Responsibilities of Council Members

Council members are elected by the Fellows and Members of their region. Being a council member carries responsibilities but should also be a productive and rewarding experience. It enables an ophthalmologist to contribute to the work of the College and to take part in the national debate about ophthalmology. Meetings are usually held in clusters in the second week of the month. The responsibilities include:

- **Being a trustee of the College***
  All Council members are trustees of the College under the Charities Act. The Charities Commission sounds the warning that “lack of knowledge about the duties and responsibilities of charity trusteeship may not just affect the way in which the charity is run, but can also have personal consequences for the trustees”. The commission has produced detailed guidance on the responsibilities of charity trustees which can be found at [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk). Prospective Council members are urged to read section CC3

- **Attendance at Council**
  To participate in the debate and to bring constituents’ views to the attention of the College. Council meets quarterly, on a Friday morning, concluding with lunch

- **Participation in standing committees**
  Council members are expected to join at least one standing committee (Education, Examinations, Finance, Professional Standards, Scientific and Training). Members’ preference will be taken into account but the Honorary Secretary will ensure sufficient Council representation on each committee

- **Preparation for meetings**
  Council members are expected to read the meeting papers in advance. They are sent a week in advance by email or hard copy and may include a number of enclosures.

- **Conduct in meetings**
  To promote free and open debate the discussions in meetings should be regarded as confidential. The minutes of meetings are a matter of record

- **Dialogue with regional members**
  Council members are responsible for disseminating information on College business to their constituents as well as representing their constituents’ views. To assist this process, “short notes” of Council minutes are sent to each Council member, (with a set of regional address labels) to forward to members with a commentary, if appropriate. Council members should develop mechanisms to communicate with ophthalmologists in their region and ensure that knowledge of these mechanisms is passed on to their successors

- **Declaration of conflict of interests**
  Council members are expected to complete a declaration of interest form each June and to declare any conflict of interest that at the start of committee meetings and to withdraw from the ensuing discussions, if appropriate

- **Attendance at the Admissions Ceremony**, usually in September.
- **Attendance at the Council Dinner**, in June, for which a charge is levied.
Council members are not paid for their services. Travel expenses are reimbursed on production of receipts and claims should be submitted within three months of the meeting. Please visit the website for all Policies relating to the governance of the College, including travel expenses.

Council members are asked to read the Annual Report and The Strategic Plan 2015-19.

*Governance Structure*
Council members are currently trustees but the College is reviewing its governance structure. The following appears on the College website:

The governance structure of the RCOphth – and why change is necessary
The current governance structure of the RCOphth, where Council members are also Trustees, was introduced in 1988. The College has since become an increasingly complex organisation and is subject to greater regulatory burdens. The pressures on NHS staff have grown; Trustees find it increasingly difficult to find the time necessary to fulfil their responsibilities and commit to being members of Council.

How have proposed changes been identified?
Council set up a short-term Governance Working Party to identify ways of improving the existing structure. Council has accepted its recommendation that a Trustee Board should be created. It noted that several other royal medical colleges have already made a similar change, to good effect.

What is the role of the Trustee Board?
The Trustee Board would have the final responsibility for the financial, business and legal aspects of the College. It would bring in the expertise of lay members but medical members would always be in the majority.

What is the role of Council?
Council would continue to manage the College’s medical, professional and clinical obligations, with responsibility for furthering and fulfilling the mission of the College and for setting long-term goals and priorities.

Who approves the changes?
The proposed governance changes require the Charter and the Ordinances to be redrafted. These have to approved, as a block, by members voting at the 2016 AGM and then approved by the Privy Council.

How will the membership be kept informed?
The College President, Carrie MacEwen, referred to this work in her opening speech at the 2015 Annual Congress and explained the rationale for change at the 2015 Annual General Meeting. Further updates will appear in future issues of College News and in Short Notes from Council.