



Swim England East Region
Minutes of the Water Polo Leadership Group Meeting
29th January 2026

Present:	Jackie Spinks (JS)	Water Polo Manager
	Ian Mackenzie (IM)	Director Representative
	Chris Cawood (CC)	Suffolk Coastal Torpedoes
	Tim Whitwham (TW)	Bedford

26/01 **Apologies**

- 26/01.1 JS opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. The meeting was declared inquorate.
- 26/01.2 Apologies received from Jonathan Lowy (JL), Hertford, Martin Vinter (MV), Colchester, Simon Lecomber (SL), Colchester, James Walker (JW), Chelmsford, and Paul Metcalf (PM) Luton.
- 26/01.3 JS confirmed that she would be representing Hitchin as well as chairing the meeting. The Group noted that in future, Hitchin should ideally have separate representation.

26/02 **Declarations of conflict of interest**

- 26/02.1 None declared.

26/03 **Previous minutes**

- 26/03.1 The previous minutes from the meeting on 16/12/2025 had been circulated.
- 26/03.2 The minutes were approved.

26/04 **Matters arising**

- 26/04.1 JS confirmed that the only outstanding item from the previous minutes related to the team selection policy, which would be formally amended and resubmitted to EW.

Action: JS to amend the team selection policy and submit to EW

26/05 **2026 Plan and Budget**

- 26/05.1 The Group confirmed approval of the 2026 Plan and Budget as previously discussed at the December meeting. The budget was based on last year's structure with amendments including purchases of hats and ear guard changes for goalkeepers.
- 26/05.2 IM confirmed that he had received further correspondence from finance requesting confirmation of what needed to be agreed. IM confirmed that all items were finalised and would be sent to finance following the meeting.



26/05.3 IM confirmed that any variances would be dealt with as they arise throughout the year.

Action: IM to submit approved budget to finance

26/06 Pool time and facilities

26/06.1 JS reported that EW has been able to book pool sessions at Haberdashers' School (HABS) and Luton for the initial regional training sessions.

26/06.2 JS reported that the third session would likely need to be at Chelmsford as it is more cost-effective than Basildon. The Group discussed rotating sessions around the Region to ensure fair access for all clubs.

26/06.3 JS provided details of the Luton pool booking:

- Rate: £88 per hour for 25 metres at the diving boards end
- Two Saturday sessions per month, 3:00pm-5:00pm, available through to April
- Hitchin has block-booked all available dates, with regional sessions taking priority as needed.

26/06.4 JS confirmed that she would visit Luton to assess the condition of the equipment. Goals are available on-site, and Hitchin would provide balls and additional equipment as needed.

26/06.5 The Group discussed pool availability at other venues:

- Basildon: £288 per hour
- University of Hertfordshire: Over £1,000 for 3 hours (though TW suggested without lane ropes it may reduce to £88 - this requires clarification)
- UEA Norwich: No current information
- Northampton: Previously used, reasonably priced, and accessible

Action: JS to contact Carl Brandwood (Norwich club administrator) to explore UEA availability

26/06.6 The Group noted that many school pools in the Region may also be suitable for regional training, particularly for younger age-groups where shallow water is acceptable. JS agreed to explore options including Bedford Modern School, Robinson College, and Haberdashers' (which has an adjustable depth pool).

26/07 Grand Prix and inter-county competitions

26/07.1 JS expressed interest in running a Grand Prix-style event, noting that water time availability (particularly at Luton) may now make this feasible. The Group agreed that additional competition opportunities would benefit player development.



- 26/07.2 Extensive discussion took place on reviving the inter-county competition:
- The competition would need clear rules to ensure fairness
 - TW emphasised that eligibility should be based on a player's home postcode, not club location. This is particularly relevant given that many Watford players reside outside the East Region (in London Region and South East Region). CC confirmed that the historical approach was a player's home postcode

The Group agreed that a player's home postcode is the appropriate criterion.

- 26/07.3 JS noted that inter-county competition would provide a valuable development pathway leading to inter-regional selection. CC agreed that any competition is better than none. The Group agreed that an inter-county tournament could be valuable for developing players ready for East Region teams.

- 26/07.4 There was discussion on appropriate age-groups for the inter-county competition:

TW suggested having senior level participants and allowing a 4-5 hour tournament with two halves per match.

JS proposed focusing on younger age-groups initially.

The Group agreed that eligibility would need to be postcode-based to ensure fair representation and prevent teams being dominated by players from a single club.

