

British Hallmarking Council

Council meeting 11.00 am Thursday 15 April 2021

By zoom

Minutes of meeting

1. Opening business

Present:

Noel Hunter, Chair
Carol Brady
Malcolm Craig
Ken Daly
Louise Durose
Patrick Fuller
Joanna Hardy
Harriet Kelsall
Gay Penfold
Isobel Pollock-Hulf
David Reddaway
Chris Sellors
Matthew Sibley
Vanessa Sharp
John Stirling
Charles Turner
Gary Wroe

In attendance:

Ashley Carson
Robert Organ
Scott Walter
Richard Sanders
Rachel Bealey
Geraldine Swanton (Item 2)
Sue Green, BHC Secretariat

Apologies for absence:

Tom Murray
Doug Henry

Declarations of interests:

There were no additional declarations of interests.

Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising were taken under item 16 of the agenda.

2. Complaint

There was discussion of correspondence with a complainant. It was noted that Her Majesty's Mint conducts an audit of each assay office's methods and procedures to determine and assess their accuracy, and provides a report accordingly to the Council. The Council's Chair had appraised Her Majesty's Mint of the nature of the complaint. It was noted that in their recent letter the Royal Mint had confirmed that the audit had been completed recently and had concluded that the assay offices' methods, equipment and procedures were satisfactory. The Council was satisfied that the concerns raised by the complainant had been addressed by the statutory audit process and that there are adequate facilities for assaying and hallmarking. The Council therefore regarded the matter as concluded. The Council's Secretary would write to the complainant in these terms.

3. Chair's report

The Chair's report had been circulated with the meeting papers.

There was discussion of the proposals in item 2 regarding managing future Council business. During the Covid-19 pandemic the use of virtual meetings had enabled a great deal of work to be managed efficiently and effectively. However, moving entirely to virtual meetings was likely to be counter-productive because much value comes from establishing personal relationships in face to face settings. Council members who joined in 2020 had yet to meet all their colleagues, due to the pandemic. The Chair proposed a new structure for Council meetings with a cycle consisting of two face to face meetings per year, for the main decision making, and two additional virtual meetings to provide an opportunity to brief on Council activities and priorities and discuss questions from Council members. All committee meetings would continue to be held virtually unless a physical meeting was required for particular reasons. The Council's view was that the reintroduction of face to face meetings, including potentially the proposal for overnight stays for one meeting a year, was a good aspiration for when times have improved. However there were currently financial concerns and if business could be effectively managed on a virtual basis, this would be preferable. It was agreed that during 2021 meetings would remain as virtual, with the aim of returning to a face to face meeting in spring 2022 if possible. The interim update meetings would be introduced in the meantime.

Action: Chair and Secretary: interim update meetings by zoom to be set up

Enforcement: the Chair updated the meeting on the planned internet sweep to review compliance with hallmarking law in online retail sales of precious metal items.

It was noted that, following recent Cabinet Office guidance, seven members of the Council could be replaced at the end of 2021. Representations had been made regarding the disruptive effect this would have on the Council's work as well as the inefficiency and cost of this level of turnover.

4. Annual Report & Accounts (AR&ACs)

The Secretary introduced this item. The draft AR&ACs had been circulated with the NAO's audit completion report and the Assay Office viability reports. The NAO's letter of representation was awaited. The AR&ACs had involved a lot of work late in the day due to Covid-19 pandemic related issues delaying various contributions to the documents, including the wording of the audit certificate section. The report and accounts sections of the draft AR&ACs were a complete draft on which approval was sought. It was planned to lay the AR&ACs before Parliament in early June. At that stage there would need to be a re-certification that there had been no significant changes since the end of the accounting period. The Secretary summarised the content of the draft AR&ACs, noting the sections on general operating conditions in the Chair's report, key risks, performance summary and analysis, governance structure and committee work, and the financial position at the end of 2020.

The audit completion report had been circulated with the draft AR&ACs and the Council was asked to note its contents, particularly the comments on regularity and true and fair view; the audit fee; risks that had been evaluated; and steps still to be taken including the signature process.

Any additional comments were requested by 25 April. Subject to any further points the document was approved for signature, noting that a final version would be circulated once the audit certificate was available, and a final note on post year end events would be required.

The meeting approved the draft AR&ACs and signature process on this basis.

Action: Chair and Secretary Finalise AR&ACs document; recirculate to the Council; signature and laying process to be taken forward.

5. Business plan and budget

The Secretary introduced this item. The 2021 business plan had been circulated together with the 2021 draft budget and a finance report and the draft corporate statement. The business plan had incorporated a number of comments from members from previously. It was written on the assumption that the Council would be able to carry out its work in current conditions.

