial performance;
 - 6.31.7 Responsible for ensuring that the organisation is open, responsive and supportive to the Board and individual Board members;
 - 6.31.8 Responsible for the enhancement of relationships with key and relevant external organisations;
 - 6.31.9 Responsible for representing the organisation at appropriate events and using them as an opportunity to enhance the reputation and performance of the organisation.
- 6.32 In summary, the Chairman and Chief Executive of The Pony Club both have critical roles to play and it is essential that they have a good and mutually understanding relationship to ensure that the organisation moves forward efficiently and effectively.

Professional Staff Team

- 6.33 We also conducted a one-to-one interview with each full-time member of the professional staff team based at The Pony Club office, Stoneleigh.
- 6.34 The professional team exists because The Pony Club has, at various points in time, decided that particular areas of work needed to have a dedicated staff function. If the professional team did not exist that work would of course have to be undertaken by volunteers, thus increasing their workload and pressure, or not be undertaken at all. Furthermore, Stoneleigh is not really the 'Head Office' or 'Headquarters' of The Pony Club, because that function is discharged by the Committees comprised wholly of volunteers. Perhaps in future Stoneleigh should be regarded as The Pony Club 'Support Centre'.
- 6.35 We also conducted a workshop with the professional team to provide feedback on the surveys undertaken with Branches and Area Representatives, and to look at The Pony Club current and possible future activity.

- 6.36 We found the team to be very committed to, and enthusiastic about, The Pony Club in general and their own specific areas of activity. Overall they appear fairly stretched; there is little cover when somebody is away and there is very limited capacity to take on additional duties without further resources. Morale has not been high in recent times, partly due to the pressure of work but also a real feeling that a 'divide' is appearing between the full-time paid staff and some of the volunteers. The team do not feel they enjoy the full support of Trustees and the senior committees. Individual staff also highlighted a small number of incidents with volunteers that do a disservice to The Pony Club's reputation for, and values of, politeness and respect. These quite frankly are not acceptable and need to be dealt with jointly by the Chairman and Chief Executive. The team also feel that, if they were consulted, they could help the Board and Trustees more in their policy and strategy work. There would appear to be a good working relationship with the individual disciplines.
- 6.37 We explained how the Branch and Area surveys had raised issues of how enquirers perceived they were handled by members of the team and received feedback that the team also felt they had strained relationships with some volunteers. We also explained about the issue of consistency of advice whilst accepting that some 'play the system' for the answer they want to hear. These issues have to be addressed by both the professional team and by volunteers going forward, as both are on 'the same side'.
- 6.38 At present, there is no career progression and no personal development or training plan for individual members of the team. This is a concern and should be rectified, certainly in the case of personal development and training.
- 6.39 The general view was that The Pony Club still adhered to too many outdated practices and processes and that modernisation would bring economies in time and effort, whilst improving efficiency. The professional team was fully supportive of most of the measures being suggested by Branches and Areas.
- 6.40 Finally, through the workshop, the team fed into potential strategic direction and confirmed that they want to see The Pony Club continue to be a premier training organisation and maintain the quality of activity, but also to play a very proactive role in equestrian participation and development.

Summary of Recommendations

- 6.41 In view of the comment at 6.4 above, both the Memorandum & Articles of Association and the Rules should be harmonised and revised accordingly.
- 6.42 The Board of Trustees must act jointly and severally in a fiduciary capacity, always in the best interests of the charity and not representing any specific interest group (even if a nominee). Each Trustee should clearly understand and acknowledge their personal responsibility and obligations.
- 6.43 The Board should explicitly comprise:

