



THE SAPPER CHARITY

Royal Engineers Association

REA OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES HELD ONLINE 10–11AM

MONDAY 29 JUNE 2026

Attendance

Ken Kirk	CEO
Julian Allerhead	National Branch Rep
Joshua Brown	West of England
Roy Lowe	South Wales
Simon Scott	Yorkshire
Tim Harnett	South West
Mike Facchini	North East
Craig Smith	Corps SM
Kevin Street	Midlands
Graeme Palmer	London
Ian Sidebottom	Corps Treasurer
Phil Tatterton	East Anglia
David Waters	North West
Phil Taylor	Airborne
Andrew Brown	South East
Grahame Doughty	National
Nick Gunnell	Secretary

Apologies:

Col Claire James	President
Rick Tootle	Capt of Standards
Mike Payne	Central Southern
Ron MacGregor	Scot & NI

1. **Welcome, Attendance and Approval of Previous Minutes**

- a. Meeting opened at 1000 hrs. Apologies received from Mike Payne and Rick Tootle. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and seconded without amendment.
- b. Actions from previous meeting were reviewed:
 - (1) Strategy booklets had been distributed
 - (2) Benevolence direct access trial remained on track for wider rollout from September 2026
 - (3) Branch Matters circulation was proving effective
 - (4) Burns Night planning continued

2. **Reports**

- a. **Board of Trustees Summary.** **KK** briefed the committee on progress against the new five-year strategy. Membership, outreach, fundraising, branch engagement and benevolence activities were all reporting positive outcomes. The Sapper App remained on track for launch by Corps Memorial Weekend.
- b. **Benevolence Report.** **NG** briefed the committee that benevolence demand had increased significantly, with requests exceeding the previous year. Funding requirements were likely to increase by 20–30% compared with 2025. The direct branch benevolence request trial continued to perform well.
- c. **Branch Annual Reports and Operations Report.** Reports highlighted generally stable performance with examples of strong branch engagement, but recurring themes included recruitment challenges, ageing membership, governance awareness and resistance to change. The committee agreed to prioritise issues identified through DGD returns.
- d. **Finance Report.** **IS** reported that the charity remained in a strong financial position. Investments totalled approximately £12.3M and the overall charitable value was approximately £12.5M. Investment performance exceeded benchmark returns and passive income remained strong.

3. **Sapper App.** **NG** provided an update on the new Sapper App which will replace SapperCom. The application will support the wider Sapper family, including REA branches, serving personnel, the Museum and RE CPD. DGDs will have administrative access for their groups and branches. Briefing sessions will be provided prior to launch.

4. **Deputy Group Director Reports.** Discussion focused on recruitment, branch activity and governance support for new volunteers. The committee agreed that active programmes and events remain the most effective recruitment tool. Examples of successful engagement included Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs, family engagement, social branches and local events. Suggestions included

improved induction material for new Group Officers, distribution of leadership contact details, and better access to centrally produced promotional resources.

5. **Standard Bearers Survey.** The committee reviewed survey feedback regarding standard bearer participation and expenses. Members agreed that the key issue was increasing participation rather than restricting claims. Consideration was given to regional concentrations, training events and reducing the competitive emphasis. **Decision: Attendance at both the Standard Bearers Competition and parade will be required for individuals to be eligible for subsistence for Corps Memorial Weekend.**

6. **New Life Member Lapel Badge.** The committee endorsed the introduction of a new lapel badge based on Royal Engineers TRF. The design was considered more recognisable to the wider Sapper community and will be issued to new members joining the Association.

7. **Forecast of Events.** Progress updates were provided on the Sapper Games, Lancashire Cenotaph Ball, Corps Memorial Weekend and the proposed Chilwell Burns Supper in January 2027. Planning remained on track.

8. **AOB.** The committee discussed increasing the number of Operations Committee meetings from three to four per year and aligning them more closely with Board of Trustees meetings.

9. **Soldo.** Soldo rollout was reported as progressing well, with approximately 70% of branch funds already transferred. Concerns regarding transaction charges were acknowledged and Head Office will seek to absorb charges where this had previously been communicated.

10. The potential introduction of card-reader technology to support fundraising and branch activities was also discussed.

11. **Actions**

a. **NG** to develop a prioritised action plan from DGD reports for the next meeting.

b. **NG, KS** and **RT** to develop proposals for a Standard Bearers Competition linked to the Chilwell Burns Supper.

c. **Head Office** to continue rollout and support of the Sapper App.

d. **Head Office** to investigate and if possible, implement suitable card-reader solutions for branches.

e. **Head Office** to absorb agreed Soldo-related transaction charges where appropriate.

12. **DONM:** September 2026 (date to be confirmed following Corps Memorial Weekend).