



Central News – March 2025

Sharing operational information, engagement opportunities and news with RBL Counties/Districts, Branches and Sections around the world

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Important dates	
Sir Clive Johnstone award nominations	28 March 2025
Annual Conference in-person attendee registration closes	30 March 2025
Nominations for Place of Conference 2029	11 April 2025
Nominations for National Conference Committee	11 April 2025
Deadline for completed ballot papers to reach Civica	14 April 2025
Annual Conference virtual attendee registration closes	22 April 2025

Sir Clive Johnstone award: nominations open

Please see below a message from the National Chair:

Those of you at Annual Conference in Newport last year will remember Sir Clive's speech and his ask for unity across all parts of what he described (in my view, rightly!) as "the greatest charity." I am delighted to announce a new award in his memory, to be called the Sir Clive Johnstone Award. This has been made possible by some of the people Clive led in HMS Bulwark, who made a generous donation to the RBL in his honour.

The criteria to be considered for the award is simple – we are seeking demonstrations of unity, and those who seek to create, repair or improve it. It is open to individuals, groups, or teams, and is unique in that it is open for nominations from members, volunteers, and colleagues – possibly even groups that have representatives from all three!

As we are only just launching the Sir Clive Johnstone award that will be awarded for the first time at Annual Conference in Harrogate, **the closing date is 5pm on Friday 28 March**. The judging panel will be myself, the National Vice Chair, the Director General, and Mike Challinor as Chair of the Membership Awards Committee.

So please think hard about who might deserve this award and why. We look forward to hearing from you and celebrating them together in May. You can [download the application form here](#).

Thanks

Jason Coward, National Chair



Issue with Annual Conference registration emails resolved

We are aware that between 13:50 and 14:40 on Tuesday 4th March, some branches received multiple or incorrect emails from Membership Services.

These emails, which had the subject heading "RBL Annual Conference 2025", were issued due to a configuration error on our delivery partner's portal. Although the information provided by us to the delivery partner was correct, their IT system configuration error also caused some branches to be sent incorrect information.

We can assure members that there has been no data breach and that these emails can be disregarded. The registration portal for Annual Conference is again live and we will continue to test

the system before sending out final compliance confirmation emails next week.

We sincerely apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Looking forward to Annual Conference

Annual Conference isn't just a weekend of debating and voting on motions, it's a jam-packed weekend full of opportunities to learn more about RBL's work, and to network with your fellow members.

Be absorbed by the exhibition

A variety of RBL's teams and select external organisations will be exhibiting their work and engaging with in-person attendees on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 May. This is a fantastic opportunity to speak directly with members of staff.

Your questions answered

On Sunday 18 we will again be holding our popular membership forum. This session is a chance for members to raise their questions or concerns to a panel of senior leaders from across the organisation and hear what they have to say. There will again be the chance to pre-submit questions, with details on how to do so shared in due course.

Annual Conference 2025 takes place 16 - 18 May 2025. You can register to attend in person or online [via our website](#). In-person attendee registration closes 30 March, whilst online attendee registration closes 22 April. The Standing Orders of Conference are available [on MAP](#). See you there!

2025 RBL Elections update

Ballot papers and the candidate booklet for the 2025 RBL Elections will be sent by Civica Election Services to compliant Voting Branches by 10 March. These will be sent electronically via email, or by post to branches without an email contact address. Please contact elections@britishlegion.orf.uk if your branch has not received these by 17 March. The deadline for completed ballot papers to reach Civica is **5pm on 14 April 2025**.

Safeguarding in the RBL

The RBL has a duty to protect beneficiaries, staff, members, volunteers and members of the public. It is everyone's responsibility to report safeguarding concerns, and often branch members may see or hear things which don't feel right, particularly those of you who are BCS supporters working with beneficiaries or branches who are out in their communities.

If you have concerns about a vulnerable adult or child being at risk of abuse or neglect, you should report this to your Membership Engagement Officer so that appropriate steps can be taken.

Ordering Portraits of The King

Further to last month's Central News, please [see here](#) detailed information on how your branch can order an official portrait of His Majesty the King through a dedicated [online ordering portal](#).