- 6.43.1 Chairman of The Pony Club, elected by the Equestrian Council in its capacity as the registered voting members of the incorporated charity;
 - 6.43.2 Vice-Chairman of The Pony Club, elected by the Equestrian Council in its capacity as the registered voting members of the incorporated charity;
 - 6.43.3 Treasurer, recruited by dint of relevant financial expertise and appointed by the Board, who shall be Treasurer of The Pony Club by virtue of office;
 - 6.43.4 Two Area Representatives, elected by the ARs (acknowledging that Branch Members make up two-thirds of total membership);
 - 6.43.5 Chairman of Centre Membership (acknowledging that Centre Members make up one-third of total membership);
 - 6.43.6 No fewer than three Independent Trustees recruited and appointed by the Board to provide specific expertise (with appropriate experience) identified as otherwise both required and lacking, eg. legal, commercial, marketing, merchandising, communications, finance, resources management (human and/or property).
- 6.44 With effect from January 2015 (and not applicable retrospectively), each Trustee should serve initially for a period of three years, renewable for one or two further periods of three years, subject to re-election by the Equestrian Council in the case of all but the Treasurer and the other Independent Trustees, whose re-appointment should be agreed by consensus of the Board but again limited to two or three consecutive terms. In the event of earlier retirement or resignation, the replacement Trustee should serve for a three-year term effective from election/appointment, thus leading to staggered rather than wholesale rotation of Board membership. Any Trustee who has served three consecutive terms of three years will be eligible for re-election/re-appointment after a sabbatical of not less than two years.
- 6.45 Membership of all other national committees (including the Equestrian Council) whether elected, nominated or appointed, should be restricted – as far as possible – to three consecutive terms of three years, in order to encourage succession planning.
- 6.46 The Board should agree and adopt formal Terms of Reference for itself and for the Equestrian Council, Management Committee and all other committees.
- 6.47 The Board should be responsible for strategic planning and direction, governance, compliance, financial and other policies, and for legal issues, and will also be the final authority on the interpretation of and changes to The Pony Club Rules (on advice from the Equestrian Council). It will approve the budget, determine annual subscriptions and other fees, review investment policy and ensure sponsorship opportunities are maximised. It should receive reports and briefings, for information or decision, from the Chairman of Training and the Chairman of Disciplines. The Board should measure the achievement of strategic objectives by

reference to predetermined targets, and should keep its own performance under critical scrutiny.

- 6.48 Other than holding the Chief Executive accountable, the Board should not concern itself with executive management and operation of The Pony Club (which should be left to the Management Committee). However, the Board could assume responsibility for audit (integrity of financial systems, internal controls, risk management) and, as now, for the adjudication of complaints and appeals via an appointed panel. Arrangements for financial and non-financial delegation to committees and executive staff should be agreed and clearly defined.
- 6.49 As now, the Equestrian Council will be responsible for all equestrian matters and accountable in that respect to the Board of Trustees. In its capacity as the registered voting members of the incorporated charity, the Equestrian Council will also elect the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of The Pony Club, receive the annual report, accounts and balance sheet, appoint the auditors, and be consulted on The Pony Club's strategic plan as proposed by the Board of Trustees.
- 6.50 The Management Committee will be accountable to the Board of Trustees and responsible for executive and operational management, finance, administration, IT developments and deployment of resources. It should refer issues requiring policy decisions or of wider significance to the Board of Trustees. It should be chaired by the Chief Executive and comprise the Director of Finance & Operations (see recommendation at 7.5), the Chairman [Director] of Health & Safety, the Chairman [Director] of Training, the Branch Operations Directors, the Chairman [Director] of Disciplines, the Chairman of Centre Membership [or Centre Membership Executive Officer as substitute], and two Area Representatives (different nominees from those on the Board). The Chairman or the Vice-Chairman of The Pony Club may attend and observe meetings in an *ex-officio* non-voting capacity. The Management Committee will also have the power to invite key individuals (eg. the Championships Director) to the meeting when business need dictates.
- 6.51 Standard templates should be introduced for all meeting papers, including purpose of report, explanatory but concise and relevant narrative content, evaluation (quantitative and/or qualitative), conclusions, proposals, impact and wider (including financial) implications, and recommendations.
- 6.52 The agenda of each meeting should include a brief status report (preferably written) from its chairman and/or the Chief Executive. The meeting should be preceded by a formal briefing for the chairman to ensure that each item is accorded appropriate attention/debate and achieves an outcome or action.
- 6.53 A description of their respective roles and responsibilities is required [now being drafted] for the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, the Treasurer and the other Trustees. The Chairman's should explain the working relationship with the Chief Executive, and the Treasurer's should explain the working relationship with the Director of Finance & Operations and the

