

Some improvements are in prospect for Birmingham Talking Newspapers Association (BTNA), the charity that records and distributes weekly audio versions of local newspaper and magazine articles for visually-impaired listeners.

The impetus for change came last July at the BTNA AGM where Mike Hughes presented a short paper outlining his concerns about BTNA. He described a charity run by an elderly and aging group of trustees and facing a more-hostile world where regulators were increasingly demanding and unsympathetic.

When the Executive Committee subsequently reviewed the paper they agreed that, although some of the risks were overstated, there was a strong case for an organisational “spring clean” and for some new blood to strengthen BTNA.

Charles Ashton-Gray, one of the new-blood candidates to join the Committee, and David Gowdy, a technician in North with some experience of charity governance, were asked to recommend a course of action. Their work has now been adopted for recommendation to the 2019 AGM.

The Committee itself had previously considered a revised Constitution but had not made any changes.

In 2013 a new legal model for running a charity was approved by the Government. This offers two main benefits to BTNA – firstly it creates a limited-liability charity and secondly it is a clean sweep – a fresh start using a standard form of constitution. Currently BTNA is a simple charitable association where the trustees each are individually liable for their share of any debts incurred by BTNA. This does not help recruit new trustees! In future that risk will be limited, typically to £1.

Thus the main recommendation is that the Talking Newspaper will in future be provided by a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation, Birmingham Talking Newspapers CIO. This brings the organisation up-to-date. The proposed CIO Constitution is based closely on the Charities Commission template so it should be readily accepted by them. The charitable purpose of the CIO will be identical to the existing charity. In the standard CIO Constitution, membership is open to anyone who supports the aims of the charity and heeds its rules. (The existing BTNA membership is limited to its listeners.)

The change of Constitution will help the Committee function better but otherwise does not change how the Talking Newspaper will operate.

The new CIO will be run by a maximum of 12 trustees. These places need to be filled so the AGM will be asked to nominate and appoint people who are willing to take on that job. Mike Hughes has identified some new people with experience in other charities. Existing BTNA Members and volunteers will also be encouraged to step forward.

If the AGM accepts the CIO recommendation then the meeting will be asked to:-

- approve the formal registration of the CIO with the Charities Commission ;
- instruct the Committee to transfer the assets of the old charity to the CIO;
- wind up the old charity.

This changeover should be completed by October 2019.