Internal Audit Review of Counties/Districts

The Audit, Compliance and Investigation Team will be starting work on their review of Counties / Districts in the next few weeks. The purpose of these reviews is to assess compliance with RBL's requirements, through the review of annual returns and other documentation, and to provide information and support to local committees so that any gaps identified can be addressed.

The intention is to also provide county committees with an overview of the branches in their area, highlighting any that are non-compliant and in need of extra assistance or support. A phased approach is being taken, and the work is expected to take several months. Individual Internal Audit team members will be in touch with the county/district officers with more information ahead of any field work starting. Thank you for your support in this process.

Using Branch funds to support beneficiaries: legacies and almonisation

Across our network, there are millions of pounds in branch and county funds, mainly held in Branch Finance Initiatives (BFIs) but also as legacies where the RBL branch has been left money in a supporter's will. Some of these funds remain in bank accounts for years, gathering dust, when they could be used to directly support the Armed Forces Community.

If you didn't know, it is easy for branches and counties to ensure that these funds are used to make a difference to beneficiaries through a donation, legacy or almonisation. So what's the difference and how do these work? [Read the guidance on MAP](#) to find out more.

February Membership Council Brief

The Membership Council Chair's Summary of the February 2025 meeting is now [available on MAP](#). The next Membership Council meeting will take place on 25 April, with the Chair's summary to follow in due course.

RBL National Chaplain

We would like to inform you that a successor to our former National Chaplain, Scott Brown, should be appointed later in the year. The new National Chair, who will be in post mid-May, will take the lead on the appointment with the aim that Scott's successor will be in post ahead of Remembrancetide 2025.

Scott stepped down in September, having led services for memorable events such as Annual Conference 2024 – a special time for us when the three National Standards were charged together for the first time in our history. We would like to extend a warm thank you to Scott and look forward to sharing news of his successor with you later in the year.

Improving the Membership Handbook

A revision of the Membership Handbook will be published week commencing 7 April in both PDF and a new eBook format. It will be distributed via RBL.Community emails, available in [the Handbooks folder on MAP](#) and accessible through Membership Engagement Officers.

This revision primarily focuses on improving accessibility by restructuring the handbook and creating a new eBook version; the content itself has not been reviewed. A full content review will take place for a September 2025 revision.

We hope this upcoming revision makes the handbook easier to use for everyone. As always, we welcome your feedback once published – please use the [dedicated feedback form](#) to share your comments. Thank you for your ongoing hard work and support.

VE/VJ Day Remembrance Resources

This year we will be commemorating 80 years since VE Day and VJ Day. As branches you play a key role in engaging your local communities in commemorative events and connecting with veterans and their families. We are happy to again be producing Remembrance resources to help you engage with your communities, including a tea party event pack.

In addition to free digital resources and event packs, there will be an easily-assembled 2.5m-high four-sided tower, which can form a fantastic talking point at an event, one- and two-sided pull-up banners, and a large poster and leaflet.

Each of these items will be available in the following formats:

- The end of the Second World War, featuring an overview, veteran case studies and imagery.
- Teaching Remembrance Learning programme, featuring information on events and

resources available to teachers and educators.

Branches can apply for funding to support their tea parties and commemorative events – more details will follow on how to apply. You can find out more about how branches can support commemorative events with our [guidance on MAP](#).

Lastly, bespoke resources with an educational focus for non-teaching adults to engage with young people about Remembrance will also be available to order and download from mid-March [via the RBL website](#).

[RBL hosts MPs and Peers at Speaker's Apartment](#)

Last month, RBL hosted over 60 MPs and Peers at the Speaker's House in Parliament, giving MPs the opportunity to hear more about the needs and experiences of the Armed Forces community in the UK, and the work RBL does to support them.

The Speaker's House is the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons and is only available to those organisations invited by the Speaker. We were thrilled to have been given the opportunity to host an event in such a historic space.