need for segregation of respective duties to avoid conflicts of interest. It is essential that the Chairman and Chief Executive have a good and mutually understanding relationship to ensure effective and efficient leadership of The Pony Club. It is also essential that both understand and discharge their respective roles proactively.

- 6.54 All Trustees should receive comprehensive induction training, in which their roles and expected contributions are clearly explained, together with personal briefings from each member of the professional staff to improve understanding of the work undertaken by the office. This should be enhanced by the appointment of an experienced mentor (Trustee) and the offer of further training opportunities to address any identified shortcomings. Individual and collective performances should be critically reviewed on a regular basis (at least once a year) to improve the Board's effectiveness.
- 6.55 A Register of Interests must be created and maintained, and a Trustees Code of Conduct adopted.
- 6.56 The roles and responsibilities for Area Representatives should be reviewed, possibly reduced and revised, with objectives and annual targets set and performance monitored through a system of peer review. Where feasible, assistance should be provided to ARs on the co-ordination of training. Decisions taken collectively at Area Representatives and Equestrian Council meetings must be accepted and implemented consistently, with no excuse on grounds of personal dissent.
- 6.57 Role descriptions should be produced for Branch Operations Directors and those for District Commissioners should be refined/revised. It would be helpful for the purposes of recruitment if DC duties are better understood at Branch level.
- 6.58 The terms of engagement of Regional Centre Co-ordinators, for services rendered and remunerated, should be formalised.
- 6.59 In view of the convoluted and repetitive effort involved in revision of the Rules, consideration should be given to the formulation of a common set of Rules applicable across all equestrian activities and non-equestrian matters, supplemented by discipline-specific rules only where necessary. It is further suggested that a Rules sub-committee be established to simplify the Rules and reduce duplication.

7 Implications for Staffing

- 7.1 The functional responsibilities, job description and person specification (including requisite skills and competences) of the Chief Executive must be aligned to the future requirements of The Pony Club as it adapts to a changing operating environment and external influences. The Chief Executive should play a strong supporting role to the Board, advising them and making clear and reasoned recommendations for action. With strategic direction from the Board, the Chief Executive should be proactive in planning and implementing policy initiatives, foster better relations and more influence with BEF, Sport England and other stakeholders, and heighten the profile of The Pony Club by speaking at major events, conferences etc. It is acknowledged that, at the request of Branches, the current (in 2013) Chairman has preferred to attend the round of Autumn Area Meetings herself, a task that was previously undertaken by members of staff, other Trustees, the Chief Executive and/or the Development Officer.
- 7.2 Staff vacancies are advertised on The Pony Club website, in appropriate publications (such as Horse & Hound) and with local recruitment agencies. One member of staff was a previous student placement, and one was approached directly when a vacancy came up. However, the employment policy and procedure for staff does not follow current best practice in certain respects. From the Chief Executive down, job descriptions have mostly been drafted by the current incumbents based on the tasks they perform at different times of the year. Based on these, the Chief Executive sets objectives, annualised (rather than developmental) work programmes and short-term targets. She monitors workflow through staff meetings every six weeks or so, and undertakes annual performance appraisals. There is no formal training or CPD programme (staff are invited to identify courses they want to attend); the training budget of £5,000 is rarely spent in full (and will reduce to £3,000 in 2014).
- 7.3 The staff structure pre-dates the incumbent Chief Executive and is essentially flat with no tiers of line management or escalation/delegation other than to/from the Chief Executive (although the Senior Executive Secretary acts nominally as the CEO's second-in-command and as mentor to other staff). Budgetary constraints have precluded employment of the additional staff considered necessary to introduce a tiered structure, shared responsibilities/knowledge and opportunities for succession. One-year student placements exchange their roles every six months and are not an effective substitute. If proposals for improvements to volunteer support are endorsed, the structure will need to be realigned more explicitly to serve the needs of the grass roots.
- 7.4 The current arrangements for financial management give cause for concern for a number of reasons:
- 7.4.1 The Treasurer performs a dual role as a Trustee on the Board and as *de facto* finance director, which creates conflicts of interest, probably not actual but possibly perceived and certainly potential.

