

AGM 2024

DC Report.

Thank you everyone for attending. It is sometime since we last had a District AGM and for this I apologise, since the times of the pandemic I have somewhat taken my eye off the ball in respect of governance but with the change from Executive Committees to Trustee Boards, as a District (as with all five Scout Groups), we need to move forward and make sure that we get our governance absolutely right, hence tonight's AGM which I've called at relatively short notice.

Moving forward I would like to establish a District Trustee Board which complies with the requirements of the Scout Association and the Charities Commission. In the past District governance via the Executive Committee has consisted primarily of senior leaders from the Scout Groups and Explorer Scout Unit and as such when the Executive Committee met, I felt that there was often a blurring between Governance Matters and Operational Matters. As a District (as with our Scout Groups) we need greater representation from non leaders on the Trustee Board, ideally exceeding the number of leaders on the Board and certainly equalling it. I fully acknowledge that this requirement will prove difficult to fulfil, volunteers are hard to come by at the best of times, however as a District we need to make the effort in order to ensure that we are compliant. In reality, participation in the District Trustee Board shouldn't be too much of an odious or time consuming task, I don't envisage more than two or three meetings a year, with the prime function of Governance at a District level dealing with the financial aspects of the District. Whilst senior Scout Leaders would still sit, ideally I would like a non leader representative from a parent of a child or young person from each of the five Groups and the Explorer Scout Unit to be members of the District Trustee Board. Volunteers required please!

With five Scout Groups, Blaydon and District is one of the smallest in Durham County, but that doesn't make us any less active.

2023 really saw an absolute full return to all aspects of Scouting after the disruption of the past few years. Looking around the District I am happy to report that all sections in our Scout Groups continue to deliver exciting and challenging programmes for our

children and young people. The continued commitment by our adult volunteers to these programmes and Scouting in general, results in success stories across the District such as the number of top awards, Chief Scouts Bronze Silver and Gold that have been gained and the number of children and young people who want to be involved in Scouting and undertake our mantra of #Skills for Life.

On this note, the Squirrel Drey for 4 to 6 year olds at Winlaton continues to draw attention and enquires from both within the locality and more often than not from outside the Blaydon District area. Whilst it is the case that it's probably the only Drey for miles around this shouldn't diminish the fact that the volunteers involved in the section have worked hard to make it a success despite the section adult volunteers being initially absolutely brand new to Scouting, I thank them for their hard work and commitment to this completely new aspect of Scouting.

Judging by the number of enquiries I get every week, many sections across the District continue to grow in numbers. Notable successes of growth include the recent restarting of the Beaver Colony at Crawcrook after a couple of years break due to a lack of adult volunteers and at the same Scout Group a four fold increase in numbers at their Scout Troop where this years census informed me that they have some 23 scouts in regular attendance.

Growth in numbers is of course not universal across the District, and I acknowledge that some of our Groups sometimes struggle to recruit and retain children or young people in their sections. This is in my view no-ones fault, and certainly no blame is laid in respect of our volunteers and leaders. Various forces often conspire to work against us, one year you might find that you've got (for instance) a healthy and buoyant Scout Troop then the next year you wonder where all the numbers have gone as other interests (army cadets and football training comes to mind) and pressures from school and friends not in the organisation prevail. All we can do is to keep plugging away and keep Scouting but in addition, I am looking at ways of trying to redress the balance across the District as a whole, as the Scout Association nationally requires us to do our best to ensure that anyone who wants to be involved in Scouting should be given the opportunity to do so. It seems illogical to me that children are sitting on a waiting list at one Group whilst there are vacancies at a neighbouring Scout Group. I

acknowledge the fact that children will often want to be with their friends and school peers but in the first instance we need to afford them the opportunity to do Scouting, which will only come about if we have greater cooperation and liaison between Groups and Sections in respect of waiting lists and / or a District waiting list. It is a work in progress.

Whilst the re establishment of the Beaver Colony at Crawcrook is an undoubted success, a downside is the fact that despite some initial promising discussions we have been unable to restart the Colony at Blaydon. Once again it's a case of volunteers are hard to come by and in this case volunteering was going to come from within the District via adult volunteers who already have roles in Scouting and I for one am conscious of overburdening adult volunteers with too many roles and too many commitments, after all we are opposed to do this as a hobby for fun. As ever I remain optimistic that at some point we will be able to have a fifth Colony in the District, it is another work in progress.

With the exception of the Cubs Paisley Trophy which for a number of reasons didn't happen in 2023, but is due to return this year and for which I'm grateful to Jamie Ion and the Cub Leaders for getting underway again, the District had a full compliment of competitions and section events last year.

Beavers attended the County Beaver picnic and having attended the District Cub Camp at Moor House, it was great to see our Cubs having a good time participating in loads of different activities around the centre, it's what Scouting is all about.

In Scouts, the First Aid Competition was won by a team from Winlaton, Kirby Shield, the annual static camping competition was taken by Crawcrook whilst the prestigious Thunderbird Competition in October was won by Ryton, which was a remarkable feat in itself as it was my understanding that they had a number of withdrawals from their team at the eleventh hour with last minute volunteers stepping up to the mark. Congratulations to all the winners of the District Competitions and again my thanks to all adult volunteers who make them happen but in particular Howard Gillfilian who is pivotal to making the three events happen as well as Kit Carson and Ben Hurst who

have successfully run the Kirby Shield for the past few years after it to a lesser degree was dropping off in terms of popularity.

