

**DRAFT Minutes of Talking News Federation**  
**Trustee Awayday Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 November 2021**  
**Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa**

**Attendees:**

Amanda Reed	Chair	(AR)
Tim Baty	Technology	(TB)
Heather Bolton	Secretary	(HB)
Alan Dunderdale	Development	(AD)
Paul Ramsden	Strategy	(PR)
Mike Wood	Vice President	(MW)

**Apologies:**

Richard Black	Treasurer	(RB)
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**1. Welcome and Apologies**

AR welcomed everyone to the first trustee meeting since her election as TNF Chairman at the October 2021 AGM. RB sent apologies on medical advice.

**2. TNF activities: work in progress/ project updates/ topics for discussion**

**2.1 IT stream**

- 2.1.1 TB said the new member database was now operational. Targeted emails could be auto generated, although some data cleansing was still required. The next stage would introduce Microsoft 365, allowing trustees access to central storage and shared documents. Ongoing discussions would confirm how many MS Office 365 licences TNF would receive (minimum 10).
- 2.1.2 Trustees agreed to fund an upgraded web hosting package at a cost of approx. £700pa – an increase of around £250pa. While more than the figure quoted earlier in 2021, this is still significantly cheaper than TNF's previous hosting arrangements. Benefits of the new package included:
- Splitting web and audio hosting, allowing streaming of audio files (something current arrangements cannot support long-term)
  - Unlimited email traffic, allowing full use of the new database to contact members.
  - Removing the current cap on TN Talk emails, allowing creation of different topic streams within an updated TNF-hosted TN Talk.
- 2.1.3 Trustees warmly praised the IT work carried out by Gavin Smalley and discussed whether TNF should pay him for some of the forthcoming Microsoft 365 implementation. They also agreed that additional volunteer resource would be useful to remove some less technical tasks from Gavin. TN Talk could be a source of potential new volunteers and AD offered to make inquiries locally.
- 2.1.4 TB explained that IT system resilience had been increased. Both TB and Gavin Smalley now have administrator access to all TNF IT systems (website, servers etc) in case of problems. In addition, a third administrator access code/password would be stored in the safe at the Swindon office.
- 2.1.5 A future topic for discussion should be the impact on TNs (and their listeners) of BT's proposals to replace current landline technology with internet based VOIP in the next few years. This had potential for significant impact on the older demographic among TN listeners.

**2.2 Roles & vacancies**

- 2.2.1 Peter White remains as TNF President, with Mike Wood as Vice President.
- 2.2.2 Trustees agreed to write to Dr Amit Patel to formalise the invitation to become a TNF Vice President, setting out what the role would entail and what expenses would be reimbursed. HB will draft a letter. Suggestions included asking him to promote TNF by:

- Attending a small number of TNF events as a speaker, including TNF's AGM
- Mentioning TNF in some of his social media posts (TNF to provide him with hooks to encourage this)
- Becoming a regular interviewee on Soundings (say 2-3 times a year).

2.2.3 The idea of recruiting TNF ambassadors was put on hold in the short term to consider how best to define the role and avoid any conflicts of interest potential candidates might have.

2.2.4 Among the existing trustees, MW agreed to send HB the current Secretary role profile, which may need updating. PR offered to help frame trustee meeting agendas and ensure reports were submitted in advance and appropriate follow-up information provided.

2.2.5 Trustees considered Raksha Malde-Kara's application to become TNF's lead for communications and agreed to ask her to develop a TNF communications & branding plan to present to the committee. This would give her the opportunity to talk to existing trustees as an introduction to TNF and its needs before standing as a trustee at next year's AGM. AR and HB will arrange a zoom call with Raksha to discuss next steps and establish HB as 'mentor' for the project.

2.2.6 TNF would benefit from a co-opted trustee with sight loss. AD agreed to make initial contact with xxxxxx (ALAN - NEED THE NAME FOR ECLO WE DISCUSSED PLEASE) – initially for a Soundings piece – but with the longer-term aim of considering approaching her to become a trustee.

2.2.7 Past TNF Chair Mike Lewington had offered to help at occasional external events. ML had also offered to assist with TNF guideline, process & policy development, but his reporting lines into the committee need be defined beforehand.