- 7.4.2 The accounts department comprises a self-employed married couple who report to the Treasurer/Finance Director and are not actively managed by the Chief Executive. Again, this introduces weakness in internal financial controls.
- 7.4.3 The Chief Executive has neither been offered nor taken the opportunity to demonstrate or apply her financial skills, knowledge or understanding, as the Treasurer has retained responsibility for finance. Accordingly, she defers to the Treasurer and the accounts staff and has not had any direct involvement in financial matters.
- 7.4.4 The Treasurer, with the support of the accounts staff, is directly and actively involved in capitation and gift aid but, ironically, not with sponsorship which is handled solely by the Chief Executive. He also prepares the annual budget, monitors income and expenditure via management accounts produced by the accounts staff, and oversees investment policy.
- 7.4.5 The retirement of the accounts staff and their forthcoming departure in March 2014 presents both threat (of disruption to services) and opportunity (to restructure financial management).
- 7.5 There is a strong case for appointing a Director of Finance & Operations, responsible for all internal operations, including finance and management, thereby allowing the Chief Executive to perform a more externally-oriented function and to provide proactive strategic support to the Board.
- 7.6 The exigencies of this new and challenging post would require a qualified accountant with experience of operational management. The post would need to be augmented by a dedicated accounts clerk who could take on capitation, gift aid etc., thereby relieving existing non-finance staff from those functions. However, at some point in the future consideration should be given to outsourcing membership and even routine financial administration.
- 7.7 The IT strategy has already been discussed (see 4.31-4.34 above) and delivery of planned developments must be accelerated. This can only be achieved by the allocation of increased resources, viz. a Project Manager for the systems and process development backed up by a team of maybe two, one dedicated to new development and one providing ongoing technical support to users.
- 7.8 Rightly or wrongly, the head office staff and operations are geared more towards supporting higher levels of events and competition than the training role largely undertaken at Branch level. Although the work of the discipline secretaries does still benefit the grass roots membership, Branch volunteers are crying out for more practical support (see survey results in section 5 above), such as training for District Commissioners and Branch Treasurers, and in compliance issues (H&S and child welfare). Relative priorities for staff work programmes need to be re-evaluated.
- 7.9 Notwithstanding annual holidays or sick leave, staff can be absent from the office fairly frequently at certain time times of the year (notably during the Championships period) but the effect of this on meeting the

day-to-day requirements of Branches could be mitigated by role-sharing instead of specialisation. Indeed, given the proposals put forward in section 5 for much enhanced support for volunteers, there is a very strong case for allocating dedicated staff support for Area Representatives and Branches, perhaps in the shape of a 'Branch Liaison Co-ordinator' (rather like a Customer Services Manager) who would be the first point of contact for Branches and would either deal with the issue or arrange for the appropriate specialist to respond.

