

No. 076/21

26<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**TO: ALL BRANCHES**

Dear Colleague,

## **BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS AND BRANCH GENERAL MEETINGS**

Branches will recall that at the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 CWU HQ issued guidance in respect of the convening of Branch AGM's and Branch Membership meetings. This was contained in LTB 128/20.

The guidance was published in accordance with the relevant restrictions and legislation that had been published by the Government at that time. The main restriction, relevant to the holding of physical attended Branch meetings, was that events which involved large gatherings of people were not allowed to take place and, unfortunately (almost 12 months later), the situation regarding such meetings remains the same.

It is fair to say that at the time of issuing the original guidance in the above LTB we did not envisage that 12 months later that it would still not be possible for the CWU to be able to hold member meetings in the same way as we had done in the past.

As a result of this and following consultation with the CWU President and Vice President, we believe it is now necessary for the CWU to review the situation and to issue further guidance to branches and further to introduce regulated changes that will allow branches to convene decision making meetings in which members can participate.

This is pertinent as most branches would normally be arranging AGM's at this time of the year and therefore we have received a number of enquiries seeking authority for meetings to take place and for guidance on how these can operate during the pandemic.

For ease of reference the Branch Model Constitution contains the following wording;

*Each Branch shall hold an Annual General Meeting by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> March of each year. Not less than 28 days' notice shall be given to members of the Annual General Meeting and branches shall be responsible for publishing the agenda and timetable for the submitting of motions and amendments etc.*

Quite clearly during the current pandemic it is not possible for branches to comply with this branch rule and therefore this requirement as set out has been suspended until further notice.

That said we believe it is now essential that branches are once again able to consult with their members at meetings, place important and urgent issues before them for decision and seek agreement on branch policy matters. A number of branches have already successfully held meetings using electronic meeting tools and we believe other branches are able to do the same.

We have therefore set out below how this can happen and have provided further guidance and a framework of how branches can now begin to arrange decision making member meetings.

### **Guidance on Decision Making Branch Member Meetings including Annual General Meetings**

The democratic principles of the CWU are founded on the union ensuring that members are fully involved in our decision making processes and that they are given the opportunity to receive reports from their elected branch officers/committee on issues of branch policy and finance, etc. thereby giving them their say on matters that impact upon them.

It is also important that branch members are given the opportunity to put themselves forward, where appropriate, as candidates in relevant representative elections for local, regional and national representative positions in accordance with their entitlement as set out in the national rules of the union, this normally happens at branch meetings.

In order to be able to do this and be compliant with the COVID 19 restrictions Branches should now begin to make arrangements for decision making member meetings to take place in the coming months. All such meetings will need to be held virtually and be conducted via a suitable video conference platform such as Zoom or Skype, etc. that provides the opportunity for large numbers of members to participate in the meeting either by joining online via a laptop, tablet, smartphone, etc. Branches will need to ensure that the platform it is using is not restricted to a set number which may then result in some members not being able to join the meeting. Further information regarding this can be obtained from CWU HQ.

### **Notice of Meeting**

Branches will need to provide suitable notice for meetings. This notice should be given at least **14 days** before the date of the meeting.

The notice should contain the details of how members can participate and join the meeting, and should contain the agenda for the meeting including the wording of any particular policy, motions or relevant documents that are going to be placed before the meeting for a decision.

Branches will also need to give the opportunity to members to submit their own motions (or amendments to motions being submitted by the Branch Committee) to the meeting.

### **Branch Finances**

Branches should ensure that regular detailed financial updates are produced containing, as a minimum, a breakdown of bank account balances, income received and expenditure. This information should be published and circulated to members by all means at the disposal of the Branch.

Members should also be given the opportunity to raise questions on branch financial matters at member meetings. Branches should also place a comprehensive detailed summary of their annual accounts before a member meeting for approval at the earliest opportunity. Ideally this should be done at the virtual AGM or if this is not possible at a separate meeting called specifically for this purpose.

## **Voting Arrangements**

All major online meeting systems have the facility for individuals to show their support or not for a particular position or proposition. Branches will need to familiarise themselves with the facility of the system they are using and publish the arrangements on how such voting will take place during the meetings to their members.

Additionally, Branches will need to ensure they have a mechanism in place to verify attendees as actual members of that branch before allowing the attendees to vote. This obviously needs to also take account of the rights to vote of retired members or not in certain circumstances. As per the rule book.

## **Branch Nominations**

In respect of seeking nominations for relevant positions from members, branches will need to put in place a robust system and use all reasonable methods to advise members of positions for which nominations are being sought and for which endorsement is being sought at the meeting.

## **Conclusion**

As you would imagine it is not possible for CWU HQ to be absolutely prescriptive about what arrangements will operate in each Branch. There may well be individuals who, as would be the case in face to face meetings, for a number of reasons cannot participate at the set time and date of the meeting. We do not believe that this factor, as with meetings in person, should be a barrier to any Branch organising a meeting to include as many of their members as possible in line with the above guidance.

Any enquiries regarding this Letter to Branches should be addressed to the Senior Deputy General Secretary's Department on telephone number 020 8971 7237, or email address [sdgs@cwu.org](mailto:sdgs@cwu.org).

Yours sincerely,



Tony Kearns  
**Senior Deputy General Secretary**