Speakers at the event included the Speaker of the House of Commons, The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, the Minister for Veterans and People, Al Carns OBE MC MP, and RBL National Chair, Jason Coward. Attendees also heard from Gemma Barnes, vice-captain of RBL's Invictus Team UK, who shared her inspiring recovery journey. The event reinforced the need for continued collaboration to ensure the Armed Forces community's voices are heard.

[Click here](#) to hear more about what the Campaigns, Policy and Research team get up to.

[Director General gives evidence to Defence Select Committee](#)

On Tuesday 4 February, Mark Atkinson appeared before the Defence Select Committee to discuss how the Armed Forces Covenant can better support veterans, serving individuals, and their families. His testimony was part of a wider review of the Covenant's effectiveness, impact and future after the Government promised to strengthen the Covenant Duty in its election manifesto.

Mark gave oral evidence alongside Lieutenant General (Rtd) Sir Nick Pope, Executive Chair of the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo), before a cross-party group of MPs, the Defence Select Committee, chaired by Tan Singh Desai MP.

To watch the evidence session in full, [click here](#).

South Wales Admiral Nurses donation

A substantial donation was presented to one of our RBL Admiral Nurses in South Wales, by the South East Wales District Chairman on behalf of his Committee and District. The donation was made possible by the very generous legacy of £123,764.00 left to the RBL by Mrs Dorothy Bowen. This donation in her memory will pay for the costs of an Admiral Nurse for at least a two-year period.



The service provided by our qualified Admiral Nurses to the carers of veterans with dementia is a lifeline and the District was sure that Mrs Dorothy Bowen and her family would be extremely pleased her legacy was being put to the best possible use. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Mrs Dorothy Bowen and South East District.

“What membership means to me”

When Adrian Leslie – now RBL’s Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager, Wales – was recovering from life-changing lung surgery, he didn’t know the RBL could help him. “And they didn’t know I needed help,” he says. But that all changed the day he was stopped in the street by a stranger. The man, who had spotted Adrian’s Royal Navy rugby shirt, was the Chair of the local RBL branch. He asked Adrian if he had served and invited him to come along for a pint and a chat if ever he was at a loose end.



That simple act of camaraderie led to Adrian becoming an RBL member. In time, he became a Branch Secretary and then a Legion Independent Examiner; and when he became interested in welfare, he travelled to Cardiff to help out as a welfare admin worker, logging and filing cases and sending archive cases to storage.

“As I was not working, I volunteered,” he says. “And for the first time in nearly two years, I felt like I had some social and community worth again.”

When his health improved, Adrian was ready for a new direction. He first became an Advice and Information Officer and then a Membership Support Officer (MSO). Being an MSO, he says, was perfect for him. “I have always been a people person and enjoy helping others.” Finally, he joined Campaigns, Policy and Research where, he says, he works with “a great team”.

Other than his health, Adrian says he had transitioned well into civilian life – even though resettlement in the 1980s just “meant a train ticket home”. But when Covid struck, he began to struggle.

“Being in an extremely vulnerable group took its toll, and after all the restrictions were lifted, I found myself avoiding people, which was most unlike me. My confidence had gone on the inside, although I managed to hide it.”

Adrian turned to RBL for support and was placed on a residential mental health recovery course at the Battleback Centre. “The experience was life changing as far as regaining my confidence. It was also a fantastic group of people all helping each other.” Since then, some graduates of the course, called Recovery through Comedy, have performed standup comedy at RBL’s Annual Conference and even the Edinburgh Fringe.

From being a member, Adrian has been an RBL volunteer, colleague and beneficiary. For him, he says, RBL membership is “about being part of a community that offers opportunities to make a positive impact on others, while also receiving the support you need.” Although not all branches are always in the position to achieve this, he feels it’s a great thing to aim for.

It’s also something he has experienced from different perspectives. “It’s funny to think that over the last 15 years, I’ve helped many people as a Legion member and a member of staff. I’ve also received help as a beneficiary.

“None of this would have happened if a Legion member hadn’t invited me for a pint.”

Thank you for reading! The March edition of Central News is due to be published
Tuesday 1st April.