

BRITISH HALLMARKING COUNCIL

**Council meeting 11.00am Thursday 14 October 2021
Via Zoom**

Minutes of meeting

1. Opening business

Present:

Noel Hunter (Chair)

Carol Brady

Louise Durose

Patrick Fuller

Joanna Hardy (part)

Harriet Kelsall

Tom Murray

Gay Penfold

David Reddaway

Chris Sellors

Matthew Sibley

Vanessa Sharp

John Stirling

Charles Turner

Gary Wroe

In attendance:

Doug Henry

Scott Walter

Robert Organ

Will Evans

Ashley Carson

Sue Green (BHC Secretary)

Apologies for absence:

Malcolm Craig

Ken Daly

Isobel Pollock-Hulf

Richard Sanders, BEIS

Rachael Bealey, BEIS

There were no new declarations of interests.

2. Chair's report

Noel Hunter referred to the Chair's report circulated previously. Items from this report were discussed as follows:

Managing Council business: Noted and agreed that it was intended to hold the next full Council meeting face to face, at Birmingham Assay Office on Thursday 28 April 2022. Committee meetings would continue to be via zoom unless the Chair of the meeting determines that in exceptional circumstances a face to face meeting is necessary. Council briefings would be held by zoom.

BEIS consultation, Reforming competition and consumer policy: the BHC's response had been submitted. Other discussions with BEIS in other contexts indicated that the issue of enforcement in relation to online retail was being taken forward.

WRi further internet sweep: once again this sweep had been carried out pro bono for the BHC. It indicated that non-compliance with hallmarking law remained high. It was noted that more detailed research was needed to get clarity on the numbers of non-compliant items.

Argentium Silver: it was noted that a request had been submitted for the BHC to request an amendment to the Hallmarking Act to recognise Argentium Silver 940 as a specific grade of silver. Noted that requesting an amendment to primary legislation would be expensive and time-consuming, involving processes such as impact assessments. Without wider representation from the industry, there were no plans to put forward a request to amend the HMA. The question would be logged for further consideration alongside other potential amendments to the HMA.

Action: Secretary to send a response on behalf of the Council setting out this decision.

Touchstone Award: the winner had been chosen from a field of strong entries and the Award had been presented at the CTSI Symposium. The speech by Chris Sellors at the Symposium had been well received. The Award is an important way of maintaining the profile of hallmarking amongst Trading Standards teams. LAO would be hosting a reception at Goldsmiths' Hall in November.

HALO Award: this was now taking off, with the support of the National Association of Jewellers and it had been launched at the recent NAJ Summit. It was noted that it was important to keep up the momentum and ensure that the competition is widely publicised.

Regulators Code Audit: a working group of Council members with the Secretary was being set up to carry out an audit in the autumn.

Council appointments: there were three Council members coming to the end of their term on 31 December 2021. Shortlisting had been carried out and interviews were to take place in early November. There had been no suitable candidates from the trade for the role and accordingly representations had been made to extend Harriet Kelsall's appointment for a further 12 months. This had been agreed and gratitude was expressed to Harriet for agreeing to continue for this additional period. Work would be needed to raise the profile of this role with the industry. The selection process would progress with the replacements for Malcolm Craig and Louise Durose.

Annual Report & Accounts and laying process: thanks were expressed to the Secretary for managing the process of laying the AR&ACs before parliament.

3. Dealers Notice

The Secretary updated the meeting on the launch of the new form Dealers Notice for use in online retail settings. The wording for the Dealers Notice B had been finalised, together with the video version. The document Your Commitment to Hallmarking provided the standard text for websites and social media. Assay Office websites had gone live with this new information on 13 October and the BHC press release had gone out on the morning of 14 October. Ken Daly was overseeing the communication of this news throughout Trading Standards across the UK. Chris Sellors was ensuring that the NAJ would publicise it. A request to update the BHC website was with the gov.uk team. A standard Qs and As document was to be drafted, picking up on issues raised in response to the launch. Assay Offices would be publicising the launch via social media over the coming days. A provisional programme for publicity of Dealers Notice B and HALO Awards was being developed, with the aim of ensuring that the Dealers Notice was published widely. The HALO Award would be added to the BHC website shortly. Thanks were expressed to the working group and the good work of Charlotte Turner at LAO was noted.

Feedback on the wording of the Dealers Notice included the question of why the BHC website details had not been included: this was because websites hosting the new format Dealers Notice would not want to include a link to an external website, potentially taking customers off their site. However the BHC's website address was included in hard copy versions of the full Dealers Notice for display in physical shops. There was also comment that the term Dealers Notice is not descriptive of its purpose as it exists to provide information for consumers.

4. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Robert Organ reported on the current position. The mark had been finalised and the press release sent out in early October. The charge would be £1 for the basic mark. It would be available from 1 November. Items struck in 2021 would not include the date letter alongside the jubilee mark; those struck in 2022 would be accompanied by the date letter. Further publicity was planned for the coming weeks, including development of social media assets.

5. Risk register

The working group paper and revision version of the Council's risk register had been circulated. A working group consisting of Vanessa Sharp, Louise Durose and the Secretary had been working on the risk register and it had now been organised into sections covering the BHC's functions and purpose; governance; and operational issues. Questions for discussion had been highlighted in the revision version of the risk register.