## 2.3 AGM/Local conferences

2.3.1 Trustees agreed to target a programme of 3 conferences in 2022 – a shorter annual conference and two smaller regional events. The AGM would include a social event on Friday evening, followed by a full day on Saturday with dinner, but no organised Sunday events.

2.3.2 AR will look for an AGM venue in the midlands. AD will look for a venue for one regional event in northern England, with the other regional event being held at London's Musical Museum (offered by Steve Barrett-White). AD will ask Phil Stannard if he is willing to provide AV for next year's events. If Phil is unavailable Steve B-W may be able to assist. Once dates and venue are agreed, TN Talk should be used to recruit volunteers to help with conference organisation.

2.3.3 HB to consult RB on the potential to bring forward the timing of TNF accounts, allowing the AGM to be held earlier in the year. Subject to the accounts trustees may want to consider bringing the AGM date forward gradually over a number of years (EG from October to July).

## 2.4 Soundings

2.4.1 There remains a vacancy for a Soundings/ Content trustee. Contributor numbers are increasing and Soundings' future is OK at present but it has proved difficult to find moderators able & willing to use the online content publishing system. Recruitment efforts to find more moderators are ongoing.

## 2.5 Talking Info

2.5.1 MW reported that the Talking Info domain name has been bought, a producer has been recruited to co-ordinate and chase up local groups. The system will launch fortnightly once the website is ready. Talking Info would allow small local groups to operate without registering as individual charities. Groups could then generate a small amount of local news, which would be supplemented by Soundings content and broadcast via the BWBF app. While TNF would not offer a local USB option, local volunteers could potentially download Talking Info onto USB sticks and circulate these themselves if they had the resources to do so.

## 2.6 Insurance

2.6.1 The current insurance deal is coming to an end. MW and Brian Watts will now negotiate with Verlingue to fix prices for a new 3-year deal. Member feedback on the insurers has been good, with some TNs saving as much as £450 a year through the TNF membership deal.

## **2.7 TN Talk**

2.7.1 Trustees agreed to bring TN Talk in house in order to be able to provide greater capacity – removing limit on email traffic and allowing creation of different topic streams. Starting in December 2021, there would be three topic streams: General, Technical and Editorial.

2.7.2 There is a need to review some aspects of the new-style TN Talk:

- Consider whether some general enquiries sent via TN Talk should be re-directed to TNF's paid admin support in Sheffield **(NB - NOT CLEAR WHO WILL ACTION THIS)**
- Retain the ability to put TN Talkers under moderation of their comments are deemed inappropriate
- Add footers to clarify that views are contributors' own not TNF's
- Establish one official TNF voice for TN Talk that is distinct from trustees'/volunteers' individual messages.

## **2.8 Development**

2.8.1 AD reported that TNs often only contacted him when they had already decided to close and it was too late to help save them. Leeds TN fell into this category but contacted AD to offer their £5,000 reserves to TNF.

2.8.2 Trustees agreed that it would be timely to email TNs to remind them about TNF's rescue package of advice and help for members with problems. PR, TB and HB will draft an email to all TNF members asking about plans for the future and reminding them about the help available.

## **2.9 TNF member survey/ Marketing & communications**

2.9.1 The rescue package email (see 2.8.2 above) was a greater priority than a general survey. Feedback from the rescue email would help inform a full member survey to be drafted later by a new communications trustee. Decisions on marketing & communications should be deferred until Raksha has delivered a communications plan (see 2.2.5 above).

## **2.10 Exhibitions & events 2022**

2.10.1 Trustees agreed to prioritise exhibition presence at Sight Village events for 2022 as follows:

- Exeter 26 April 2022 – potentially AR. MW to approach Helen McIntosh to assist as she is local to the venue.
- Solihull 28-29 July – AR, MW & HB
- Leeds 21 September – AD & PR
- London 8-9 November – Mike Lewington

## **2.11 Winter Workshops**

2.11.1 PR reported 40-50 people had signed up for 'IT Swapshop' on 4 December – the first of this season's winter workshops. Trustees agreed to spend £500 on a GDPR specialist to deliver a second winter workshop. PR will commission the speaker and organise the event for January 2022, with a video available after the event and, ideally, a GDPR factsheet for TNF members.

