

FROM NATIONAL CHAIRMAN'S OFFICE

Haig House  
199 Borough High Street  
London  
SE1 1AA  
Date 18 December 2015

Membership Council  
County and District Chairmen  
Branch Chairmen

**Comradeship Services Project (CSP) - Update**

Dear Chairmen,

During recent months, the membership renewal and joining systems have undergone fundamental change, resulting in a number of issues and concerns, many of which have arrived at my desk. This letter aims to update you on progress and to explain in more detail some of the issues that have been experienced.

Firstly, one of the key drivers for change was our existing system PRO 2000. The membership database, was obsolete and technically un-supported; it was therefore appropriate and necessary to seize the opportunity to change and in particular to take an overarching view of TRBL data management architecture and needs. Holding separate databases across the organisation is inefficient, whereas, one single repository could satisfy the needs of membership, fundraising and volunteering. In addition, TRBL has to ensure compliance with the auditor's requirements, the Charity Commission's regulations and the Data Protection Act 1998.

At the same time we recognised the need to open up a more diverse range of payment options in order to modernise TRBL and attract a younger membership base. The CSP benefits TRBL by widening the methods by which both new members and renewing members can pay their membership fees, specifically online, telephone, direct mailing or in branch. Methods to pay have also been widened to include; DD, cheque, credit/debit card, cash at PayPoint, bank transfer including PayPal or the traditional cash at branch. The main change; however, is membership cards are issued after payment has been received and are mailed directly to the recipient's home address. By using home addresses and direct mailing, TRBL can gather, maintain and ensure accurate data. Strategically, through encouragement by TRBL officers, we can increase the verifiable uptake of Gift Aid and therefore increase both benevolent and membership revenue.

Whilst the changes have impacted some individual members, for the vast majority this has not been so. The membership team at Haig House and the Membership Support Officers on the ground, have been working hard to implement the new system, relying on you at branch level to lead your members towards making their renewal payment. We have listened to your feedback and two major changes have been implemented; the first is that we will accept cash payments in branches and have put in place the capability to accept bulk cheques for multiple members; the second is that we will extend the payment period out to 31 March 2016.

Delivering these new changes has not been easy and there are several key areas where we need to say we could have done better: for example, we underestimated the complexity of the task and whilst we ran over 60 branch briefings, the message was not cascaded widely to our stakeholders, specifically, our members. We could have managed our communication

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better, particularly the issuing of letters by our partner organisations and specifically phasing our letters and reminders to give members the best chance possible to complete their renewal.

In tandem with this, such momentous change programmes ordinarily need to be phased in; however, this programme alongside the implementation of Office 365 were taken together to allow MSOs and branch officials the access needed to review, update and maintain membership listings. Implementing both projects together applied more pressure to branch organisations than some could bear, thus creating a point of failure.

The membership team are working hard alongside Novacroft and Connect Assist to improve communication, proactively informing MSOs of forthcoming changes and phases of delivery as these occur in order to rectify the situation. To date 197,000 members have renewed their membership, with a further 8,000 new joiners registered on the system, thus the total membership today is 205,000. Reminder letters were dispatched on 11 Dec to the 56,000 members yet to renew and emails dispatched from 18 Dec to 19,000 members yet to renew. Additional staff have been deployed by membership services to support the enquiry and complaints process, whilst Novacroft and Connect Assist have increased their staff to cope with call volumes.

As stated earlier, acknowledging the difficulties some members have faced with the revised renewal process, the renewal year will be extended until 31 Mar 16. The current governing rules permit membership for a 3 month period beyond the usual renewal point; however, circumstances this year are such that in order to facilitate the maximum number of renewals membership services will not lapse members until after 31 Mar 16, thereby allowing MSOs, County and Branch officials to complete the renewals exercise. Your support to make this happen is imperative and I urge you to proactively influence membership renewals in your branch.

Finally, change programmes do cost money and we have incurred more costs than planned, To suggest that we could simply switch from one system to another without issue was neither sensible nor achievable. The outcomes from this change have allowed us to broaden our payment methods and for that there are development costs to be borne which are being shared by the finance and IT departments. In addition, we have developed a direct mailing capability, which whilst it will also incur costs; must be set against the advantages of verifiable data, improved security and direct communication with each member.

I urge you to rally your members and secure the memberships TRBL is actively seeking to grow our membership base.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Crisford', with a horizontal line underneath.

John Crisford  
National Chairman