

NEWSLETTER – 2025 AGM

The AGM was held on Friday 2 May at 7pm at
Cyclopark, Watling Street, Gravesend, DA11 7NP

The AGM was attended by seven members in persons who received a presentation from Board members that covered:

A view from the Board

- **Elections**
 - Gez Gibbs was standing for election in his last term as a Non-Executive Director
- **Regulator**
 - Meeting to be held with the regulator in two weeks.
 - No issues but challenge expected on New Business, Property, Strong Solvency and higher Expenses.
- **Member Forum**
 - Two meetings held and a further one to be held before summer.
- **AGM**
 - Electronic voting carried out.
 - 101 votes had been cast online. Votes made at the AGM will be added to this figure and a donation will be made to a local charity.
- **Strategic Objectives**
 - To increase the number of members.
 - To improve the quality of the property portfolio and to increase the financial return.
- **Member Survey**
 - 102 responses received.
 - The proposal to hold one member meeting per year, namely the AGM, was supported by 90 of the respondents.
 - The addition of pet bills to discretionary benefits was not supported by 65 members.
 - 70 members supported the addition of respite stay at the Clarendon Respite Hotel with a possible roll-out to other CQC registered providers.
 - Parliament Hill – 81 members did not find the offers useful and 91 members had not used any of the offers.
- **Have Your Say Winners**
 - Peter Herbert, individual winner, donated the monetary value of his prize to charity.
 - Gravesham Sanctuary and Gravesham Repair Café were joint winners of the member/community vote and will receive sponsorship of £1,500 per year for the next 3 years.

Operational and Strategic Update and Financial Results for 2024

The Vision and Mission highlights the four pillars and the work being done to progress these. Overriding objectives are to recruit new members and the property strategy.

● **Recruiting new Members**

- Increase the membership to 3,000 over the next 5 years.
- Board defined a target of 190 new members for 2025.
- Brand launch and new website, updated to reflect feedback from members driven by Consumer Duty, will assist with recruiting new members.
- Over 100 people introduced via Member-Get-Member over the past 2.5 years.
- Social media commenced in 2023 and will continue.
- Affiliate scheme set up on Top Cashback.
- Google ads and pay per click trialled but Gravesham Friendly not well known.
- Presentations to community and local businesses to continue in an effort to aid relationships.
- Recruitment ongoing for a Sales and Business Development Executive.

● **Community – five partnerships since brand launch:**

- Shorne Woods
 - sponsorship renewed in 2025 and a further walk planned later in the year
 - Cyclopark
 - similar values to Gravesham Friendly
 - partnership for 3 years
 - boards to be placed around cycle tracks and stalls and posters planned for large events
 - wristbands to be produced to promote the Society
 - Guru Nanak Football Club (Gurdwara)
 - Football club sponsored
 - Stall held at Vaisakhi event which was attended by 15,000 people
 - Tour of the facilities attended by Chair and Chief Executive
 - Gravesham Sanctuary
 - Money ringfenced for dayroom where people have tea/coffee
 - Gravesham Repair Café
 - Speaking to Repair Café to ringfence the donation
- The Society will work closely with Gravesham Sanctuary and Gravesham Repair Café over the next 9 months.

● **Products**

- New sickness product paying £250pw to be launched in May. More relevant and cheapest on the market.
- New group sickness product to be launched in May and will target small businesses.

● **Discretionary**

- No changes planned this year.
- Pet support to be discussed with Member Forum as the member survey showed this aspect was not supported.
- Ideas for other categories of discretionary benefits are always welcome.

● **Property**

- After much consideration into retrofit and passivehaus, the Board concluded the best way forward is a 10 year project to transition away from the legacy portfolio to new property that meets long-term sustainable standards.
- Objectives are to reduce carbon usage by ensuring all properties have an EPC C rating by 2034 and to increase the financial returns on the property portfolio.
- Nine properties being purchased in Alkderden Heights, Ebbsfleet (EPC B rating) at the end of May.

