



THE SAPPER CHARITY

Royal Engineers Association

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REA OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES HELD ONLINE 10:00–11:00AM MONDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2026

Attendees	
Name	Role
Claire James (CJ)	Chair (Board of Trustees Member)
Ken Kirk (KK)	CEO
Nick Gunnell (NG)	Secretary
Ian Sidebottom (IS)	Corps Treasurer
Andrew Brown (AB)	Deputy Group Director (DGD) SE
Graeme Palmer (GP)	DGD London
Graham Doughty (GD)	DGD National
Phil Taylor (PT)	DGD Airborne
David Waters (DW)	DGD NW
Ron McGregor (RM)	DGD Sco & NI
Roy Lowe (RL)	DGD S.Wales
Mike Payne (MP)	DGD Central Southern
Joshua Brown (JB)	DGD West England
Tim Harnett (TH)	DGD SW
Philip Tatterton (PT)	DGD East Anglia Group
Rick Tootle (RT)	Captain of Standards
Ollie Allerhead (OA)	Bomb Disposal Branch Rep
Kevin Street (KS)	DGD Midlands
Fiona Louch (FL)	Business Manager, REA
Apologies	
Mike Facchini (MF)	DGD NE
Simon Scott (SS)	DGD Yorks
Spencer Eardley (SE)	Corps SM

1. **Welcome, Attendance, Approval of Previous Minutes.** Meeting opened at 10:00. Minutes of the previous meeting were ratified (proposed by **RT** and seconded by **KS**, with no objections). Chair's opening remarks noted a positive year and welcomed feedback on the new strategy and the committee's role in driving operations over the next five years. **Decisions: Previous minutes approved.**

Reports

2. **Board of Trustees Summary.** The summary of the meeting can be found [here](#).¹ Financial performance on track; ongoing app development to replace Sappercom; heightened focus on cybersecurity as charities face increased targeting; strategy brochure near completion and to be distributed to members. Fundraising momentum continues—particularly with serving community participation. **Action: Distribute the strategy booklet to all committee members and branches once finalized (NG).**

3. **Benevolence Summary.** There is an increase in serving soldiers/families seeking support; overall veteran case volumes continue a gradual decline (~2% p.a.). Direct caseworker model enables faster response to immediate-need cases; trial allowing national branches to request benevolence directly. If successful expansion to local branches will follow. The conversation captured contrasting experiences with RBL/SSAFA: some delays and gatekeeping vs. several smooth, positive outcomes; REA now on Mosaic, facilitating coordination. The full report can be found [here](#). **Actions: Continue the national branch trial for direct benevolence access via the caseworker and evaluate for wider branch rollout.**

4. **Branch Annual Reports Summary.** 80 branch returns received (~9,000 members reported). Average meeting attendance ~16.6; ~60 branches meet monthly. Common branch feedback: desire for more funding, easier benevolence access (in progress), reduced admin, greater transparency, modernized image, and more regional events (Leeds event noted as step forward). The summary can be found [here](#). **Actions:**

a. **Request raised to remove outdated report forms from the website to avoid confusion. (FL)**

b. **Include Deputy Group Director contact emails in next 'Branch Matters' (unless individuals opt out). (NG)**

c. **Deputy Group Directors to remind branches to submit return. The list of branches that have not sent their return in can be found [here](#).**

5. **Operations Report Summary.** Outreach & briefing since January led to ~130 new 'Ubique' serving members (newsletter + contact card incl. Combat Stress 24/7 line). Positive feedback on the planned Leeds staff gathering; event day interest approaching 300 with ~134 for the evening meal. The full Operations report can be found [here](#). **TH** there is an open door for the Plymouth Branch to share large events nationally, however this is at their discretion. **Actions: Publish next 'Branch Matters' within 10–14 days of Deputy Group Director circulation (NG).**

6. **Financial Update Summary.**

a. FY2025 (year end 31 Dec 2025): Income £1,657,599; Expenditure £1,915,776 (planned overspend ~£258k aligned to strategy).

¹ These are not minutes.

