As many of you will no doubt be aware, on 2 January 2024 Mr John Thorne launched his candidacy for a role on Council at the upcoming AGM; something we encourage any member to do. Regrettably in this instance, he chose to do so by posting a video to social media publicly defaming both individual Association members and Council as a whole with a series of wild yet wholly unsubstantiated accusations of wrongdoing. Our opinion is he is deliberately misleading you as to the probity of decisions Council made at the meeting he attended as an observer and, on at least one occasion, simply fabricating facts to suit his narrative. In order to determine an appropriate response, it was necessary for Council to convene an extraordinary meeting on Monday 8 January.

Whilst the minutes of the meeting will be produced by the Secretary in due course, Council determined in accordance with our documented policy that it had little choice other than refer the issue to our Conduct and Standards Committee (CSC). Secondly, I should write to you all and provide facts, as opposed to opinion, and lastly to write to Mr Thorne directly and invite him to either present tangible evidence of wrongdoing or retract his very serious but unsubstantiated allegations.

Whilst it is clear from his comments, he disagrees with how our Constitution directs the management of the Association; a system, supported by the Charity Commission, which has been in place since 1977. Mr Thorne does go further however suggesting that the Officers elected at the AGM in 2023 formed council by appointing:

“their mates to basically pass [um] what can only be described as dubious decisions”.

Mr Thorne’s first example of what he describes as a ‘dubious decision’ appears to imply that an invoice brought to Council for authorisation by the Treasurer for “£7,000” worth of shotgun cartridges was the result of a purchase “simply because we’ve always done it” and that it was an arrangement put in place with “a member because it’s one of his mates”. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

As many of our active shotgunners will be aware, Council approved an agreement to secure the supply of shotgun cartridges for members to purchase at a discounted price some time before I even became involved with Council in 2017. This benefit to the membership has been managed by the previous Regional Director who has graciously continued to do so this year, even providing the storage and transport of these cartridges to matches at his own cost. In short, the Association has for the last 5 years been purchasing ammunition in bulk and recouping the money as members purchase ammunition to consume. At the meeting held on 8 December 2023, the Treasurer brought forward an invoice for £6,192 he had received for the latest batch of ammunition ordered to replace depleted stock. Whilst Council approved the payment to settle the invoice, it also decided not to approve any future purchases. At the time this arrangement was put in place, shotgun was considered by many as the primary discipline within the Association; today however, it is but one of many active isciplines. With this in mind Council judged it inappropriate to continue to provide an exclusive benefit for hotgunners if it was not able to provide a similar benefit to our other IPSC discipline shooters. In this instance, alongside many others throughout this year, the invoice was simply brought to Council by the Treasurer for payment to be approved as is our standard practice for any sum above the Treasurers delegated powers to authorise1.

He goes on to cite a second example where he states:

“Callum himself proposed a [uh] suggestion that all the existing sponsorship agreements, they simply rubber stamp them and give them all pay make them pay 350 quid and that gives them the right to be the sponsor on the website” ….. “again no defined benefits, no defined payments in or what you get for it, it was simply done well he’s all there let’s charge him 350 and move on from there” ….. “it was simply jobs for the boys and contracts for your mates and whilst I don’t believe all the committee are integrally involved with this sort of process, there was a lack of dissent in what was going on that made me concerned that we’d gone beyond the point of no return”

At the meeting on 8 December 2023, the Treasurer did make a suggestion that sponsorship agreements should be standardised and indeed suggested that a fee of £250 might be appropriate. What Mr Thorne neglected to relay in his comments was that I personally intervened, asking the Treasurer if they had formulated a full written proposal that Council could scrutinise to assure itself that any benefits to both the Association, and potential sponsor, were coherent with the policy guidance issued by the Charity Commission for such arrangements. As he had not yet done so, the item was shut down by me at that point and not debated further. To suggest, as he does, that it was simply “rubber stamped” or there was a “lack of dissent” is simply untrue.

He goes on to state that:

“We’re at a position in time where now the UKPSA doesn’t function okay, it is used and abused by certain people to simply line their own pockets” ….. “We have £200,000 in the bank and it is just being wittered away on frankly fraudulent um applications that’s not being controlled properly and not being looked after in terms of a decent management structure” ….. “there is money in the bank and it is being stolen from us by people who shouldn’t be there” ….. “we have to heal some of these things and you can’t heal it if your methodology of being there is to corruptly get one of your buddies elected and then use that to steal money from people both the Association itself and in terms of selling things to the members”

These are probably the most serious of his allegations however, he has not offered any specific evidence to substantiate them. In my letter to Mr Thorne, I will be inviting him to either provide such evidence, or publicly retract these baseless allegations. I would just remind you all that our accounts are independently audited by 3rd party accountants annually as part of our obligations to file accounts with the Charity Commission. If there were any substance to these allegations of theft and fraud, I would expect them to be identified by the auditors who are duty bound to report such anomalies to the appropriate authorities.

Lastly, I would just like to comment on Mr Thorne’s assertion that the UKPSA and its’ Council is held in low regard by organisations such as the various Police Forces, other National Governing Bodies and is perpetuating historic rifts. Council members have been actively and constructively engaging throughout 2023 with the National College of Policing, individual Police Firearms Licensing Authorities and the other recognised national level shooting organisations, including the NRA, NSRA and BASC to name but a few. At no point have any of these organisations voiced any concern regarding the Association or indeed any of our elected or appointed Officers.

Hopefully the facts I have presented will allow you to draw your own conclusions as to the veracity of his allegations and as ever, I am happy to engage with you all directly if you have any questions you’d like me to answer.

A C Williams

Chair

For Council