2.11.2 It was agreed to target 4-5 winter workshops for 2021-22. Suggestions for future topics included:

- Insurance – EG trustee liability/ libel/ building & equipment cover etc – presented by TNF's insurance company
- Copyright, including the implication of moving TNs online.

2.11.3 The prospect of spending £500 on a single winter workshop prompted discussion on the level of TNF's subscription. Trustees agreed to keep the subscription at £42pa for 2022-23 but will revisit the idea of a price rise later in 2022 for the year 2023-24. In the meantime, projects such as the GDPR workshop will be funded from reserves.

## **2.12 Volunteers project**

2.12.1 On hold – not seen as a current priority.

## **2.13 Content**

2.13.1 Trustees agreed that TN content would make a good workshop topic for next year's AGM. MW to approach TNF President Peter White to present a session on how to find material and how to interview. In the meantime, TNs would have access to Soundings content, Talking Info and tips from the new TN Talk content stream.

## **2.14 Display equipment, branding & marketing merchandise**

2.14.1 This should form part of Raksha's initial communications project. Trustees agreed to ask her to look at marketing material aimed at both sighted people and VIs and to give her a budget range to work within. In the meantime, existing display & marketing material will continue to be used.

## **2.15 Communications report**

2.15.1 Progress had been made towards implementing the Communications (People stream) report, although there remained more to do once a communications trustee was in place. Measures introduced so far included new structure & trustee roles; updated website with simplified hosting and updating processes; and new database allowing better targeted communications. Planned introduction of Microsoft 365 (see 2.1.1) will support better business continuity, document management and allow trustees to store and share files centrally.

## **2.16 Facebook**

2.16.1 AR currently manages the TNF Facebook page and will continue until someone else can be recruited to take over. Take up of Facebook posts is mixed but often low. TB will check admin rights for the Facebook page.

## **2.17 Talking Newspaper Services (TNS)**

2.17.1 Amid speculation that TNS will cease trading in March 2022, trustees debated whether there was a role for TNF to step in and offer alternative phone-based services. It was agreed TNF would not do this because take up of phone services was low. However, assuming TNS closure is confirmed, TNF should promote its existing factsheet on DIY phone services to TNs.

## **2.18 Policies & guidance**

2.18.1 Mike Lewington had offered to continue to work on TNF policies & guidance. He would draft material for trustees to review before publication but trustees should keep alert to emerging issues that may require policies. AD proposed 2-year reviews for all policies. HB offered to help edit new policy/ guidance documents to ensure they were short and to the point.

## **2.19 Training & Support/ How to guides**

2.19.1 The only organised face-face training offer in the short term would be the programme of winter workshops (see 2.11 above)

2.19.2 The 'how to' guides were useful but needed a review. They should be returned to their original authors for any updates before being promoted to member TNs **(NB - NOT CLEAR WHO WILL ACTION THIS)**. A follow-on project would transfer the guides to the planned TNF wiki.

## **2.20 TNF website (covered in 2.15 above)**

## **2.21 Independent reviews**

2.21.1 Review activity had been quiet as TNs recovered from lockdowns. PR suggested TNs should be reminded about the review offer. Trustees wondered whether the offer might be extended to magazine content as well as news. MW will contact review co-ordinator Helen McIntosh to make sure she is willing to continue in this role before PR drafts an email a reminder to all members to be sent out via the new database.

## **2.22 TNF grants offer**

2.22.1 Grant applications had been few and far between – and often poor quality. Trustees agreed to keep the grant offer as a member benefit but not promote it extensively over the next year.

## **2.23 TNF office Swindon**

2.23.1 Trustees agreed to maintain the Swindon office as a useful home for equipment and archive material, and costs were minimal.

## **2.24 Sheffield admin support**

2.24.1 There was a lack of clarity about the type and quantity of TNF enquiries handled under the contract with Sheffield society for the Blind and whether this provided value for money. Trustees agreed that the new admin contact and new manager at Sheffield should be asked to provide qualitative and quantitative information on the work they do on TNF's behalf.