- 7.10 An alternative solution may be for each member of staff to be assigned to support two or three Areas, thereby giving them a broader understanding of grass roots activities (which can be shared through team briefings/debriefings) whilst providing an identified contact point with head office.
- 7.11 Training is a cornerstone of Pony Club activities and its demands are likely to increase significantly if future plans are implemented. The member of staff currently assigned to the Training support role will need to be deployed full time without seasonal distractions.
- 7.12 Health & Safety, Child Welfare and risk management is such an important aspect pervading Pony Club activities, with ever increasing obligations and potential liabilities, that it warrants dedicated resourcing, more so than currently available through the Chairman of Health & Safety Committee and the member of staff assigned to provide support.
- 7.13 These are a few ideas to consider. However, we believe that form should follow function and the latter will depend on The Pony Club's commitment to improve its strategic direction, reform its governance arrangements, and provide better support for its volunteer network.
- 7.14 Issues raised in discussions with the professional staff team need to be addressed too. These included:
- 7.14.1 Capacity at times, and cover;
 - 7.14.2 Support from Trustees and senior Committees;
 - 7.14.3 A degree of strained relationships between Areas/Branches and the team;
 - 7.14.4 Dealing with the small number of incidents that do a disservice to The Pony Club and its values;
 - 7.14.5 Consistency of advice;
 - 7.14.6 Personal development and training;
 - 7.14.7 Improved systems and processes.

8 Options Analysis

- 8.1 During the course of the Review, a large number of opportunities for improvement were identified and, individually, each would provide some defined but limited benefits. However, collectively, the net effect would be very significant. In the final analysis, it was considered that the outcomes from a critical mass of improvements would far outweigh a 'pick'n'mix' approach. The result would see a step change in the way The Pony Club operates and delivers its strategic objectives, without impinging on its underlying spirit and ethos.
- 8.2 So, although the proposed range of improvements would necessarily be implemented over a period of years, some much quicker than others, it seems that the options are stark and best illustrated in the following table:

THE PONY CLUB – OUTLOOK COMPARISON 2014

STATUS QUO (ie. DO NOTHING)	REVIEW IMPLEMENTED
The Pony Club will be sustainable.	The Pony Club will be sustainable.
Still delivering quality product at the local level.	Still delivering quality product at the local level.
Membership will continue to erode, downward trend. Tensions will become more acute. Overloads will continue. Branches and Centres become further dissatisfied.	Has a clear strategic direction and plan, a pathway, for next 5-10 years (by end 2014). Has a clear governance structure with clarity as to who is responsible and accountable for doing what (by end 2014) with current overlaps and duplication eliminated.
Not a 'Best Practice' organisation.	The Pony Club becomes a 'Best Practice' organisation.
Not meeting Charity Commission 'Best Practice'.	Meets Charity Commission 'Best Practice'.
Not meeting Sport England/UK Sport governance criteria. Therefore, not meeting Sport England funding criteria.	Meets Sport England/UK Sport governance and funding criteria.
Sidelined by BEF and other equestrian bodies.	Is 'fit for purpose' and can re-engage with BEF in making a positive leadership contribution to equestrian development.

9 Key Recommendations

- 9.1 The Pony Club is a voluntary youth organisation for young people interested in horses and riding. It is a registered charity and a recognised National Governing Body of Sport through the British Equestrian Federation. For almost 85 years, The Pony Club has provided quality training and 'fun' for young people to either carry on riding for enjoyment for life or put them on the first rungs of the talent pathway to success. All we spoke to endorsed The Pony Club's record of success in achieving its purpose.
- 9.2 The Pony Club is sustainable financially and has an enviable network of 345 Branches, 570 Centres, almost 45,000 members and an army of supporting volunteers.
- 9.3 Things have moved on apace in recent years and The Pony Club is now faced with a series of challenges in preparing itself for the next 10 years.
- 9.4 We have gone into considerable depth during the course of this Review and gathered a welter of evidence (much of it provided on a confidential and non-attributable basis) from a range of sources. We believe that, although The Pony Club would remain sustainable for many years if the status quo was retained by the Board of Trustees and Equestrian Council, such a decision would not be in the best long term interests of The Pony Club. We believe that The Pony Club must address a series of issues that we have highlighted in this Review.
- 9.5 Each section of the Review highlights action that is needed, but in overarching terms our key recommendations are as follows.
- 9.6 We **recommend** that The Pony Club receives the Review and commits itself to a period of activity with proper resourcing that will lead towards The Pony Club becoming a 'best practice' organisation, both as a training body and in the way that it governs itself.
- 9.7 We **recommend** that as an organisation with a turnover of £13million per annum, The Pony Club should have a clear strategic direction for the next 5-10 year period and that attention should be given to developing a firm Strategic Plan for the further development of the organisation.
- 9.8 We also **recommend** that in developing its Strategic Plan, The Pony Club should re-evaluate its relationships with the British Equestrian Federation and the other equestrian bodies, and with relevant organisations such as Sport England, and aim to be a key development delivery organisation by the time that planning commences for the next round of Whole Sport Plans for the period 2017–2022.
- 9.9 We have found significant issues and anomalies relating to the current governance of The Pony Club. Some of these issues warrant serious attention. We **recommend** that The Pony Club again commits to becoming a 'best practice' organisation in terms of corporate governance by the end of 2014, and to meeting the advisory standards laid down by relevant organisations such as Sport England and the Charity Commission.

