

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

I know that logistically it is not possible for most of you to attend the national AGM which was held last month, so with so much change in the society this year I just wanted to run through what has been happening.

You will recall at last years National AGM Brian Ball was ratified as Chairman and Neil Wray as Vice Chair.

Unfortunately, in early December Brian tendered his resignation and Neil Wray stepped up to the role of Chair and Neil and the council began to undertake the changes that were required.

There were many challenges that we faced as a society. Firstly, we were in a very weak financial position, which is summarised in the finance report prepared by Elaine McCarthy which is available on the website but we also have some copies available here if anyone would like to see.

To summarise the position we found ourselves in, the 2018 expenditure exceeded income by over £90,000 a position which we simply could not carry in to 2019.

Our OFQUAL regulated qualifications were under scrutiny, with many areas of concern around our compliance with the OFQUAL standards and regulations.

Plus, membership numbers were falling and feedback was that the society was not providing what members wanted.

We have been fortunate to have some of the experienced members coming back in to the fold and playing an active part in the society once again.

With the new committees in place with a mix of new blood and experience, I believe the society is well on the way to where we need to go.

Unfortunately, however, as well as gaining some great people, we also lost a few through retirement & resignations that were simply not prepared to go on the journey with us.

Those losses included:

Linda Swain as Chairman of the ACs, and a long serving member of council.

Gary Docking as a member of the judges committee, and council member.

And Stephanie Evans, from the Awards Board and council

We have achieved a great deal since last December.

We have improved the governance of the society – with decisions made by the appropriate, responsible people.

We have improved relationships with a number of other carriage driving bodies, the Tandem Club being a clear example.

We have made significant improvements to balancing the books.

We have moved the office out of Swingletree and to a private office suite in Bury St Edmunds cutting our rent in half.

We have invited back to the society a number of people who had previously been excluded.

We have changed the way we support the areas, ACs and AACs – but recognise we still have much more to do regarding this.

We ran two extremely successful shows. The BDS Show at Windsor and National Championships at Addington, both under new administration.

We have made changes to the training we offer and how we deliver it.

We have secured a new President of the Society, Colonel Toby Browne, The Crown Equerry who fills a position that has been vacant for some time.

We have started to drive improved engagement with our members, with much improved transparency. Hopefully that is borne out by such actions as the various reports from the National AGM already being available on the national website.

Jeff Osborne and Osborne refrigeration have provided generous sponsorship of our national championships and the qualifying shows for many years. However, on the Saturday evening of The National Championships at Addington this year Jeff informed Neil Wray that he is ceasing his sponsorship. This fortunately aligns with our plans to make significant changes to our national championship event going forward. Details of this will be provided soon once plans have been finalised.

Membership has held fairly steady at approximately 3300. Obviously, as we move forward one of our key goals will be to grow, but to do that we need to ensure the society offers what the carriage driving fraternity require.

BDS Education has been undergoing several areas of improvement with one aspect being the return of the popular competence scheme that was in place in 2000.

The Training committee has made a few changes to ensure that the scheme is up to date and current but remain with the same ethos.

There are now just three levels of competence which are progressive so must be taken in strict order, starting with the Elementary, progressing on to the Intermediate and ending with the Advanced level.

The Elementary Certificate consists of three units, 1 and 2 are taken at the same time but unit 3 may be taken on the same day or at a different time.

This gives the candidate more opportunity to concentrate on a smaller package.

Having achieved the Elementary Certificate a candidate wishing to progress must then move on to take the Road Driving Assessment.

The Road Driving Assessment is one complete unit and is assessed on the public highway.

Achievement of the Road Driving Assessment satisfies a large part of the Code of Practice for Horse Drawn Vehicles issued by the Department of Transport.

The Road Driving Assessment is pre-requisite to entering for the next level of achievement, The Intermediate Certificate.

The Intermediate Certificate consists of compulsory units and optional units from a list of different areas of driving activities.

To achieve the Intermediate Certificate a candidate must be successful in all compulsory units together with one optional unit of their choice.

There is also a unit for Pairs driving at this level which is optional for the Intermediate Certificate but becomes compulsory for those wishing to progress on to the Advanced Certificate.

The method of achieving the optional unit will be new to many members in as much as the candidate provides evidence of experience and ability in a variety of ways by producing witness statements of their attendance and achievements at a variety of events, competitions, shows or activities relevant to their chosen option.

