



The Royal British Legion
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26th January 2016

**Chairmen of WS Counties and Branches
RBL County Chairmen and Branch Chairmen**

**cc Board of Trustees
Membership Council
Marilyn Humphry
Members of WS Central Committee
Directors
Tony Wright**

Dear Chairman,

The Future of the Royal British Legion's Women's Section

As you know, bearing in mind its statutory duty to act in the best interests of beneficiaries at all times, The Royal British Legion Board of Trustees has decided to change the governance arrangements in respect of The Women's Section as part of the Legion so that all parts of The Royal British Legion act as a single organisation with one voice. From comments I have received, it is apparent that a great deal of misunderstanding exists about what has been decided, why and what the effect will be. I am therefore writing to all Women's Section County and Branch Chairmen, and all Legion County, District and Branch Chairmen, to set out the facts.

I must emphasise, at the outset, that the Board of Trustees continues to place great importance on the valuable work of the Women's Section, not least its fundraising activities, in support of our beneficiary community. There is no reason why that work should not continue long into the future. The changes need to be made to modernise the governance arrangements and reflect current statutory duties and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees and will actually secure the future for the Women's Section which would otherwise be in considerable doubt.

By way of background, it is widely known that a debate about the status of the Women's Section within the Royal British Legion has been underway, off and on, for many years. Various speakers at the Women's Section Annual Conference and the RBL Annual Conference, including myself, have referred to it in recent years and, during the last twelve months, the issue has been debated by the Board of Trustees on several occasions. The Chairman of the Women's Section and other members of the Central Committee have participated in those discussions and have kept their colleagues on the Central Committee informed. They have not however been able to discuss the issue more widely because the understandable sensitivity of the discussions meant that they were bound by the principle of confidentiality up to the point where a clear decision had been reached i.e. at the meeting of the Board of Trustees on 10th December.

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To date, the Women's Section has been a semi-autonomous entity within the Legion with its own systems, processes and structure. In December 2014, the Director of Finance presented a paper to the Board of Trustees which outlined four major issues facing the Women's Section:

- falling membership;
- declining income;
- the introduction of a comradeship (membership) database in the rest of the Legion; and
- the high ratio of administrative costs to welfare spend within the Women's Section.

In March 2015 the Chairman of the Women's Section presented a paper to the Board of Trustees detailing the actions that the Women's Section was taking to address those issues. A number of meetings between the National Vice Chairman of the Royal British Legion, myself and the Women's Section Chairman and Vice Chairman were subsequently held to discuss possible options and identify areas of concern. I should emphasise that the sole motivation for these discussions was to secure greater value for money in the use of charitable donations.

Six options for the future of the Women's Section have been discussed and were presented to the Board of Trustees at a meeting on 10th December 2015. These ranged from 'no change' to disbanding the Section altogether. A paper prepared by the Chairman of the Women's Section which argued for the 'no change' option was also considered. The strengths and weaknesses of each option were carefully considered. Particularly bearing in mind the relationship of Women's Section costs of administration relative to the amount of money made available to beneficiaries, the Board of Trustees decided that the status of the Women's Section should be that of a District within the Royal British Legion with effect from 1st October 2016.

In order to achieve this a small committee, comprising Terry Whittles (National Vice-Chairman), David Whimpenny (Chairman of the Membership Council), and Marilyn Humphry (Chairman of the Women's Section), has been formed and has been given delegated authority to act on behalf of the Board of Trustees to determine the detailed arrangements to achieve the Board's objective. Notwithstanding the work that the committee will undertake, you may wish to be advised of the following:

- The name of the Women's Section will not change. It will still be known as 'The Women's Section' whilst, for governance purposes, it will be a District as defined in the RBL Governing Regulations;
- The Branch structure within the Section will be unaffected;
- The Women's Section National Standard will be laid up;
- Branches will continue to have their own Standards;

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- Retention of the Branch structure will mean that all Branches will be able to participate fully in elections for Trustees, the National Chairman and the National Vice Chairman of the RBL and will also be entitled to send delegates to the Royal British Legion Annual Conference thus increasing the diversity of attendance at the conference;
- Women's Section members will still be able to raise funds for their current schemes of support for beneficiaries. Of course those who are helped by the Women's Section will continue to have access to RBL support as they do now;
- The Women's Section Central Committee will become a District Committee;
- Women's Section County Committees will cease to exist;
- As a District within the Legion, the Chairman of the Women's Section will no longer have an automatic seat on the Board of Trustees;
- The Women's Section will have a seat on the Membership Council; and
- Assuming she wishes to do so, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal will continue to be President of the Women's Section.

Full integration of the Women's Section within the Legion, as a District, will reduce costs (therefore making more funds available for beneficiaries) by, for example, fully integrating systems and processes and the size and cost of the Women's Section Annual Conference will be much reduced. Finally, it is possible that there may be some redundancies within the current staff of the Women's Section but, in accordance with established Legion policies, full consultation will be undertaken with those who may be affected and every effort will be made to redeploy staff.

In conclusion, I would stress that the Board of Trustees has taken the decision to change the status of the Women's Section to that of a District following detailed consideration of the pros and cons of a range of options always with the objective of achieving the best outcome for our beneficiaries and bearing in mind the statutory duty of Trustees to act in the interests of beneficiaries at all times. The efficient use of financial and other resources is paramount in performing that duty.

Yours faithfully


Chris Simpkins
Director General

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