



Central News – December 2023

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What's coming up	
11 December 2023	Membership Roadshow – Central Region
8 January 2024	Registration for Annual Conference opens
23 January 2024	Membership Townhall
8 January 2024	Registration for Annual Conference opens
16 February 2024	Membership awards nominations close
1-2 March 2024	County Chairs seminar
10-12 May 2024	Annual Conference

Director General appointed

Mark Atkinson, the current CEO of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) and a former CEO of Scope, will be joining the RBL as Director General in the new year.

Starting on Monday 29 January, Mark comes to the RBL after five years with RNID, a national hearing loss charity. He will continue the delivery of our transformational change portfolio, whilst working to develop our long-term thinking to best look after the needs of our community.

At RNID, Mark oversaw a period of significant transformation and led the development of a new corporate strategy. He also introduced a new financial and operating model and led the introduction of a new organisational structure and matrix working with increased focus on flexibility, agility, and trust. Mark also played a leading role in the Disability Charities Consortium of 10 national disability charities to co-ordinate advocacy and influence government.

Announcing Mark’s appointment, National Chair Jason Coward said that like many charities, the RBL faces challenges around how it adapts to changing beneficiary needs, how it responds to current economic issues, both in supporting our community and raising vital funds, and how it creates the best environment.

“These are all issues Mark has previous experience in and I am confident he will bring strong leadership and strategic thinking to the charity as we continue to ensure we’re fit for the future and put those we support at the heart of our work.”

Membership Council Chair’s Briefing

The briefing from the Chair of the Membership Council, John Boisson, from the Membership Council meeting of 18 October [is now available on MAP](#).

Updated safeguarding policies

New versions of RBLs safeguarding policies have been made available in the MAP documents library, found within the [Safeguarding folder](#) of Governance and Policy. Separate policies are in place for [children and young people](#), and for [adults at risk](#). Should you have any safeguarding concerns, please contact your MEO in the first instance.

Annual Conference update

Whilst many are counting the days to Christmas, we are also counting the days to Annual Conference 2024. Last month, armed with laptops and notepads, staff and representatives of the Membership Council, National Conference Committee, Ceremonial Working Group and Membership Awards Committee went on a recce to Wales, with planning in mind.

We are delighted to report that the venue, [ICC Wales in Newport](#), is an impressive space that offers comfort, accessibility, and functionality. From drinking water points to spacious, clean facilities, it offers the flexibility required to host a successful RBL Annual Conference.

Ample parking is on site, with a daily fee of £6 – discounted from £16 – and for those who will stay in accommodation closer to the heart of Newport or who simply want to explore, the venue is just a short car or bus ride away.

Registration opens on 8 January for both voting delegates and visitors. Voting delegates will receive confirmation of their registration in March 2024. Please note, visitors who attend online do not have access to the evening entertainment but can view the business of Conference and, in the case of virtual delegates, vote on Motions.

For further information on the venue, please refer to the [October Special Circular](#) or the [FAQs page on the RBL website](#). Further details of Annual Conference will be released as they become available with full details in the March Circular.

Got a question for us?

Whilst Viva Engage (formerly Yammer) is a great channel for information and sharing ideas, unfortunately our moderators are unable to answer any questions posted. For questions that require a response from RBL, please send an email to MembershipServices@britishlegion.org.uk. From there, your query will be triaged to the most appropriate team.

January Townhall

Over the last few weeks, regional Membership Roadshows have provided an opportunity for branch officers to raise questions and have those questions answered. Following these roadshows' success, we encourage members to save the date for the next Membership Townhall, which is scheduled for 7-8pm 23 January. Members may attend on the day using [this link](#).

Membership Townhalls **are open for all members** to hear presentations from RBL and ask questions, so please share this information with other members. View a recording of the last Townhall [on MAP](#).

County Chairs seminar briefing pack survey

Thank you to everyone who completed the County Chairs seminar briefing pack survey. We received a good response and have collated valuable feedback as a result. We are pleased that so many found the pack useful and felt it provided a good overview of the presentations and discussions throughout the seminar.

However, given feedback on the balance of information, length, and timeline for delivery, the team is committed to improving the pack going forward.

The next County Chairs Seminar is scheduled to take place 1-2 March 2024. We will share more information when available next year and look forward to seeing you there.

Youth membership update

Following a very successful event on 7th October for County Officer training, we have been working to ensure that all feedback gathered from the County Youth Officers has been taken on board and followed through. A Youth Working Group has been established to enable the Membership Council to provide assurance to the Board of Trustees that:

- Activities are in place to develop the youth membership offer, with the aim to grow youth membership.
- Activities involving youth members are carried out in accordance with the youth membership policy and Legion youth strategy.

The working group will be co-chaired by Dilys Hooper (Membership Council Representative) and Issy Beeson (Membership Experience Manager) and will comprise staff and members, including a couple of CYOs. In the new year, the first meeting will commence by working through the feedback from the session in October. If any CYOs have further comments, please send these through to Issy and Dilys.

Fundraising

Following Remembrancetide, the Face-to-Face Private Sites Campaign is now active again. Employing small teams of two to three fundraisers in shopping centres, supermarkets and events around the UK, it aims to encourage new support for RBL through regular monthly gifts.

The campaign significantly contributes to recruiting new RBL supporters and providing essential funds to uphold our dedication to the Armed Forces community, ensuring we support them whenever and wherever needed.

If you or your members encounter our team, you can learn about becoming a Poppy Supporter or Poppy Lottery player whilst sharing your positive experiences of RBL. Our goal this year is to gain 36,000 new supporters through face-to-face interactions, aiming to raise approximately £14.6m over five years, and your support of the campaign is greatly appreciated.

Have your say in supporting our veterans

The Office for Veterans' Affairs has launched a new consultation [Supporting our Veterans](#), seeking to understand how veterans interact with various organisations such as government and local authority services, charities, and private companies. A range of policy topics will be covered, with a focus on issues including employment, housing, the economic and social contributions of veterans, and public perception and recognition of veterans.

If you or someone you know is a veteran and interested in responding, [this can be done online](#) or email veteransconsultation@cabinetoffice.gov.uk. The consultation closes on the 3rd of January 2024.

RBL welcomes the consultation as an opportunity to shape positive change for our Armed Forces community and will respond to the consultation as an organisation. If you have any questions, email: publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk

Petitioning and for a Veterans' Commissioner for England

The RBL is also urging the UK Government to appoint a veterans' commissioner for England, to be in line with Scotland, Wales Northern Ireland which already have commissioners. [Find out more and sign the petition online](#).

Good practice

We share two stories of how collaboration enabled members to come together in comradeship and remembrance.

Members from three branches come together in Germany

After receiving “a tentative message” from the UK, three branches in Germany came together to remember the sacrifice of Corporal of Horse Percy Frederick Clark of the Royal Horse Guards, who died in action in Germany, on the 25th of April in 1945.

CoH Clark’s son, Anthony, and his wife were due to dock in Hamburg and Mr Clark had reached out to the RBL in Germany to ask if they could help with a visit to the Becklingen cemetery.



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Mr and Mrs Clarks’ son and granddaughter were also flying into Hamburg to take part in the visit.

Coming together, members from the Bergen-Hohne Branch, the Hannover Branch and Minden Branch worked out a plan to make the visit possible. This involved the co-ordination of transport from Hamburg to Becklingen and back, the volunteering of three standard bearers, and a bugler to sound the Last Post.

At 12:00hrs on the 19th of July, a solemn dedication and ceremony of remembrance took place with the Clark Family standing present at the war grave of CoH Clark. A wreath provided by the RBL was laid on behalf of the family by Mr Clark, who was supported by his family.

“As the standard bearers performed their precisely timed ritual, it seemed as though the birds had fallen silent,” Hannover RBL Branch BCS rep Kieron Bradley wrote.

“The bugler took position, and the Last Post broke the peaceful silence.”

The Bergen-Hohne Chairman led the ceremony, ending with a moving dedication and recital of the Kohima epitaph.

“During acts of remembrance, we understand that emotions can be heightened,” said Mr Bradley. “The RBL members in attendance were able to provide a source of strength and comfort to the family as they paid their respects. It must also be said that the intensity of the occasion tested the emotional

resolve of the members who gave up their time and we are proud to have made the occasion as poignant as possible.”

Teamwork from the UK to Thailand enables act of remembrance

Teamwork between a UK RBL branch, Membership Engagement Team (MET) colleagues, and the RBL Thailand, enabled a war grave to be visited on behalf of a member.

MET colleagues received a request from the Chair of the RBL Hadleigh Branch. Due to his age, a member was unable to visit his father’s grave in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery. Could the Thailand Branch help?



MET’s Overseas Manager promptly reached out to the Thailand Branch, receiving a response almost immediately. Thanks to the RBL’s extensive branch network and ever-dedicated membership, contact was made with one of our members in the area in Thailand, who visited and photographed the grave for the relatives back home to let them know their loved ones, no matter where their resting place, can and will be remembered.

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Stay updated with eNews

If you enjoy reading *Legion* – which, we are pleased to report, recently won Bronze for the “Best Purpose-Led Content” at the International CMA awards – then why not sign up to our monthly *eNewsletter*? All members can sign up by managing their communication preferences [in the self-service portal](#). Should you decide you no longer wish to receive it, it is just as easy to unsubscribe. *eNews* keeps members up to date on stories and information that may not be included in *Legion* or *Central News*, so is a membership benefit worth signing up for!

Thank you for reading.