For example, if the chosen option is Private Driving, evidence would be provided by detailing shows attended and results, the number of occasions when the candidate had been a steward, groom or even show organiser.

The candidate could also provide video evidence or put together a portfolio of their carriage driving life and achievements.

When all the evidence is gathered it will be scrutinised by the members of the Training Committee with the relevant qualifications who are the internal verifiers and the evidence will be studied and matched against the requirements of the syllabus and the achievements credited.

This is known as Accreditation of Prior Achievement.

Subject to everything being satisfactory, the candidate will then gain the Intermediate Certificate.

At this point they may well have had enough and decide to call it a day, but should they aspire to achieving the Advanced Certificate they must then study for and achieve the Pairs Unit as this is pre-requisite for the Advanced Certificate.

The Advanced Certificate takes the candidates knowledge and skill to a whole new level and is much more aimed at the advanced driver and contains units in multiples including teams and tandems.

There is also a new approved Coach Scheme which is simply replacing the old Training Provider list. We have aligned the term coach into the BDS as this is the term used widely in all equestrian disciplines.

Our Approved Coach Scheme has a high standard of requirements for approval ensuring we meet the needs of the current day learner.

Coaches will not only have to demonstrate their coaching qualifications but also their driving, first aid, safeguarding and attend regular CPD events to ensure they remain current and up to date with coaching practice and ideas.

We aim to work more collaboratively with our Approved Coaches as we move into 2020 to support them in coaching events as well as CPD events, Coaching and Assessing Qualifications and providing a suite of resources to help them deliver and run events.

Moving on to look at the financial position of the society

In comparison to 2017 our turnover increased in 2018 and stood at £224,000. This was an increase of £38,000.

The majority of our income comes from subscriptions and in 2018 income from subscriptions was just under £160,000.

This is up from 2017 when our income from subscriptions was £136,000.

This was an increase of £30,000.

However, our expenditure also increased year on year and amounted to just under £253,000 in 2018.

This was an increase on 2017's spending of nearly £50,000.

Along with this, the stock market did not perform well in the later part of 2018 and as a result, the value of our investments fell by £19,000.

In order to try and 'make ends meet', over £50,000 was withdrawn from BDS investments.

All of this means that the BDS made a loss of £40,000 in 2018.

In 2018, the National Championships at Addington made a loss of £10,000.

BDS Smiths Lawn made a loss of £13,000.

And our Education programme made a loss of £7,000.

The costs of these activities are made up of direct expenditure and a proportion of the cost of running the society i.e. overheads.

The direct cost of publishing the three editions of the newsletter was in excess of £25,000.

The direct cost of producing and mailing the yearbook was £11,000.

Some income was derived from these publications and the overheads attributable therefore stand at a little over £3,000.

So, "what are the overheads?" Overheads are the costs required to run the BDS, but costs that cannot be directly attributed to any specific activity, product, or service.

In order to balance the BDS books going forward we have taken a long hard look at each of these costs.

We have ...

- changed the way we access legal and professional advice
- We have moved the BDS office, resulting in our monthly rent being halved
- We have applied for and received business rate exemption status
- We have changed our phone and internet packages to reduce our payments
- We have reduced our credit card collection fees by handing back unnecessary rented card payment equipment
- We have closed some bank accounts to reduce bank charges

And we are in the process of ...

- changing our accountants and the way we do our book keeping
- and adjusting our investment portfolio so that our fees are reduced

What this all means for our accounts is that at the half way point of June 2019 our income stood at just under £172,000, our direct costs were £75,000, and our overheads were just under £50,000, all of which results in a half year profit of £47,000.

We do not expect this profit to be maintained through Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 of 2019.

Some costs for Smiths Lawn are not included yet, nor are the National Championships or the Winter Newsletter costs.

That all being said, we hope to be at, or near, break even at the year end so hopefully you will agree, that we're heading in the right direction with everything that has been put in place.

I hope you can all see that the last year has been very productive and the society is now much better for it and if you have any questions please just get in touch and if I can't answer it I will get an answer from someone who can.

Please feel free to get in touch with any of the council members or Neil and we will try to help as best we can.

Caroline Watson
(Chairman of The Scottish Branch Of The British Driving Society)