To my recollection at least three of our Scout troops attended the County Scout Confido at Moor House last October and whilst I understand it was something of a mud fest along the lines of Glastonbury, it was a case that a good time was had by all.

The Phoenix Explorer Scout Unit continues to thrive and I'll take this opportunity to remind everyone that this is the only provision for Scouting for 14 to 18 year olds in the District that is allowed by the Scout Association.

Members of the Unit have undertaken all the Explorer County competitions gaining success with one of our teams winning the Sanctuary event which has in the past been the only one that eluded the Unit.

Three of our Explorers Eve, Edith and Gabriel were members of the Durham Unit who attended the International Jamboree in South Korea last summer and were accompanied by one of our adult volunteers from Winlaton, Bethany Fraser. We will all be aware from press reports at the time that the event experienced a number of difficulties due to the weather and conditions in camp which resulted in the early termination of their Jamboree participation it was still very much the case that a great time was had by all and it was still a fantastic (if different from what they initially expected) experience for all who attended from the District.

Last summer, two of our Explorers, Lucy and Grace were able to take part in a fantastic tall ship sailing experience and again reported that they had a brilliant time. This was kindly organised and arranged by Duncan Graham, as there had been a couple of last minute withdrawals and the girls were offered places at short notice at a greatly reduced cost which was an added bonus.

After a bit of a blip in 2022 when we were a bit shy on uptake of Duke of Edinburgh places, particularly in the bronze section, I am happy to report that enthusiasm for this worthwhile training scheme has been resurrected in 2023 and as we go into the 2024 programme. Last year Explorers and Network Members variously achieved Bronze

Silver and Gold Awards. Two of our Explorers Grace and Louisa at the ages of 15/16 have already attained their silver award and we expect a third, Ellie at the same age to finish hers shortly. This is a remarkable feat for Explorers with only a couple of years membership in the unit and puts them hopefully well on course to complete their gold before they are 18 should they continue at the same pace and with the same commitment. To put it in perspective most young people don't achieve the gold Duke of Edinburgh award until they are well into their twenties.

My thanks go to Jamie Ion and Alex Haley for their continued commitment and support in running the Districts Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. I have it on good authority from County that Blaydon and Districts programme is one of the best Duke of Edinburgh schemes in Durham County.

A number of our Explorers continue to participate in the Explorer Scout Young Leader Scheme, volunteering with various sections across the five Groups in the District. I am grateful for the time and efforts of our Section adult volunteers in assisting with this important aspect of our young people's training and all being well we should reap the benefits as we are nurturing the adult volunteers of the future.

Another positive note in the District, is the resurgence of a Network Section for 18 to 25 year olds. Better a volunteer than a pressed woman, earlier in the year Bethany Frazer approached me and asked if she could take on the role of organising the network. I gave her the role of District Network Commissioner (now District Lead Volunteer) and I'm pleased to say that Network is becoming successful again. Meeting on an ad-hoc and informal basis they have already taken part in a number of events both in Durham and Northumberland County, winning one of the competitions across the border. Hopefully the enthusiasm will continue as the Network is good way to keep younger people in the scouting family.

There is always a sad aspect to any annual review, and as such I take the opportunity to remind the AGM of the sad passing of two volunteers and supporters from the District.

In May of last year Peter Britten died after a short illness. Peter was a stalwart at 1st Blaydon, being an assistant Scout Master when I was a scout many years ago and latterly he was involved helping Kit with the Cubs.

In the latter part of the year, Joe Stobbart passed away. Joe was a great friend of Phil Paisley and a good supporter of the District and in particular Thunderbird to which he had previously donated a shield (which is still awarded) in his name which is given annually to the best scout on the competition. Joe's family kindly donated money to the District which mourners at his funeral had given in his memory. With this money we have been able to replenish our stock of Thunderbird badges which was running low.

Both Peter and Joe will be missed.

Finally, it is the case that the next few months will see changes in Scouting as the organisation moves towards the Teams based model of adult volunteering. I have recently seen documentation from another District in the County which quite frankly it seems to me over complicated the whole process by introducing timelines and specific dates for the introduction of the changes.

Whilst we need to embrace this new way of working, it occurs to me that in the Scout Groups in Blaydon District, we have been working as a team for many years, it is all about team work, being so small and with many of us having more than one role, I don't see how we can operate other than as part of a team, else it simply wouldn't work at all.

Our titles are changing, but what's in a name? At the last County Lead District Volunteer meeting we were informed by the County Lead on the project that the hold up at the moment is (not unexpectedly) the introduction of a new computer system / data base to replace Compass which will embrace our new titles and roles.

However one positive (I think) is the team approach to training and skills whereby Woodbadge training is not going to become mandatory (which it was rapidly becoming, have to do it within three years of appointment etc) but more a question of choice, with

adult volunteer teams having the range of skills between then as opposed to having them all individually. Hopefully this will make volunteering less daunting and get us more help where we need it, at the coal face.

And very finally, and this is a big thanks from me which I regularly repeat but it is important. The District has one of the best, if not the best record in Durham County in respect of our mandatory ongoing learning, Safeguarding Safety First Aid and GDPR. We perpetually hit the zero percentage figure for volunteers with outstanding or expired mandatory training which makes my life really easy and for which I am grateful for all the hard work and diligence across our adult volunteers across the District. Long may this position continue and I thank everyone for readily buying into the whole idea of Mandatory Ongoing Learning.

Thank you for your attention and be you an adult volunteer, a junior member, a parent or a supporter please continue to enjoy Scouting in 2024.