- b. Investments: ~£430k dividends; ~£844k capital gains; properties in Ebbsfleet generate ~£46k rent p.a. and appreciated ~£5k.
- c. Total fund value increased from ~£12.1m to ~£12.7m (~5% rise). Board continues to review diversification options; not progressing specific additional property at this time (timing).

7. Forecast of Events (key points)

- a. Sapper Gathering – Leeds (25 Apr 2026): ~296 attending the day; ~134 for the dinner.
- b. Sapper Sunday – Royal Hospital Chelsea (10 May 2026): uptake currently low (~19). Bookings for groups is now available using Microsoft Forms.
- c. Gibraltar Weekend (12–14 Jun 2026): 90+ attending the weekend.
- d. Sapper Games – Perham Down (29 Jun–2 Jul 2026): ~15 veterans registered; exploring an evening social.
- e. Lancashire Cenotaph Ball (4 Jul 2026): linked to Preston Cenotaph 100th and 20th anniversary of Duke of Lancaster's Regt; wider parade/garden party/ball expected.
- f. Corps Memorial Weekend (18–20 Sep 2026): details TBC.
- g. Winter Ball, Chilwell (27 Nov 2026), or Burns Supper (23 Jan 2027): strong preference for Burns Night in Jan 2027; proposal accepted to proceed and cost properly.
- f. **Decisions: Proceed with planning for a Burns Night at Chilwell on 23 Jan 2027 (replace 2026 winter dinner). (KS)**
- g. **Actions:**
 - (1) **Include Sapper Sunday as a national event in the next newsletter (NG).**
 - (2) **KS to develop a costed plan for the Chilwell Burns Night; coordinate grant timing with Ops/Finance.**

8. Branch Funds Centralisation Update.

- a. Program to roll out bank accounts and cards now commencing priority to ~35 branches already operating effectively in the system.
- b. Treasurer verification (name, email, phone) required by the bank to enable secure transactions (Multi Factor Authorisation). ~80 treasurer details to be submitted to the bank immediately to trigger card issuance.
- c. Governance reminders: do not open secondary/non-charity accounts; close legacy accounts once migrated; avoid cash-in-tin practices; shadowing of existing accounts permitted during transition (not for new accounts).
- d. Training & support: updated guidance/webinars and explainer videos to be produced; explore card readers/Stripe to reduce cash handling (cost/benefit to be assessed).
- e. Begin staggered rollout this week to branches whose details are verified.

Actions:

- f. **Submit verified treasurer list to the bank and initiate card/account rollout (KK).**
 - g. **Publish updated treasurer guidance and schedule training/webinar (KK).**
 - h. **Investigate options/pricing for card readers and Stripe-style solutions and report back (KK).**
 - i. **NG to copy DGDs on responses to branches querying centralisation to aid consistent messaging.**
9. **REA Dashboard.** The Dashboard can be viewed in full [here](#).
10. **Standard Bearers – Participation & Claims.** Recent activity: 14 standard bearers supported the Freedom of Rochester Parade; 5 competed in the competition despite broad invitations. Costs: one individual claimed £800+ for the weekend; total c. £3,000. Discussion focused on balancing appetite for mileage claims with lower interest in competition participation. Ideas discussed: pilot regional ‘mini-nationals’ (North/Mid/South) feeding a national final; align with existing events to improve cost-effectiveness and attendance. **Action: Deputy Group Directors to highlight opportunities for SB competitions to RT before the next meeting.**
11. **Reports & Returns – Format for Next Meeting.** The format for the next meeting will be similar, however prior to the meeting members (regardless of attendance) will be asked to submit a return using Microsoft Forms. The purpose will be to share activity, strengths/weaknesses, and identify where support is required. The form can be found [here](#).
12. **Any Other Business (AOB) & Date of Next Meeting.** No additional items requiring decision were raised in-session beyond those captured above.
13. **DONM.** 1000am Monday 26th June 2026. Online.

Produced by:
N R Gunnell
Operations Director
Secretary
Date:

Minutes Approved by:
Ken Kirk
Chair
The Sapper Charity
Date: