

# 2017 BMC AGM – PRESIDENT STATEMENT

By Rehan Siddiqui

Read at BMC AGM, 22 April 2017

This motion of no confidence by Bob Pettigrew , Doug Scott, Dennis Gray and supporters has been a targeted politically motivated attack to take control of the BMC, effectively an attempted coup. This has been to impose their views regarding their dislike for the Olympics, competition climbing, the International Federation of Sport Climbing, promoting & attracting membership from hill walkers and a long-standing perceived issue regarding the maintenance of a toilet block at Harrisons Rocks.

Doug Scott himself told me on my attaining the Presidency of the BMC that “Climbing is far too important for democracy”. A sentiment that I definitely do not share. I firmly believe that the BMC is a modern inclusive and member-led organisation representing all our interests and not those of a colonial elite from a by gone era.

The BMC admitted that the Sport England funded rebrand was a mistake and following widespread membership disapproval, the BMC reacted quickly to rectify this. I feel it is now appropriate to inform you that I personally was against the rebrand in Executive Committee discussions. When the majority decision was reached to go ahead with the rebranding. As President of the BMC, I felt duty bound to publicly support the democratic decision of the Executive Committee in mid-May and also that of National Council in mid-June 2016.

Following the widespread disapproval of the rebrand I and other voluntary directors and the CEO personally spent significant time touring the country to attend BMC area meetings, club meetings and meet with individuals in the consultation process which in hindsight

should have happened before the rebrand. I have endured unjustified and highly personal attacks over the issue since.

I feel it is important to point out that the Executive Committee is not composed of long-standing, entrenched members. The Executive, with exception of the salaried CEO) is actually composed of hard working volunteers who are highly respected in their various professional fields and who each stand for three year periods with the treasurer standing for five years. The membership of Executive regularly changes as tenures are generally staggered.

Although the motion of no confidence has not been successful, The BMC faces significant challenges going forward. Executive Committee and National Council have agreed that a review of governance is required and the best way forward on this is to have an independently chaired review group which will report to National Council and the Executive Committee. This effort is also supported by major clubs such as the Alpine Club, Climbers Club and others. This review is likely to lead to recommendations for major changes to the articles of association. Today's BMC is much larger than when the current Articles of Association were written.

Independently of this decision Sport England have expressed concerns on the BMC'S Governance linked in the main to the relationship between the Executive committee and National Council. This in turn is linked to complying with the Companies Act. The motion of no confidence has done the BMC no favours with our image with Sport England and in general. The BMC receive funding from Sport England and many aspects our operations will be at risk if the governance issues are not quickly resolved.

The work load on the President and members of the Executive Committee is significant and regularly goes way beyond what is reasonable for voluntary unpaid roles. The Presidents role in particular is not sustainable with regular requirements to have to deal with day to day operational matters. The board of most representative or governing sporting bodies deal with strategic direction rather than operational matters. This is not the case with the BMC. The motion of no confidence has added to the existing pressure and I have been consumed in BMC matters from dawn to late into the night for extended periods of time. It is essential that the review group looks at the roles, responsibilities and time commitments of the volunteer executive to ensure that the BMC has the capability to recruit as wide-a-range of talent as possible. The BMC needs to be able to attract current professional people to Executive positions as well as retired individuals.

As many of you know, my theme as BMC President has been to encourage the wide and diverse range of activities that the BMC is involved with. The BMC is rightly proud to promote the rich heritage of British mountaineering and traditional climbing values. It is the representative body for traditional climbing and mountaineering, hill walking, sport climbing, bouldering, clubs et al as well as acting as the governing body for competition climbing. By having a balanced and inclusive approach based on consultation and consensus, we are collectively stronger. As Aristotle said "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts". I firmly believe that by being inclusive enables us to educate our younger generation of the rich heritage of British climbing, traditional values and protecting the environment. I also believe that it is important that we embrace youth, support competition climbing on artificial structures and find ways to engage with users of climbing walls.

My Presidency and involvement with the BMC has been eventful to say the least. The day of my election as President a large earthquake hit the mountain regions of Nepal. I immediately put forward a plan to hold charity auction of mountaineering memorabilia, days out with climbing legends and tea with national celebrities amongst many other generously donated items. It brought together the BMC with major clubs such as the Alpine Club and Climbers Club in support of a common aim to provide vital funds to the people of Nepal, in the main, via Doug Scott's charity.

A major BMC staff restructure had already been agreed prior to my Presidency which had to be implemented shortly after my election. This involved me winning the support of BMC staff to ensure a happy working environment. A major reconfiguration of the BMC headquarters was also undertaken. A happy working environment means better productivity and delivery of all that the BMC does and an office fit for the future.

During my years of involvement with the BMC in different voluntary roles, I was instrumental in the setting up of the equity steering group and acted as its first chair. I served as Vice President from 2008 – 2011, canvassed support and campaigned for the purchase of Wilton quarry and Crookrise crags, pushed the outdoor agenda with regular meetings with political figures via the APPG. I supported Mountain Heritage Trust and their move to the Blencartha Centre as well as encouraged the series of Alex Honnold lectures. A successful mend our mountains crowd funding effort raised in the region of £100,000. I have promoted and developed a culture of inclusion for the wide range of sectors that we cover, aiming to achieve a BMC for all with a common mindset without elitism.

After successfully leading the BMC through the biggest challenge to its existence in its entire history, I have decided that the time is right to stand down as President of the BMC. The

last few months in particular have been very difficult and I have been frustrated that the motion of no confidence has meant that energy and focus of both volunteers and staff has been directed away from the many positive areas which members benefit. I have a business to run and a young family to provide for and cannot reasonably make such a huge sacrifice anymore. I have immense pride in the BMC and utmost respect for the excellent and hard - working fellow executives and BMC staff that I have had the pleasure of working with. I will not leave the organisation leaderless and will stay on in the role until a new President or acting President can be appointed.

I will be addressing National Council tomorrow morning prior to the main meeting which will then be chaired by Vice President Nick Kurth.