2.24.2 MW will brief the new contacts at Sheffield and request a report on the number and type of enquiries they handle – and this will feed into a report to trustees by MW outlining proposals for contract review/ updated specification/ service level agreement. TB to arrange for AR to have access to the [enquiries@tnf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@tnf.org.uk) email address to monitor enquiries and responses.

## **2.25 Archive & history**

2.25.1 Cathy Sexton will continue to help with archiving of old paperwork, magazines etc. Digital copies will be transferred to Microsoft 365 once it is operational.

## **2.26 Trustee meetings**

2.26.1 For the coming year trustees agreed to hold 2 face-to-face meetings and 4 zoom meetings on weekdays. Meetings should include a mix of operational and strategic topics, with agenda and reports circulated 2 weeks in advance. Agendas should also ensure actions from previous meetings are followed through and reported back. HB will explore options for a session on understanding 'team strengths' for a future face to face meeting – possibly based around Belbin questionnaires.

2.26.2 HB will contact RB about forward dates for trustee meetings to fit with the account reporting cycle.

## **3. AOB**

### **3.1 Fit for the future?**

3.1.1 PR suggested a piece of work on how to help TNs make themselves fit for the future. To help shape a discussion at a future meeting, PR will ask all trustees to send him bullet points on the prospects for TNs in 1, 3 and 5 years' time.

### **3.2 Scottish TNs**

3.2.1 Following the closure of the Scottish equivalent of TNF, MW & AD will jointly approach a friendly Scottish TN - such as Ayrshire - to see if it will be possible to build a relationship on the ground as a starting point for greater contact with other TNs.

### **3.3 TNF structure**

3.3.1 HB to recirculate the TNF structure for review. Updates may be required now that new trustees are in post and AD suggested that conference organisation could potentially be moved into the Development portfolio.

### **3.4 AGM minutes**

3.4.1 Trustees agreed the accuracy of the draft AGM minutes and these will now be added to the TNF website, awaiting member approval at next year's AGM.

### **3.5 Updated TNF member offer**

3.5.1 PR, TB and HB agreed to review and update the TNF member offer. Once agreed this will be used to approach Scottish TNs, added to the TNF website and sent to member TNs at membership renewal time.

#### **4. Summary of decisions & actions: TNF trustee awayday 29-30 November**

##### **Key decisions: short term priorities/ strategic decisions**

- a) Trustees agreed to fund an upgraded web hosting package at a cost of approx. £700pa. As part of this TN Talk will move in house.
- b) Trustees agreed to write to Dr Amit Patel to formalise the invitation to become a TNF Vice President, setting out what the role would entail and what expenses would be reimbursed. **HB will draft a letter.**
- c) Trustees agreed to ask Raksha Malde-Kara to develop a TNF communications & branding plan to present to the committee. This should look at marketing material aimed at both sighted people and VIs and she should be given a budget range to work within. In the meantime, existing display material would continue to be used. **AR and HB will arrange a zoom call with Raksha to discuss next steps and establish HB as 'mentor' for the project**
- d) Trustees agreed to target a programme of 3 conferences in 2022 – a shorter annual conference and two smaller regional events.
- e) Trustees agreed to email TNs to remind them about TNF's rescue package for members. **PR, TB and HB will draft an email to all TNF members asking about plans for the future and reminding them about the help available.**
- f) Trustees agreed to prioritise exhibition presence at Sight Village events for 2022 as follows;
  - Exeter 26 April 2022 – **potentially AR. MW to check if Helen McIntosh could help as she is local to the venue.**
  - Solihull 28-29 July – **AR, MW & HB**
  - Leeds 21 September – **AD & PR**
  - London 8-9 November – Mike Lewington
- g) Trustees agreed to spend £500 on a GDPR specialist to deliver the second winter workshop. **PR will commission the speaker and organise the event for January 2022, with a video available after the event and, ideally, a GDPR factsheet for TNF members.**
- h) It was agreed to target 4-5 winter workshops for 2021-22. Suggestions. (For future topic suggestions see 2.11.2).
- i) Trustees agreed to keep the subscription at £42pa for 2022-23 but will revisit the idea of a price rise later in 2022 for the year 2023-24. In the meantime, projects such as the GDPR workshop will be funded from reserves.
- j) Trustees agreed to maintain the Swindon office as a home for equipment & archiving as costs were low.
- k) Trustees agreed that the new admin contact and new manager at Sheffield should be asked to provide qualitative and quantitative information on the work they do on TNF's behalf. **MW will brief the new contacts at Sheffield and request a report on the number and type of enquiries they handle – and this will feed into a report to trustees by MW outlining proposals for contract review/ updated specification/ service level agreement. TB to arrange for AR to be given access to the [enquiries@tnf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@tnf.org.uk) email address to monitor inquiries and responses.**
- l) For the coming year trustees agreed to hold 2 face-to-face meetings and 4 zoom meetings on weekdays. Meetings should include a mix of operational and strategic topics, with agenda and reports circulated 2 weeks in advance. Agendas should also ensure actions from previous meetings are followed through and reported back. **HB will explore options for a session on understanding 'team strengths' for a future face to face meeting – possibly based around Belbin questionnaires. PR offered to help frame trustee meeting agendas and ensure reports were submitted in advance and appropriate follow-up information provided.**
- m) **HB to contact RB about forward dates for trustee meetings to fit with the account reporting cycle.**
- n) Trustees agreed TNF would benefit from a co-opted trustee with sight loss. **AD agreed to make initial contact with xxxxxx – initially for Soundings piece – but with the longer-term aim of considering approaching her to become a trustee.**