- Gross yields of 7-7.5% will be achieved as opposed to the current level of 5.25%.
- Maintenance costs for Alkerden Heights will be lower as damp issues in the current portfolio has resulted in high repair costs.
- Properties in the current portfolio with an EPC D rating will be sold to fund the purchase of the Alkerden Heights properties.
- Society rent still below average for the North Kent area but being brought in line.
- **Consumer Duty**
 - Regulatory work to improve member outcomes with substantial cost to the industry.
 - Work completed in-house and Justine Morrissey (NED) appointed Consumer Duty Champion.
 - Review of current products completed in 2023, closed products review completed in 2024.
 - Annual Board report issued in July 2024.
 - Member survey has led to improvements to CRM and enhanced the information members can access on their online account.
- **Report and Accounts**
 - 4 key indicators:
 - Solvency – very strong, affected by property values.
 - Income – obtained from rent and returns from investments. Arrears of £15K written off from one rental property. 92% of assets held in properties.
 - Management Expenses – increased slightly. Operational costs increased from £911K in 2023 to £919k in 2024 due to an increase in staff days from 3 to 4 for one staff member, higher project costs including actuarial cost related to the new products, brand launch, new website and fees for a specialist development contractor to review the business and provide a report on recruiting new members and partnerships. Project costs are expected to be lower in 2025.
 - Number of Members – decreased slightly, despite the number of new members joining, as high number of deaths reported in 2024.
- **Discretionary Benefits**
 - Monetary value, number of claims and percentage of members claiming all increased in 2024.
 - Staff recruitment to process increased number of claims has not been necessary due to website claims being quicker and more efficient to process.
 - Claims video going live on website to show how to make a claim online.
 - Member's online accounts will show more functionality later in May, including amount remaining in discretionary benefit categories.
- **Audit and Risk Committee Report 2024/25**
- **Investment Committee Report 2024/25**
- **Re-election of Kim Harris, Non-Executive Director, for one year**
 - Kim Harris' re-election was for a one-year term as the Society's rules align to the Friendly Society Act 1992 which states that Non-Executive Directors must be re-elected annually after reaching 70 years of age. An annual review had been conducted to ensure performance and feedback was obtained from Non-Executive Directors which was formally documented. Kim Harris was deemed fit and proper and his re-election was recommended by the Board.
- **Re-election of Gez Gibbs, Non-Executive Director, for three years**
 - Gez Gibbs was standing for his last term to align with good governance and that Board members should retire after serving 9 years.
- **Re-election of Paul Osborn, Executive Director, for three years**

No questions were raised at the end of the meeting.

Formal AGM and Votes for the Resolutions

Society Rules require 20 votes to pass a Resolution, including proxy voting. The vote was carried out electronically where email addresses were held for members and by post for members without a registered email address. This was independently carried out by CES Civica. Members were also able to vote in person at the AGM.

Resolution 1 – To receive the Annual Accounts for the financial year ended 31 December 2024, the Report of the Board of Directors and the Auditor's Report

Total Votes in Favour 107

Resolution 2 – To appoint F W Berringer & Co as Auditors of the Society until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting

Total Votes in Favour 103, Votes Against 1, Votes Abstained 3

Resolution 3 – That Mr Kim Harris be re-elected as a Non-Executive Director of the Society for a period of one year

Total Votes in Favour 103, Votes Against 2, Votes Abstained 2

Resolution 4 – That Mr Gez Gibbs be re-elected as a Non-Executive Director of the Society for a period of three years

Total Votes in Favour 102, Votes Against 3, Votes Abstained 2

Resolution 5 – That Mr Paul Osborn be re-elected as an Executive Director of the Society for a period of three years

Total Votes in Favour 104, Votes Against 2, Votes Abstained 1

The Chair formally closed the AGM at 8.15pm following which members had the opportunity to talk to Board members before departing.

CONTACT US

If any member would like copies of the AGM presentation slides, or has any questions relating to the AGM, please contact us using any of the following methods:

Post: The Old Rectory, Springhead Road, Northfleet, DA11 8HN

Telephone: 01474 567050

Email: info@graveshamfriendly.co.uk