

Minutes of Beltane Fire Society Blether

21 January 2019, Main Hall, City of Edinburgh Methodist Church

Minutes by Alex Nuttgens.

[These minutes have been prepared as best we can - but do let us know if you feel any edits are needed or if your contributions haven't been fully/accurately captured - email us at chair@cas.org.uk]

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14:15 Meeting starts. Erin Macdonald chairing.

Erin: Thanks for coming.

This meeting is about selection and support for the Blues, the Board and the Court. We mentioned selection in last Blether, and after introducing some initial changes after that, it's fair to say people had more to say about this - so we wanted to hold another round of discussion to make space for that. There's no one way to do what we do, but we figure it's only by talking more that we'll find a good middle path. I'll guide the conversation today with Caroline from Blues too.

We'd have liked to give more notice of this blether, but we also had to fit it in now before Beltane prep fully begins. Although we know timing isn't ideal, it'll mean we can get thinkings going forward to influence how Samhuinn will be run, and get changes in place in plenty of time to allow for everyone affected to be consulted and involved.

We will talk, in turn about each of the three groups. We have asked people to email us and received emails Siri, Diana, Katie and Raz *[Note: Those we have permission to share are included at end of these minutes]*. We'll try to input what we can from them into the discussion wherever possible.

First, some ground rules

- One person talking at a time. Raise hand to make a point.
- If you agree: use jazz hands gesture to demonstrate this.
- Please be respectful, these are issues which are personal to many here.
- Let's focus on solutions and ideas rather than dwelling about things which have happened. Frame input in constructive way.

Caroline:

- Brainstorming, this it's about new ideas, not arguing against each other, it's not a post-mortem.

Nick Toth: Format: Maybe we should make a quick list of points from the first part, and then make topics for second part? We may not get to some things, but it could help us to get to the big ones.

Rob Thorburn: I would prefer the initial stated format.

Tom Watton: The problem with small groups is that people can think everyone agrees, whereas it can give a false impression of what everyone thinks.

Erin: Let's compromise, with smaller group discussions and and big discussions. Spend majority of blether talking as larger group.

Steve Glover: Could we mention briefly what the issues are. I haven't *read* social media.

Erin: Absolutely - we'll summarise the key sensitive points as we go.

Lorraine: Small are groups important, some people aren't confident in big groups..

[Decision made that the proposed format (3 break-out groups then longer discussion) will be used.]

Erin: Moving on, we'll give summary of how things work on board/blue/court selection etc now, so we're all on same page.

Board (Presented by Erin)

Board members stand for a year June to June, with a shoutout for applications 6 weeks before, explaining what it involves. This is circulated to our mailing list. People submit applications and those are sent out to members before the AGM, and then at the AGM these people give stand in front of the membership, stating why they're standing and what they bring to the role, they also answer questions. The candidates then leave the room, there's an open discussion, followed by a hidden vote. They are elected by simple majority based on more yeses than nos. People not being elected is rare, but it does happen.

Some of the queries/concerns that have been raised about that over the past couple of months are: Is this robust enough given the level of seniority and seriousness of consequences? Is there a better way of knowing if people are suitable? What if not many people are *at* the AGM? Checking skill balance is good. Current board is enthusiastic, but we do potentially lack some potentially key skills. Last point: current board are knackered. There's a *lot* to do with our current set up, and we don't have capacity to do all we'd like to do.

Blue (presented by Caroline)

A list is put together with every name any Blues can think of, is emailed in by members, or mentioned in conversations. The Blues talk between ourselves about what skills are needed, and what skills are present already. We then try to identify missing skills for the existing group. Each Blue has criteria which might make an acceptable Blue, for example, for me, it's having been in Red, White and Elemental groups, leadership skills, GOing experience. Blues send potential new names to Board and they are accepted or rejected. Of the Blues accepted, a number are selected by the Blues as final team.

Lorraine: How are they actually selected though?

Caroline: The Board have their own processes.

Erin: The Blues use their own process to come up with their proposed names, and Board consider those potential Blues on their merits.

Caroline: The Board don't actually choose the names in the first instance - they review those put forward. About one third of the time, a potential Blue is rejected.

Jonny: Do Blues need to be re-selected each festival?

Erin: Blues from last festival may continue unless something very serious has happened. Any people who have been Blue before that (ie have not been Blue for a festival or more) are treated the same as new Blue candidates, and must be proposed/approved.

Court (presented by Caroline)

Blues take nominations for court from community and also from people self-nominating. If there are lots of entries, we make a short-list. If someone clearly does not meet criteria, or much stronger candidates, we will tell people early. Not making short-list one year doesn't disqualify you from future years. If there's a small number, they interview everyone. We know it matters to everyone, so try to be as humane as possible.

Erin: For the past 2 years, Blues for upcoming or (if unavailable) Blues from previous festival, plus 1 Board member decided the Court. This festival it was decided to move up to 50% board and 50% blues in the selection group, triggered by discussion at the last blether, and that's what caused the kerfuffle. So in response to the concerns raised about that online, we compromised and went with 2 Board members involved, while we waited for this bigger discussion so we could decide what to do in future.

Caroline: We have an interview, and we have questions. These vary year-on-year, but we try to ask questions which get the best out of every candidate. We're aware, for instance that the best Green Man may not necessarily be at their best in a formal interview. We try to make a decision

that night, but sometimes takes longer as tiring. They try to achieve unanimous vote before accepting.

Jonny: Is the May Queen involved?

Caroline: Yes, she gets a vote, because it's a strong connection sometimes physically intimate, so important she gets a voice. We had a year when the May Queen was partner of potential Green Man, and she decided to step out of the room, saying that she trusted us to make the vote.

Is the purpose of Board vote regarded as being an overseeing role?

Erin: The current understanding is they're an equal member of the selection, but what it should be going forward is exactly the sort of thing we can discuss today.

Rob T: Is the process same for Samhuinn?

Erin / Caroline: Yes.

Gav: Ideally the Cailleach has similar role to May Queen, but not always possible as new one each year, so logistics sometimes get in the way..

Split into 3 groups: Board, Blues, Court.

Erin: Everyone will have chance to be in each group. Every 15 minutes we will move between groups - aim is to get the conversation started and explore some of the issues, so we can then come back into one big group to explore further.

[THIS SECTION IS TYPED-UP VERSION OF NOTES TAKEN BY GROUP FACILITATORS - regular minutes continue in a couple of pages]

BOARD SELECTION AND SUPPORT group notes...

Group 1:

- Minimum expectation of how long should be on the board (and max) - 2 - 5 years or so?
 - But we need to factor in transient nature of our community, and how exhausting being on the board is at present
 - Though we need stability, 1 year too short
- Have a separate welfare/safeguarding group/team
- Staggered terms
- Circulate names more in advance, and allow for discussion
- Could we have hustings/debate separate from AGM to give more time to consider applications?
- Need to be more robust in assessing candidates - enthusiasm not enough
- Have other levels of commitment /roles
 - To reduce workload, and allow more people to get involved in appropriate ways
- Paid worker a possibility to do the above etc
- External trustees - bring other skills
 - But then need to make sure they are governance only - we aren't now as we have not got other roles in place - board do everything
- Recognition and support for the board - it's hard
- Subgroups
- Introduce/promote visibility
- Make board elections interesting
- Training for board members
- Minimum involvement in BFS needed if board to be involved in court selection

Group 2:

- Have board of trustees and a separate committee
 - Our board should focus on high governance - not operations, and external well known arts figures (Tilda Swinton etc etc)
 - Committee should be operational group, BFS members and enthusiasts, running the day-to-day
- However - external ambassadors/patrons different to those who should be legally responsible for BFS
- Training opportunities key
- Coopting external expertise = a good idea

- Key = how to increase competition/interest in standing for the board, so have quality control (ie not enough spaces on board for all those who stand, so those not good enough don't get on)
- Paid roles worth exploring to carry weight, so board focus on governance
- 'Artistic director' (but not that term) role to carry weight/ensure that narrative works is a good idea. Not creating it, but acting as a hub to make sure conversations happen. Too much at present - not consistent who does this, sometimes mix of blues, court, GOs etc. Doesn't have a formal home at the moment
- Terms for board members should be staggered
- Membership need a say. But is recruiting trustees from within BFS right? Hard to know.
- Combine AGM with something more appealing to attract more attendees - eg with society performances etc

