Ecological
Land
Cooperative

Organisational Development 2021/22

What's happened...

- At the AGM in 2021, the membership voted through a resolution to defer elections to the Board for 6 months – later extended to 12 months by a 'key decision' email – to allow for a review of the Board make-up
- At a gathering in November, ELC Stewards, Workers and the current board discussed how the coop could work towards a new board structure and agreed on a majority of recommendations
- A Working Group was formed (4 stewards, 2 workers and 1 board member) to look at outstanding issues and met 4 times in February and March.
- The Working Group was unanimous in many of the key questions however there were some issues that it was unable to agree on.
- The Working Group presented their recommendations to the Board in March and the Board agreed with the majority of the Working Group recommendations
- Outstanding issues were brought to 2 workshops in early May for further discussion and, following this, a survey was circulated to all of the above members for feedback.
- There was a 70% response rate to the survey and the responses that had a clear majority agreement have been included in this proposal to be voted on by the full ELC membership.

What needs to happen now...

- At the AGM on 2nd July 2022, the membership will need to vote on whether or not to approve each of the proposals in turn.
- Where there was not a clear majority from the May survey, further work will be carried out by the new board to continue the review.

Overview

The outcome of this review so far can be summarised in the following way: there is an agreed need to tighten up the membership class definitions and, using these new

definitions, a commitment to giving community members a majority on the board whilst still ensuring that people with relevant experience and knowledge who aren't community members can contribute. Further work is needed to determine whether ELC stewards should have a ringfenced proportion of positions on the board and if so, what that proportion should be.

Further to this, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), who regulate the ELC as a Community Benefit Society, require that our AGM is held within 7 months of the end of our financial year. As our financial year ends on 31st December, this means that the AGM falls in the middle of summer which is a very busy time for most of the ELC stewards, therefore it has been recommended that the financial year end is changed to allow for a more appropriate date for the AGM.

Lastly, it has been agreed among those who have participated so far in this process, that it would be necessary to have a transition period following these changes. This will allow for some continuity between the current board and the new. Therefore, although any rule changes voted in will come into force immediately following the AGM, there will be a period during which any outgoing board members may continue to participate in the running of the board as non-voting members.

Notes

- As each of these proposals constitute a change to the rules of the ELC, they will need a majority of 75% to be passed.
- Alongside the proposed membership class definitions below, which would be included in the rules, the new board would need to devise a membership policy which adds further depth and detail to the requirements for qualifying for the various types of membership, in line with the rule definitions.

Proposals

1. The proposal is that the Board should be renamed a 'Council' as a more inclusive term and one that recognises the ethos of the organisation.

2. The proposal is that the definition of 'stewards' should be changed from 'those engaged in managing land ecologically' to the following:

   Stewards: those with a lease or rental agreement on ELC land.

3. Changing the definition of steward to include only those with a lease or rental agreement on ELC land means that other land stewards that currently are included in the definition of steward will no longer fit in this category.

   The proposal is that a new community membership class should be created alongside Stewards, of Landworkers defined as follows:

   Landworkers: those engaged primarily in productive, ecological land-management.

4. Workers are currently defined as 'paid and unpaid; part-time and full-time'. The proposal is that the definition of workers should be changed to the following:

   Workers: those with a contract of employment with the ELC.

5. Currently there is only one class of non-community membership: Supporters (with no definition in the rules). The proposal is that there should be two categories of non-community membership. The first is for supporters with a new definition, and the second is for investors. The proposal is that the definition of a supporter should be as follows:

   Supporters: individuals or organisations with a significant alignment with the ELC's objectives.

6. There should be a new non-community membership class specifically for investors.

7. The maximum size of the board/council should be increased from 9 to 12.

8. The minimum size of the board/council should be increased from 3 to 5.

9. Currently, weighted voting at General Meetings is as follows:

   50% Stewards
   25% Workers
   25% non-community

   The proposal is that the weighted voting at general meetings should be as follows:

   50% stewards and landworkers using the new definitions;
   25% workers using the new definition, and
   25% non-community members using the new definitions of supporter and investor.

   The main change is the new category of Landworkers being included in the 50%.

10. The proposal is that, using the new definitions of membership categories, a minimum of 51% of the board/council should be community members and no more than 49% should be non-community members. Therefore, there would always be at least one more community member (steward, landworker or worker) on the Board/Council than non-community members (supporter, investor).

    Currently the rules state that 75% of the board should be community members using the current membership definitions.

11. The proposal is that the financial year end date should be moved from 31st December to 30th April (TBC)
    (This proposal has been made in consultation with ELC stewards)