- o) Trustees agreed the accuracy of the draft AGM minutes and these will now be added to the TNF website, awaiting member approval at next year's AGM.

### Other actions: medium term/ operational

- i. Recruiting additional IT volunteers: TN Talk could be a source of potential new volunteers and **AD** offered to make inquiries locally.
- ii. **MW** to send **HB** the current Secretary role profile, which may need updating.
- iii. Conference venues: **AR** will look for an AGM venue in the midlands. **AD** will look for a venue for one regional event in northern England (accessible from Scotland), with the other regional event being held at London's Musical Museum (offered by Steve Barrett-White). **AD** will ask Phil Stannard if he is willing to provide AV for next year's events. If Phil is unavailable Steve B-W may be able to assist. Once dates and venue are agreed, TN Talk should be used to recruit volunteers to help with conference organisation.
- iv. **HB** to consult **RB** on the potential to bring forward the timing of TNF accounts, potentially allowing the AGM to be held earlier in the year.
- v. **MW** and Brian Watts to now negotiate with Verlingue to fix prices for a new 3-year insurance deal for TNF and its members.
- vi. **TB** will check admin rights for the Facebook page.
- vii. Assuming Talking Newspaper Services' closure is confirmed in Spring, TNF should promote its existing factsheet on DIY phone services to TNs.
- viii. **HB** offered to help edit new policy/ guidance documents to ensure they were short and to the point.
- ix. 'How to' guides are useful but needed a review. They should be returned to their original authors for any updates before being promoted to member TNs. **TO CONFIRM WHO IS DOING THIS??**
- x. TNs should be reminded about the review offer and the offer potentially extended to magazine content as well as news. **MW** will contact review co-ordinator Helen McIntosh to make sure she is willing to continue in this role before **PR** drafts an email a reminder to all members via the new database.
- xi. Following the closure of the Scottish equivalent of TNF, **MW & AD** will jointly approach a friendly Scottish TN - such as Ayrshire - to see if it will be possible to build a relationship on the ground as a starting point for greater contact with other TNs.
- xii. **HB** to recirculate the TNF structure for review. Updates may be required now that new trustees are in post and AD suggested that conference organisation could potentially be moved into the Development portfolio.
- xiii. **PR, TB and HB** agreed to review and update the TNF member offer. Once agreed this will be used to approach Scottish TNs, added to the TNF website and sent to member TNs at membership renewal time.

### Topics for future meetings

- **PR** proposed the impact on TNs (and their listeners) of BT's proposals to cease offering landline phones in the next few years.
- **MW** to approach TNF President Peter White to present an AGM session on sourcing TN content – EG how to find material and how to interview.
- **PR** suggested discussion on how to help TNs make themselves fit for the future. To help shape a discussion at a future meeting, **PR** will ask all trustees to send him bullet point on the prospects for TNs in 1, 3 and 5 years' time.