

Motion E

The rationale for the motion is set out in the supporting paper, which I hope you have read so I won't go through it all.

I'm a great supporter of this Council and I believe it has an important role to play. I know that it does many useful things to serve ringers, and for a third of my life I've worked quite hard to help it achieve some of them.

But I also know that the Council has some serious weaknesses, one of which is the awful image that it manages to create in the minds of many ringers. I hate it when the Council that I serve is derided and ridiculed, and I'm sure that many of you feel the same.

This proposal is intended to help repair that image. It isn't the whole solution by any means, but it is a chance for us to 'stand up and be counted', to make a public commitment to ringers at large, and to dispel some negative press.

The key statement in our proposal is the first one – to make it clear that the reason we are here is to serve ringers – not to serve the church, nor to serve any other body, but to serve ringers. The Victorian clergy might have had other views, but Victoria died 115 years ago, and we need to serve 21st century ringing.

One thing the recent controversy about sport brought into sharp focus was the relationship between ringing and the church. It is a very important relationship, but the way it is portrayed in the Council's Objects, and in recent public statements, is not helpful. If you did an audit of what the Council actually does, or if you did a survey of what ringers think it ought to do, you would not come up with: 'To promote and foster the ringing of bells for Christian prayer, worship and celebration'.

Let me make it quite clear – this motion is not 'anti church'. I'm the leader of a church band. I have a strong commitment to my church. I work hard to maintain good relations between the ringers and clergy, PCC and congregation. And I spend a lot of effort to ensure that we will ring regularly for services. I do all that because as a church band our main performance commitment is service ringing. Our director of music shows a similar dedication to providing music for services. But he wouldn't believe that sole purpose of music is to perform in church. Music is about far more, with its own tradition, history and skills, of which church music and performance is a part.

The same is true of ringing. What has kept ringing alive for 400 years, what got me hooked on ringing, and what I suspect got most of you hooked too, is ringing itself – the craft, the skill, the art and the tradition. Ringing is about far more than the church, just as organ playing, choral singing and stained glass are about more than the church, even though you can find a lot of them all in churches.

The Council needs to think long term, and over the long term

church ringing is only a part of our history. For over 200 years ringing thrived as a secular sport and public entertainment, with bells maintained and controlled by the community. Things have been different in the 150 years since the reformist clergy largely took over ringing and introduced widespread service ringing. In another 150 years things may be different again.

Belfry Reform gave a huge boost to ringing, with the clergy promoting change ringing and founding societies to bring all ringers together. But the church is no longer a driver. Only 1% of this Council are clergy, compared with around 20% in its first few decades. Increasing numbers of churches are closing. Many congregations are dwindling and aging. Religion is a deterrent to many young people. Ringing must adapt to this changing world, and if the Council is to serve ringing it too must adapt and embrace an increasing role for secular ringing as well as service ringing.

Even the Reformist clergy knew that there was more to ringing than services. Last week I was spoke at the unveiling of a Blue Plaque in memory of Revd FE Robinson, who as I am sure you know was not only a staunch Belfry Reformer, but the first person to ring 1000 peals. He didn't limit his aspirations to ringing for church services, despite his religious conviction. He recognised that ringing was about far more.

The final two points of the motion are about the Council's relationship with others who provide services to ringers. The Council has a dominant position in this respect, but it should use that position to support and encourage other service providers where appropriate. The Council may not always, and often will not, be the first to provide an innovative service, but it has a longevity that few other service providers can hope to achieve, so it should also be willing to ensure the long term provision of any service on which the ringing community comes to depend.

Summing up, like the Ten Commandments, this proposal boils down to two things:

- The Council must improve its relationship with ringers
- The Council needs 'grown up' relationships with the churches and with other service providers – as a partner, not subservient, and not dominant.

One point of detail has been questioned since the motion was published – the inclusion of the term 'non-denominational' in point 3. We agree that in that sentence it is unnecessary, and it might dilute the meaning, so we would be happy for it to be deleted, and we suggest the motion be put on that basis.

With that I would like to propose the motion, and to remind you that we are not alone. Many ringers do care about this Council, and 30 people are watching this debate online. I hope we can send them and the rest of the ringing community a positive message by passing this motion.

Motion F

Motion E was a declaration to ringers. That's a good start but we need to go further – intentions need to be followed by action.

The Council has toyed with reform on and off over many years. A few things have changed, but not a lot. Change is hard for a large, slow-moving organisation, and there is a lot of long grass for balls to be kicked into.

With this motion we would commit ourselves to stop thinking about reform and get on and do it, with a one-year review to decide what needs changing so that we can then make the changes and get on with the job.

The motion doesn't specify 'what' the reforms should be – that needs wide consultation and mature consideration to get it right, but it does specify a time scale since without that things could just slide into the future.

Who should conduct the review? That's a key question. If we want to gear up the Council to serve the ringing community more effectively we shouldn't just go into a huddle and decide what we, on the inside think – we need a process that in business-speak would be called 'user focused' or 'customer driven'. That's why the motion specifies a balance of non-members, recent former members and current members (preferably 'back benchers' since those of us who hold office or chair committees are probably too close to the status quo, or we would be perceived to be).

The reference to members of territorial societies was an indicator of engagement with the ringing community – not to exclude members of non-territorial societies, and we would be very surprised if it did, since any ringer suited to the task almost certainly belongs to a territorial society, regardless of any non-territorial membership. Bear in mind that they are to represent the interests of ringers at large, not the narrow interests of any one society. However, we are happy for 'affiliated' to replace 'territorial' if the meeting wishes.

The review will incur costs, and we don't want it hindered by trying to do things on a shoe string. To be done professionally and speedily, it needs proper support. In particular we feel it should include a survey to gather input from as wide a constituency as possible (like the Ringing World survey) which will have a cost.

The final two clauses of the motion indicate the minimum coverage of the review in terms of who is consulted and what is reviewed.

Council officers will obviously be consulted at some length but we felt it important to emphasise the need also to consult those outside the Council – the wider ringing community and ringing societies, as well as relevant bell owning bodies, notably various churches – and of course the Charity Commission regarding the Council's legal 'Objects'.

The working group may choose how widely to cast its net but it should cover at least what the Council is supposed to do, and how it should organise itself in order to do it – the formal rules and the working practicalities.

The final part of point 5 refers to the fact that individual ringers do not have a direct stake in the Council. It has been suggested that there should be some sort of global organisation of which individual ringers could be members, and we know that such ideas are being developed outside the Council. We do not have a firm view on the best way ahead but it would seem in the Council's interest to consider whether it could satisfy that need – for example with ringers being individual members and societies being corporate members – rather than competing with another body. So the review should consider that aspect as well.

With that I would like to propose the motion, and again I would remind you that the decision we take will send a strong signal to ringers, of whom xxx are currently watching this debate.