26/08 Regional training sessions

- 26/08.1 The first regional session was scheduled:

- Date: Saturday 1st February 2026 (initially stated as 31st January, but corrected during discussion)
- Venue: Haberdashers' School
- Time: 4:00pm-6:00pm
- Attendance: 27 players registered as of 27th January 2026
- Coaches: JS, TW, and potentially Matt (Cambridge) - to be confirmed

- 26/08.2 JS confirmed the age range for the first session as 2013-2011 born boys and 2013-2010 born girls. The girls were given an extra year owing to lower numbers and development differences.

- 26/08.3 TW raised concerns about session planning without advance sight of the participant list and emphasised the need to group players appropriately:

- Players who have represented the Region should be grouped together
- First-time attendees (likely used to shallow end) need separate attention
- Those who have attended before but not yet represented the Region to form a middle group

JS and TW agreed to meet 30 minutes before the session to review the list and plan groupings accordingly.

Action: EW to send lists when registrations close



26/09

Inter-Regionals

- 26/09.1 JS confirmed coaching plans for inter-regional competitions:
- Under-14s (2013 born): Simon Lecomber and Matt McGeehan - both confirmed as willing - boys only expected
 - Under-16s (2011 born): Martin Vinter likely to continue - boys only expected
 - Under-18s (2009 born): No team expected - no girls available
- 26/09.2 There was discussion on girls' teams for inter-regionals:
- JS raised the possibility of entering 2010 born girls in the under-18 competition if they have developed sufficiently.
- TW noted that they would be in Division 2 - potentially more competitive
- JS suggested using regional training sessions with 2010 girls and 2011 boys to assess readiness.
- A decision is to be made following assessment during regional training.
- 26/09.3 JS reported that no dates have been published for inter-regionals:
- Under-18s: Originally scheduled for the end of February but now not happening
- 26/09.4 IM confirmed that the under-14s competition is expected in November/December 2026. JS confirmed the expected birth years as under-14s (2013), under-16s (2011), and under-18s (2009).

26/10

County Championships

- 26/10.1 JS confirmed that she remains unclear on the County Championships format and entry process. She noted that Essex entered last year but Hertfordshire did not.
- Discussion took place regarding the competition structure.
- Action:** JS to investigate County Championships further and report back on structure, entry requirements, and potential East Region participation.

26/11

Girls' participation and development

- 26/11.1 Significant discussion focused on the shortage of female players.
- IM emphasised that girls need competition opportunities. JS and the Group discussed the need for a girls-only session in a friendly, non-intimidating environment to encourage participation and development.
- 26/11.2 The Group agreed that the lack of competition is a significant barrier to retention and growth. JS noted that this is why regional sessions will include girls-only groups or separate girls' match play where numbers allow.
- 26/11.3 There was discussion on data collection to inform planning.
- IM noted difficulties with Swim England membership data - members being registered as swimmers rather than water polo players even if they do both.
- JS confirmed that EW had previously contacted clubs for player numbers and suggested that it is now time to update these figures, as January is when membership renewal takes place.
- The Group agreed that this would be valuable, though acknowledged many clubs struggle with low female participation.



26/12 Coaching qualifications and development

- 26/12.1 The Group discussed the need for more Level 2 tutors in the Region. JS emphasised that it has been difficult for East Region to provide Level 2 qualifications. With online course delivery, the main barrier is practical sign-off. IM confirmed that coaches can be signed off by assessors other than the tutor/assessor for their course. IM confirmed that the East Region Board has agreed for Simon Lecomber to be put forward as a tutor from September 2026.

26/13 Updates from representatives

- 26/13.1 CC announced that he has been appointed County President of Swim England Suffolk.
- 26/13.2 No other updates were raised by representatives.

26/14 Any other business

- 26/14.1 IM provided positive feedback from the recent National Age-Groups (NAGs) preliminaries:
- Girls' matches showed significant improvement over previous years
 - Match quality was high and tactical
 - Girls' under-19 matches were considered better than boys' under-17 matches
 - Teams included Caledonia, Worthing, and London Penguins
- 26/14.2 JS confirmed that she and EW would continue to pursue pool time opportunities across the Region, including following up with Carl Brandwood at Norwich regarding UEA availability.

26/15 Confidential items

- 26/15.1 No confidential items

26/16 Meeting dates

- 26/16.1 Proposed meeting dates for 2026, to be held, online, at 6:30pm:
- 21st May 2026
 - 3rd September 2026
 - 19th November 2026
- 26/16.2 The Group discussed the next meeting date of 21st May 2026, noting that Tuesday and Thursday evenings work better than Wednesday evenings to avoid Colchester training clashes. Norwich train Sundays only. The Group agreed to confirm 21st May provisionally and reassess nearer the time if scheduling conflicts arise.