- 9.10 We have found significant issues in relationships between the different parts of The Pony Club, that include the Board of Trustees, Equestrian Council, Area Representatives, Committees, Branches, Centres and the professional staff team. We **recommend** that serious attention is paid to reduce the tensions that currently exist and that The Pony Club works to best advantage where all are taking The Pony Club in a forward direction.
- 9.11 We believe that the strong and healthy network of volunteers upon which The Pony Club relies so heavily to sustain its range of activities is under very considerable pressure. It needs to be offered far greater support if it is to avoid inexorable decline because of a reducing pool of willing volunteers and lack of succession. We **recommend** that a programme of improvements is implemented in the short and medium term (for example, the suggestions outlined in 5.21-5.22 above), resourced appropriately.

Appendix – Interviews conducted

Trustees:

- Cherry Michell, Chairman of The Pony Club
- Robin Thompson, Vice-Chairman of The Pony Club
- Robin Danielli, Treasurer of The Pony Club
- Ros Slinger, Trustee (Area Rep nominee)
- Mary Tuckett, Trustee (Area Rep nominee) and Chairman-Elect
- Christopher Bromfield, Trustee

Committee Chairmen:

- William Blane, Chairman of Training
- Fiona Lace, Chairman of Disciplines
- Katy Powell-Jones, Chairman of Centre Membership
- Bill Cook, Chairman of Health & Safety

Area Representatives:

- Martin Wright, Area 11
- Janice Carnegie, Area 1
- Liz Dorse, Area 15
- Charlotte Rowell, Area 10
- Dawn Taylor, Area 13 [and Vice-Chairman-Elect]
plus informally or in another capacity (see above)
- Ros Slinger, Area 4
- Mary Tuckett, Area 12
- Christina Thompson, Area 6
- Peggy Alpin, Area 3
- Clare Valori, Area 8
- Louly Thornycroft, Area 14

Professional Staff Team:

- Judy Edwards, Chief Executive
- Clare Boardman, Senior Executive Secretary, Show Jumping, Racing, Website [and Endurance *pro tem*]
- Sarah Baker, PA to Chief Executive and Chairman
- Lucy Goler, Centre Membership Executive Officer
- Barbara Saturley, Centre Membership, Reception
- Jo Haywood, Mounted Games, Cubitt Awards, Insurance, Overseas Branches
- Caroline Pole, Merchandising & Publications Manager

- Hannah Clack, Health & Safety, Polocrosse, National Quiz
- Laura Armstrong, Polo, Dressage
- Jenny Yates, Training, Eventing
- Sue and Harvey Reader, Accounts
- Michael Burke, IT Systems Developer
- Marty Bibby, IT Support
- Clare Walkeden, Press Officer, PR & Marketing Executive

Branch Operations Directors:

- Maureen Costello
- Alison Nolder
- Hazel Warburton

British Equestrian Federation:

- Andrew Finding, Chief Executive