The draft budget had been proposed at the end of 2020 in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic operating conditions. The original budget for 2020 had been reduced to reflect pandemic operating conditions and the outgoings carefully managed so that the outturn for the year was lower than the revised budget. In planning for 2021, two scenarios had been provided for: full capacity work and reduced capacity work. Given the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the reduced capacity budget had been adopted. The accompanying finance report had confirmed this and the systems for monthly invoicing that had been adopted.

The meeting approved the business plan and budget together with the draft corporate statement.

6. Dealer's notice for online retail

Scott Walter introduced this item, thanking Chris Sellors and Martyn Wright for their work on devising the image for discussion. The image was presented and discussed. It was important to ensure that appropriate information would be displayed, whilst keeping the image simple. It was proposed to provide this image as an infographic that a retailer could include as one of the "tiles", ie images of the product. Guidance would be provided on how to use and display the notice. There was discussion of the image and information contained, and also whether retail websites would have enough capacity to present the image as one of their image tiles. The project group would work on this further.

Action: Online Dealer's Notice project working group to continue to progress this initiative.

7. HALO Award

Chris Sellors introduced this item and the proposal document that had been circulated. It was noted that the award was focused on online businesses in the context of increasing online retail in the industry. Chris Sellors and Martyn Wright were thanked for their work on this.

Action: HALO Award project working group to continue to progress this initiative.

8. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee mark

Robert Organ introduced this item. Proposed images for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee mark had been circulated. It was agreed that the design should be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for any comment, following which the marks could be produced.

Action: LAO to produce final set of images for submission; Secretary to submit design to the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

9. BEIS report

Richard Sanders referred to the report which had been circulated. On the issue of recruitment of new Council members, Noel Hunter had made representations and provided supporting material to justify extending the terms of those members who have served only one term of three years. It was noted that the process for "tailored reviews" was continuing, and that the Framework Document would be updated.

10. Operational integrity

Isobel Pollock-Hulf's report had been circulated. It was noted that, subject to the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic arrangements, revalidation visits were planned to be carried out for sub-offices during 2021. It was noted that Birmingham Assay Office's sub-office in Mumbai had closed.

11. Technical consistency

The minutes of the Technical Committee meeting on 25 March had been circulated. There were no questions on this.

12. Education & Enforcement

The E&E Committee report had been circulated. Ken Daly reported on the Committee's activities including plans to relaunch the Touchstone Award for 2021, with an opportunity to present the award at the CTSI Symposium in September. There had been constructive discussions with the Trading Standards Primary Authorities for two major online retail platforms and channels of communication set up which had led to non-compliant listings of precious metal jewellery being taken down.

13. Joint Assay Offices Committee

The minutes of the meeting on 13 January 2021 had been circulated. The contents were noted.

14. Assay Offices reports

The reports from the four Assay Offices had been circulated. The contents were noted.

15. International Hallmarking Convention

Scott Walter reported on the presentation circulated together with the report on the IHC. Robert Organ commented that there were concerns about the issue of global recognition of ancient hallmarks.

16. Minutes of meeting 8 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting on 8 October 2020 were approved. It was noted that the component marking guidance note was still to be issued, alongside the online Dealer's Notice and communications with the trade. It was noted that the review of the risk register content had been carried forward.

17. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

18. Date of next meeting

The next full meeting would be Thursday 14 October 2021 via zoom.

An interim meeting for updating the Council would be fixed in the meantime.

Decisions at meeting

2 Complaint

Secretary to write to complainant in agreed terms.

3. Chair's report

All meetings to remain as virtual for 2021; aim to reintroduce face to face Council meetings in 2022.

Interim update meetings (by virtual means) to be introduced.

4. Annual Report & Accounts

Draft document and signature process approved on the basis set out in minute 4.

5. Business plan and budget

The meeting approved the business plan and budget together with the draft corporate statement.

6. Dealer's notice for online retail

Working group to continue to progress this initiative.

7. HALO award

Project working group to continue to progress this initiative.

8. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

It was agreed that the design should be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for any comment, following which the marks could be produced.

Actions from meeting

	Item	Who
2	Complaint: Secretary to write to complainant in agreed terms	Secretary
3	Meetings: interim update meetings to be set up	Chair Secretary
4	AR&ACs: finalising document, signature and laying process	Chair Secretary
6	Online Dealer's Notice project working group to continue to progress this initiative	Dealer's Notice Project working group
7	HALO Award: project working group to continue to progress this initiative	HALO Award project working group
8	The Queen's Platinum Jubilee: LAO to produce final image; Secretary to submit proposed marks to the Lord Chamberlain's Office	LAO Secretary
16	Component marking guidance note: to be issued alongside other communications to the trade	Secretary
16	Review of risk register	Secretary Vanessa Sharp