Group 3:

- Board need an executive team to do the operational work (so they can focus on governance)
- Need clearer delineation between roles especially blues/board
- Make people aware about what's available re who does what and meeting minutes etc
- Call out to members to get involved - devolve work more
- People not attending AGMs and blethers is a problem. Candidates must always be in the room for votes (unless accessibility issue). There must be a Q&A for candidates.
- Ask people why they don't turn up
- Clarity re the roles on the board
 - Subgroups
- Explore tech solutions - livestream etc, tech voting
- Burnout a problem - involve members more
- External board members?
- Need more connection to broader arts community on the board - need to integrate. What are we?
- Special disability board role

BLUE SELECTION AND SUPPORT group notes...

- Keep current state
- Would like to know criteria for selection (within Blue) as many people aspire to do the role
- Would like to know what nuts and bolts of the role are. (+1)
 - 'A day in the life'
- If CE's criteria of having been Red, White and other is not enough, could add more criteria, (+1) eg
 - Creating a new group
 - Production side knowledge

- Stewarding
- Demeanour and personality to deal with problems - calming, soothing
- 3 festivals
- Should be involved in EC selection and EC should have an opinion on proposed Blues
- GOs of where there are disabled members - could do with a disabled Blue, so criterial as 'Red, White' are exclusionary
- Is there a check-in system to see how blues are doing
- Could GOs do more to help Blue
- What role to Blue vs Court have in festival creation
- What role to board vs blue have in creation of a festival? (**)

- Can 'reward' be increased
 - Not being 'hamstrung'
 - Eg free club ticket for tech, but turning up for derig matters more
- We need data rather than anecdotes - ask current and past blues, eg a 'timesheet'
 - Caution - this could come over as justifying time
- Feedback - who gives blues feedback? How do blues receive their feedback?
- Induction?
- Should there be more circulation of Blue names prior to a festival, as there are returning blues where there are known issues
- More public view of blue and board functions (**)
- More support - welfare safeguarding
- Needs to be less stressful and more fun (Blue)
- Blues could have a wider support group from previous blues - eg four or five of these
- Mediation training - can blues have it

- Ask the Blues what they would like for support in general
- New blues could send an email saying what they bring
- Far too high a blue turnover, challenging role
- Stress blues put under makes job difficult
- People repeatedly ask for more details on selection
- Need to put forward names for Blue even when person may say no
- May be 'expected' that in year 5, you do Blue
- Blues sorting out problems is paternalistic - better to work on festival story/ritual
- Be sure about what 'not getting on with' means
- Every few years need a full discussion about Blues and whether current blues are ok

- If feels grindingly unfair to new participants but after a number of years you see the need for selection as it is
- Could put a shout out
- Could use same process as court

COURT SELECTION AND SUPPORT group notes...

- EC maybe not at interview but talk to soon after selection to understand vision
- Board to ratify shortlist names, like blues, and then trust them to carry out selection
- Don't assume that court member will be ok with an changes that haven't been discussed with them
- Board to act as HR but not to vote in selection as not their role
- Board = legally responsible and democratic mandate, therefore why wouldn't they be involved?
- Board having oversight is very useful
- Share idea of criteria being looked at before selection?
- MQ role takes time to sink in, and an eternal role, so needed for more than one festival
- Have previous court act as support to new court festival on festival
- Closing court before GO selection is good
- Why is May Queen a continuing role? Arguably it should be just same as Green Man
- Starting early is unfair to May Queen and Green Man but helpful for GOs to know in advance. (Full month before is too early?)
- Define role of Blues and Board - who is responsible for what
- Blues have best experience since being former court or around a long time so understand role and./or drain court can be
- Board have 1 person sent with equal vote, but blues can veto that person if wrong for selection role?
- Setting remits for blue/board could solve some selection issues
- Essential Blue role for selecting ritual
- Board present to observe fairness and ensure process works
- EC having a say as someone who works with court?
- Does selecting criteria beforehand stop level playing field by meaning we can only say yes to person x
- May queen with veto for green man selection since it's their dynamic leading the festival
- Fair representation of board, blues, outgoing court or certain GOs?
- BRC pre-shortlist Beltane reputation check - complaints etc
- Samhuinn Winter King to stay on as Green Man at Beltane or Green Man stays on as a Samhuinn Summer King

[REGULAR MINUTES CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE]

Erin: Ok, thanks for that everyone, let's start with a summary from group facilitators of what was covered in the groups, and then we'll move on to discuss.

Summaries of discussion topics:

Board, (Erin)

- Length of time people serve on the Board
- Degree of commitment needed
- Enthusiasm not being enough, expertise is needed. Given problem with numbers.
- Discussion about external trustees.
- How we enable board to focus on governance, rather than operations.
- Paid workers, separate event management and safeguarding teams. Delegation to these teams.
- How to get people interested in governance related things.
- How we can make sure people standing are appropriately assessed? E.g. hustings.
- Perhaps a Q&A session for upcoming trustee candidates? More info on each candidate in advance.

Court (Neil B on behalf of Brad)

- Board could ratify shortlist of candidates, but with Blues having control of selection.
- Board could provide oversight, act as HR about known issues.
- Should Event Co-ordinators / previous court members be on group?
- Green man could stay on as Summer King?
- Timescales for selection need refined. Too long gap between Green Man and GO selection this time.

Blues (Caroline)

- Like to keep current state
- More public knowledge of selection criteria - people aspire to role.
- Could do with day-in-the-life so members know what Blues do.
- Suggestions for new criteria - e.g. creating new groups, production, stewarding.
- Help with conflict resolution, training?
- Should Event Coordinator be involved in Blue selection?
- Should Blues be involved in Event Coordinator selection?
- Are some criteria for joining Blue (*e.g. suggestion they should be in Reds, Whites*) exclusionary because Reds / Whites not accessible to all?
- Is there check-up system to see how Blues doing, is there direct feedback?
- Blues / vs Court / vs Board roles in the festival.
- Can rewards be increased? E.g. Tech get free tickets, could Blues get more.
- Need data rather than anecdotes, e.g. timesheets for Blues.
- More circulation of names prior to festival?
- Could Blue be less stressful more fun?
- Could Blues have support group of previous groups?

- Could we ask Blues what *they* want?
- Blues is a highly stressful role.
- Part of Blue role is sorting out people's problems, would it be better for them to work on festival story aspect, rather than dealing with grievances?
- Discussion of Blues wanting to work with people "they got on with", request that it be clear what this means.
- Initially seems grindingly unfair blue selection, but people come to see it as "only way".
- Could Blues use same selection process as court?

Erin: I'd like to add a couple of points from emails which haven't been discussed so far:

(Siri's email was discussed extensively as part of Board break-out group)

Katie (the May Queen) asks that if changes are made which affect people, they be consulted about the changes before they happen. She'd like more notice for Blethers, this one was at short notice. She'd ask that members to be able to hold discussions whilst being aware of bias, and would ask that we factor in knowledge of roles from those with experience.

Caroline:

Diana would like to see more transparency around Blue role. Why not start a movement to start membership showing appreciation of Blues as Nightwatch and Tech? She'd like to see more continuity in the Court roles, e.g. emailing asking if they'd like to contribute including looking at shortlist. Finally, she would like to see selection of both Blues and Board given more focus, and find a way of utilising the wealth of experience some of the membership have in this process.

Raz feels there's correlation with our problems retaining Blues and pressure from constant re-examination of role.

Erin: Ok, let's start discussion of selection and support for each group in turn.

Discussion - Board

Vicks: We should talk about splitting the Board, It's odd, that they do all the work. Ideally this should happen separately from governance.

Tom: I'd support that as an aspiration, but the issue is you end up with same people sitting on two groups, doubling the work. We could consider farming it out though.

Jonny: If we're looking for people outwith the Society for Trustees, they will lack ability to make court selections fairly. We maybe should go other way and have all Board having to have certain experience in BFS?

Lorraine: Could we make more use of formal volunteering?

Rob Spoul-Cran: Retention issues are exacerbated by stress and workload. There should be a paid Fundraising Manager paid for by grants. The Society throws away thousands in potential grants. We have a reasonable budget, but there are questions to be asked about what the future of the event should be. There should also be paid roles on committee to take on the hardest roles. There should be more high status people on the Board who have the time and contacts to network with influential people who could support the Society.

Alex Nuttgens: I agree that an external trustee or two could help with our operations / governance issues and lack of willing Trustees.

Rob T: Enthusiasm isn't enough for this sort of Trustee work. Obviously, with a board of external professionals Board they wouldn't sit on committee for selection.

It is mentioned that training for Board could be useful.

Caroline: I feel that the role of the Board should be strategic, procedural, and the Board should be there purely to oversee the festival. The Board being present to make ritually relevant decisions doesn't make sense, that's the Blues' role. It has been said that Blues don't represent the wider community, but do Board do this either? Perhaps a random member of the community should sit in?

Kenn: Beltane operates in a very primal level, it's not a democracy. I don't feel wider community should have a choice in Court selection.

Rob SC: Board aren't any more representative than the Blues, because they fundamentally aren't selected by the community, so there is no difference with representation.

Nick: We are very used to adversarial systems, there are flaws in this sort of thing. The idea that we should have a lot of people vying for places, for it to work. The lack of competition isn't necessarily a bad thing. In principle, everyone can and does have a vote, there is a proxy system in place. The problem is that people are not asking questions which are tough enough.

Jonny: The problem is with current process is that it doesn't necessarily get us the appropriate Board members, or make sure they have the right qualifications.

There should be a separate welfare committee, this shouldn't be on either the Board or the Blues.

Tom: We need to get the people who really *shouldn't* be trustees to turn up to the AGM, that gets the membership out.

Sara Thomas: Getting people in the room is always hard, but we're a young society, we could have on-line voting, and live-streaming of the event.

Anna Chaney: Maybe the reason why there are so few people at this Blether is because they're happy. The festival is working.

As an aside, I didn't feel or hear that Board were at the selection to reflect the membership. I knew the Blues represented the festival though.

Rob T: A big part of everything we do is that there is reward in what you do. Satisfaction, development, financial. Are the board happy doing their roles? Or do they just make it run? Is it possible to have a separate working committee and Trustees?

Raffe O'Rourke: I had no idea so few people came to these things. Perhaps a way to get more people here is to let people know how few people come, this is important.

Erin: My tuppence worth is that BFS is close fundamentally broken as it stands, if we don't take action. Being on the Board is close to impossible at times. We need to make some decisions on how to proceed for it to continue working and be reasonable to ask anyone to do. I feel we're managing to continue through sheer stubbornness, and it's not sustainable.

Alex: As another Board member, I wanted to say I've loved being on the Board, but I agree that things need to change, it seems a dwindling number of people are on the Board, and this results in more and more pressure falling on each of them.

Discussion - Blue

Tom W: Constant questioning of Blue process is bad. Maybe a regular (e.g. 2 years) check-in for Blues to see how they're doing with Trustees. Locking in some sort of regular check-in for Blues, so continues working with the operations committee.

Sara: The Event Coordinator shouldn't be on Court selection or Blue selection. It's not their role.

Rob T: Rather than having every 2 years chat about current Blues, rather have a maximum term, e.g. 4 festivals, then re-selection. Regarding complaints about Blue selection process, if it was tremendously transparent this would deal with a lot of this unhappiness. They need to have been engaged in various roles in parts of the festivals.

Lindsay: Worst thing is inherent lack of trust the Blues are afforded. This shouldn't be discussed on facebook. We need to find where this mistrust is coming from. I'm in favour of a hard maximum term for Blues, because it also means succession-planning is baked in. They could reach out earlier, meaning a much less random changeover.

Jonny: The feedback thing is really important. People feel that in the past, Blues who have had loads of complaints go away for a festival, then come back as if nothing happened. It needs to be clear what's happening with this. Can the Blues get a feedback sheet like the GOs? Also Board's role does need be clearer. It'd be better if the Board ratify a list.

Erin: Any Ideas on transparency about selection? What more could be done, what would that look like if current set up isn't felt to be transparent enough?

Vicks: Distrust of the Blues comes from how undemocratic they are, if there's a problem, they can choose to ignore it. There's no choice at all for members. Maybe the society should have a say in selection?

Rob SC: I don't believe that currently Board is democratically elected. A hard maximum term could cause more problems for Blues.