Vanessa Sharp led the discussion. The structure of the document was approved. The discussion covered how the Council perceived risks relating to its statutory functions, international and trade, governance, membership of the Council and protocols for handling information. The Council's risk appetite under the various headings was discussed. There was a suggestion that adding assurance mapping would assist with documenting the overall risk picture.

It was agreed that the working group would now complete the risk register, including assurance mapping. Thanks were expressed to Vanessa Sharp and Louise Durose for their work.

Action: working group to complete the risk register, including assurance mapping.

6. Business plan, budget and related issues

The 2021 business plan, annotated with a progress update, and finance report had been circulated together with draft headings for the 2022 business plan and a draft budget for 2022. Despite the constraints of the pandemic operating conditions, there had been significant progress across the various objectives in 2021. The suggested headings for the 2022 business plan sought to build on the progress made during 2021. Alongside this, the draft budget for 2022 set out an increase on 2021's funding to reflect the expectation that conditions would be returning towards normal in 2022. The total had been kept to below the original (pre-pandemic) budget for 2020. It included assumptions that committee meetings and Council briefing meetings would be held by zoom, but that full Council meetings would be face to face; a sum for enhanced compliance initiatives had also been included.

The 2022 draft business plan headings were approved for working into a full business plan; the draft budget for 2022 was approved.

Action: Secretary to produce full draft business plan for 2022

7. Audit planning

The NAO's audit plan had been circulated. This incorporated information about the audit process. It noted risks for the Council to review. Concern was once again expressed regarding the NAO's fee being disproportionate to the BHC's size and number of transactions, and the increase noted in their estimate for the 2022 audit fee.

8. BEIS report

The report from Richard Sanders of BEIS had been circulated. There were no comments on the report.

9. Operational integrity

The report of the Applications Committee was presented by Gay Penfold. The Applications Committee report had been circulated. The Applications Committee had visited two further sub-offices as part of the 5 yearly revalidation cycle: BAO sub-offices at Domino and Cookson. Thanks were expressed to BAO for their openness and assistance and the two sub-offices were confirmed as revalidated. The Applications Committee would next consider planned activities for 2022.

[Joanna Hardy joined the meeting]

10. Technical consistency

The minutes of the Technical Committee meeting on 28 September had been circulated. There were no comments on the content of the minutes.

11. Education & Enforcement

The E&E Committee report had been circulated. Most of the issues covered had been mentioned in previous agenda items. It was noted that Malcolm Craig's second and final term would end on 31 December 2021 and plans were in hand to ensure a smooth handover to pick up on his work.

12. Joint Assay Offices Committee

The minutes of the meeting on 2 September 2021 had been circulated. There were no comments on the content of the minutes.

13. Assay Offices reports

Reports from each of the Assay Offices had been circulated.

It was noted that this would be the last meeting that Robert Organ would attend as Deputy Warden of the London Assay Office, with Will Evans taking over as General Manager. LAO had had to close the sub-office at Graff as a direct result of the UK's exit from the EU.

SAO had continued their education initiative locally, reviewing websites of local retailers and informing them of their obligations to display hallmarking information where this was not visible;

compliance had improved significantly, and those who had still not displayed the information were being followed up. Referrals to Trading Standards would be made if retailers failed to comply.

Generally, hallmarking volumes had strengthened significantly since April.

14. International Hallmarking Convention

Scott Walter reported. There were a number of sub-committee posts not filled, reflecting the fact that Assay Offices generally were under pressure due to the pandemic. Italy was expected to become a signatory.

15. Minutes of the Council meeting 15 April 2021

The minutes of the meeting on 15 April were approved. There were no additional matters arising.

16. Any other business

Harriet Kelsall had participated in a BEIS governance training session at which open board schemes had been discussed, in which potential future board members are invited to attend meetings to give them experience of the business that is carried out. This was a useful way of increasing diversity and could also be helpful in succession planning for some of the committee roles and for encouraging participation by individuals from the jewellery industry. It was agreed to take up this issue outside the meeting.

The Chair expressed the Council's very sincere thanks to Malcolm Craig and Louise Durose whose terms would be ending on 31 December 2021, for their work for the Council. He also thanked Robert Organ for his very important contributions over the years and formally welcomed Will Evans.

17. Date of next meeting

Thursday 28 April 2022 at Birmingham Assay Office.

A date for an interim briefing meeting would also be set for January 2022.

Decisions at the meeting

2. Argentium silver: Secretary to respond that there were no plans to take a request to amend the Hallmarking Act on this issue forward. The question would be logged for future consideration alongside other matters that may require an amendment to the HMA in due course.

5. Risk register: It was agreed that the working group would complete the risk register, including assurance mapping.

6. Business plan, budget and related issues: The 2022 draft business plan headings were approved for working into a full business plan; the draft budget for 2022 was approved.

16. Open board scheme: potentially useful for increasing diversity and succession planning, and to be taken forward separately.

Actions from the meeting

Item	Who
2. Argentium silver: Response to be sent as noted above.	Secretary
5 Risk register: working group to complete the risk register, including assurance mapping.	Risk register working group
6 Business plan, budget and related issues: Secretary to produce full draft business plan for 2022	Secretary
16 Open board scheme: potentially useful for increasing diversity and succession planning, and to be taken forward separately.	Chair Harriet Kelsall