John Wilson: Board is the house of commons, Blues is house of lords. We are and anarcho-lefty collective, and have been told to have faith in a not really democratically selected Board, and a mysterious Black Box selection Blues, and both of these go against our anarcho-lefty instincts.

Gav: Being a Blue, there definitely have been burn outs but there are good feelings from the community for Blue. Blues not necessarily stopping being Blues, but supporting in background with admin, interactions, production meetings, etc. Blues are lost by being effectively kicked out if they're not there for a festival. I feel there's too much okaying from Board needed. We need clarity about what the Board's relationship with Blue selection.

I also agree that feedback needs to get to Blues properly.

Tom: Solution for opening transparency: We need similar Blue recruiting as Court recruiting. Should be in the Spring / AGM window, with posts online and on Facebook so that people know it's a thing going on.

Terms: Have a general Blue expectation, rather than specific terms. E.g. a Blue being expected for 4 festivals, to try to keep people consistent.

Lorraine: I feel there's a discomfort amongst the society, a perception that the Blues select themselves. It *would* be nice if there was as much comms around Blue selection as there is with the Court; it would make it less of a mystery.

Kenn: We are an anarcho-leftist org, keen on codification, is dangerous. Let's try not to codify everything. Clarity of roles needs to happen. What are Blues responsible for, and what is the Board responsible for? This needs to be clearly written down in comprehensible terms. Also, please let's stop with these personal complaints. We ask too much of Blues, and way too much of the Board.

Vicks: For choosing new Blues, I think it should be done in the same way as the Board is chosen, by election.

Andrew: I agree with Black Box problem. There are two solutions to black boxes, either make them transparent, or be told exactly how what's inside works.

Discussion - Court

Jonny: I don't think that the Board should be on the selection committee for this group, the Blues need to be trusted, and this is their job.

Erin: I actually agree, and once our current issues are sorted out it's how I think it should be, but it feels like there's a trust disconnect happening at the moment, that would need to be addressed first.

Jonny: If the Blues and Court issues were fixed, it would make this problem go away.

Rob T: The Board should get a veto early in the process, *rather* than at the end.

Rob SC: I don't see why May Queen should be a recurring role. The Green Man was recurring until he didn't turn up one festival. May Queens keep turning up so it stays. I get there's ritual and story, but it seems unfair.

Rob T: The decision was made *actively* to do this with the Green Man but not the May Queen.

Nick: The shortlist should have Board veto. Should the Board have a role in asking a question as to whether somebody who *isn't* on the list *should* be?

Tom: I maintain that we have to trust Board / Blues, and shortlisting is where the Black Box happens. It's a dangerous position to put Board in, asking them to reject many names at once. Approving shortlist solves some problems though. There still needs to be some enquiry into the Black Box situation though, and a means by which the system can be interrogated.

Jonny: Would it be any issue giving the Board full list beforehand and them removing unsuitable names on the basis of confidential information?

Loads of wee gala days in my home town had a thing where you have "in the role" followed by "in support" next year. This helps a lot with continuity and tradition. They become part of the entourage. If they're missing, previous years roles can turn up.

Erin: I think this should be at the discretion of the new person in the role.

Rob T: What is the criteria for board rejection of Blues, e.g. We're not sure/Gross Misconduct.

John W: A long-list would have to be culling on known issues.

Gav: Re: Board seeing if any people are missing from Blue list who should be there. Our long list includes all names emailed from members, so that should deal with that issue. If there was full transparency; we get recommendations in, a very long list. Would this list be on public record of the Board or confidential between Board and Blues?

Alex: One issue with a Board long-list is that it's much harder to query 25 people than 3 people. As such if there were any critical problems with a candidate for Court, they would be far harder to spot amongst 25.

Rob SC: Should just be a cc to the Board at that stage. It should *definitely* be confidential. Personally I would hate the society to know that I'd applied and did not succeed. People staying on after a Court role, that's important for people coming into role. It's hard to step back, and then suddenly have your opinion not count for anything. It's difficult for a GO to see that something you'd made with an intention of continuity be immediately dismissed. It would be nice to engineer in this continuity between groups.

Lindsay: Many complaints about Court selection have come from people who have failed at Court selection. There are many returning applicants for Court Roles year after year. I think that it's yet another thing to be doing, but there's a duty of care to these people. They have made themselves vulnerable, so we owe it to them to let them know why they didn't it, so that they can learn from unsuccessful attempts. Creating a feedback process for rejection would be positive, and avoid people banging their heads against a brick wall just doing the same thing repeatedly.

Erin: Feedback **can** be given on request, but not often used.

Gav: If there is a shift in how the Board operates, it might be good to have a sub-set for channeling the wider community into our selection process.

Jonny: Rejection: Having experienced it myself two ways, one a phonecall (where I was just told I hadn't got it), the other, a sit down with a coffee to talk about why it didn't work; having that chat is infinitely preferable.

Erin: Well, thanks all - I think we're going to have to leave it there. I (by which I mean Alex) will be writing up all of this and sending it around. Please do email in if you have any views you didn't get to share or that occur to you, and if you're happy for it to be shared, let us know. We are learning lessons with these bletchers and if you have any ideas for future formats, let us know about that too. Thanks for your time, it's not easy I know, but it has been a positive discussion and we've got lots to work with.

APPENDIX 1: Emails received from members unable to attend

[Some others received - only those we have permission to share are listed below]

FROM: Siri Pantzar DATE: Jan 26, 2019

To: chair@beltane.org

Hi boardlings,

There are a few thoughts I'd like to introduce to the mix of discussions, either tomorrow or in the discussions that follow. These are only tangentially related to the blether, but I think would help the society going forward.

At its core I feel like there should be more year-round volunteer roles.

I appreciate the work the Blues and the Board do immensely. But really I believe the Board should be saving their time and focus on strategy (like all these blethers) and legal charity requirements, and other major things. Blues (and I know this can be controversial, this is just the sense that I have) should mostly be focusing on ritual / carrying over of legacy. I believe there are a selection of tasks that fall on these entities because we lack operational volunteers and/or and operations manager staff member (and I think latter wouldn't suit us as an organisation anyway - but the former would).

So at its simplest, what I propose is founding of a few full-year BFS volunteer teams, potentially led by / watched over by a board member but largely independent. I believe this would:

- 1) make the roles of board member and Blue more sustainable, helping with volunteer retention
- 2) allow people to get involved in the bits that interest them the most and not the other things, and create space for training interested community members in those things; and
- 3) build a better experience for all the members of the community when there is clarity of support systems and the people responsible for those aren't strained for time and capacity

There are many things that I think would be important, but the core ones I think we desperately need are:

a) event management team. To work with the Event Coordinator on logistics and practicalities. You shouldn't need to be voted in to help organise stage build or licensing. You shouldn't need to learn complaint listening skills if all you want to do is coordinate with other festivals to get BFS to more other things. There are many folk who would really benefit from these skills, and many people who, I'm sure, would love to help out with this stuff but don't want the rest of board

responsibilities, and I'm sure the board / blues could use a hand with this stuff, as we continue to get bigger.

b) welfare team. I think even more core than the above. We are a community built on passion that includes a lot of people with various struggles with mental and physical health, and conflicts arise constantly, as you know. This shouldn't really be a charity board responsibility, nor Blue responsibility, except in the severest of cases (additionally, there is the issue of people having complaints against board / blues which can get all muddled up). These people should be trained in this stuff, it's not something you know automatically. I think having a dedicated team of welfare volunteers who have intricate understanding of the conflict and complaints procedures but also more generally training in conflict management etc. would really help with the wellbeing of all our volunteers. We have a lot of people who have counselling skills and training, who I think would love to help, but currently a lot of these tasks fall either on the board, on the blues, or on GOs who might or might not have the appropriate skills and training.

c) fundraising. I believe this has been talked about a bit - I have less thoughts on this but there are many people who know a lot about this stuff, and it is time consuming so help would probably be good?

Those are the things I can think of - I'm sure there are other bits that might be good (also communications / social media springs to mind, but it seems to be working fine at the moment so I'm assuming someone has it under control!).

I currently work in volunteer management so not sure if I would have the mental capacity to put any of this into action (same reason I avoid GOing at the moment, doing the same thing for work and volunteering isn't fun), but I'd certainly be happy to help out setting it up if that was useful :) I am sure something similar has been attempted in the past, in one way or another, but I feel like the society is in a place where there are plenty of people who wouldn't mind helping it out year-round even if they don't want to actually be on the board.

Hope the blether goes well!

Cheers,
Siri

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FROM: Diana Calthrop **DATE: Thu, Jan 24, 2019**

To: BFS Chair <chair@beltane.org>

Dear Erin,

I am unable to attend the Blether on Sunday and though I may well repeat myself from comments I've posted in Facebook threads and elsewhere before, I'd be so grateful if my thoughts could be added to the mix on Sunday, so I'll consolidate them as best I can here:

Blues

My studies in group facilitation and my personal life experience tell me that when people are over-stretched they are very likely to feel undervalued at the least and experience overwhelm and burn-out that leads them to simply walk away at the worst, and my main concern is that the Blues usually seem to have too much on their plates to an extent where they "can't win" in terms of what people want and expect from them and/or in terms of what they can take on healthily for themselves. Coupled with this, I also strongly believe that when there is lack of complete transparency in what a responsible and influential role entails then that breeds mistrust and certainly doesn't create the right environment for respect and appreciation either, especially where those roles are founded on self-selection. I believe that all humans need respect and appreciation for what they do, especially when they contribute to the lives of those around them, and that we also all need to know *what* it is we're being asked to appreciate in order to authentically and enthusiastically be able to do so. And authenticity; saying yes to things only when that can be done so enthusiastically and willingly; and as fellow humans, expressing our appreciation for each other's contribution to what makes life nourishing, are three of my brightest guiding lights in life so this whole email will be imbued with their flavour, even while I know that this is a very personal viewpoint that not everyone shares.

I would love to see way more transparency about what the Blue role entails, in all its aspects. I believe that that would help reveal where too much is expected of the Blues and therefore where changes in that regard could be made. Directly allied to this, why not start a movement to ask society members to voice and exhibit their appreciation of the Blues in the way that has been created to great effect over the years in regard to Nightwatch and Tech? I do think we'd need more clarity on *what* the Blues do in detail, to effect this though. I do not believe, as some might, that this is about pandering to 'Ego', I believe it is about appreciation, as mentioned before.

Court

I've offered in the past to be part of the selection of the new May Queen and the next role holder of Cailleach and been rejected. I'm concerned that there is a lack of a thread in continuity exhibited in this rejection that then affects the care of those who take on these roles for the first

time and does a disservice to the Goddess Herself. I speak from my own point of view as someone who experiences myself as one in a long line of connective unique experience, and I know I'm not the only one who has previously held the May Queen or Cailleach role, who would be a fantastic and unique resource in regard to contributing to the selection process of ongoing role-holders. It could be such a simple request as well, to email all of us who've held these roles and ask if we'd like to contribute and if so, the suggestion of how could be as simple as meditating on the names of those short listed and emailing any thoughts that arise from that, to offering the last person who's held the role to be a fully active part of the selection group, and any number of possible ways in between. The Goddess in all her aspects is inextricably linked into who I am as a person and She is of paramount importance to me in how She is treated in the run up to, during, and after our festivals and I'm delighted that this is being taken seriously as part of this Blether! (So far, I have not felt a similar connection to the Green Man and Winter and Summer King roles....)

Board

I would love to see in the selection of Blues and Board, more obvious space of consideration given to how to utilise the wealth of experience over many years within BFS, decades of general life experience, and a multitude of skills gathered from our studying and working lives, those of us with limited time and energies due to our health and for other reasons, have to contribute to the Blue and Board roles, because I for one am desperate to contribute and know I'm not the only one, and yet I don't see the structures yet, within which to do so and I think a trick is being missed making the most of us! The transferable skills from accessing one's power creatively within constraints of energy level and health limitations, are alone, I strongly believe worth their weight in gold in the Blues and the Board environments, where burn-out is rife. And, I realise that what I'm describing is what I consider a massively important part of Eldership, the respect for which is key to my understanding of healthy community.

And the more clear *how* of all my points...? I don't currently have concrete suggestions, but I *do* think that my points are well worth considering when planning to come up with new selections and support procedures... I believe there can be many ways to actively engage with these issues and that we have a wealth of talent in BFS to draw on in order to do so.

With loving appreciation to *all* who give their hearts and souls to BFS and wishes for a positive and constructive Blether,

Diana