



Swim England East Region
Minutes of the Open Water Swimming Leadership Group meeting
24th February 2026, at 7pm via Zoom

Present: Paul Kendall (PK)	Manager
Stewart Murray (SMu)	Director Representative
Jeremy Irvine (JI)	Hertfordshire Representative
Jacqui Kendall (JK)	Norfolk Representative
Ian Murray (IM)	Bedfordshire Representative
Sarah Tait (ST)	Suffolk Representative
Stephen Westwood (SW)	Specialist
Marion Westwood (MW)	Specialist

Also present: Emma Winter (EW), Regional Administrator

26/01 Welcome

- 26/01.1 PK welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending.
- 26/01.2 ST joined the meeting at 7.10pm.

26/02 Apologies

- 26/02.1 No apologies were received.

26/03 Declarations of conflict of interest

- 26/03.1 No declarations of conflict of interest were raised at the outset of the meeting.
- 26/03.2 During discussion of the allowances package, SMu declared a potential conflict of interest in that specific discussion. He confirmed that he would listen to the discussion but would not seek to influence it.

26/04 Previous minutes

- 26/04.1 The minutes from the meeting held on 7th October 2025 had been circulated prior to the meeting.
- 26/04.2 No disagreements or amendments were raised. The minutes were approved as an accurate record and agreed for publication.



26/05 Matters arising

26/05.1 Minute 25/28.3: PK to draft improved online pre-event documentation for coaches

PK confirmed that this document had been drafted and sent to EW on the day of the meeting. The documentation includes written guidance for coaches as well as an aerial photograph of Whitlingham taken by Paul, annotating which 'pods' are which, to give coaches a clear visual reference for refreshment collection points.

PK noted that the document also clarifies what coaches are entitled to and invites those with dietary requirements to notify PK in advance so that appropriate meals can be set aside for them at the barbecue area.

26/05.2 Minute 25/28.3: PK to consider creating a visual map of event locations for participants

PK confirmed that a visual map would be produced and distributed with the minutes. EW confirmed that either a JPEG or PDF format would be suitable for the website.

26/05.3 Minute 25/29.4: PK to investigate the discrepancy in committee costs

PK reported that, upon investigation, the discrepancy related to the cost of new branding items including banners and flags, which had been coded under 'committee costs'.

It was confirmed that the cost did correlate to the expected expenditure for those items; however, the categorisation had not been clearly documented.

26/05.4 JK confirmed that 1,000 hats had been ordered and received - sufficient for the next two years. Four colour variants have been procured to correspond with the four wave groups used at the event. Any odd quantities of remaining colours will be utilised at the Open Water Development Day.



26/05.5 Minute 25/29.6: EW to investigate the new temporary membership process with Swim England

EW reported that something is in the pipeline, but progress has stalled because of the Swim England reorganisation. The matter remains on EW's radar, and she is actively seeking an update.

SMu added context, noting that the initiative forms part of the 'One Swim England Strategy' to increase participation in open water swimming. Swim England is developing a membership category which would allow 'participation' rather than 'competitive' membership, enabling casual open water swimmers and potential triathletes to take part without requiring full club membership.

SW asked if this means that a person would no longer need to be a member of a club to enter – could they enter as an individual?

SMu stated that this specific question remains unanswered. It was agreed that the Group should wait to hear the formal proposal from Swim England rather than speculate.

Action: SMu to seek clarification from Swim England on the proposed membership category for participation, including whether club membership would still be required

26/06

2026 Plan and Budget

26/06.1 PK confirmed that a plan and budget had been submitted to, and approved by, the Region, based broadly on previous years' submissions but with increases to reflect anticipated cost rises in areas such as canoeist support, water hire, and other facilities.

26/06.2 PK confirmed that the plan had been discussed at the October 2025 meeting and no material adjustments were considered necessary, apart from potential increases in accommodation costs under the allowances package.

26/07

Open Water Development Day 2026

26/07.1 The Open Water Development Day was confirmed for Saturday 6th June 2026 at Stanborough Lakes, Welwyn Garden City. A deposit has been paid.

26/07.2 EW confirmed that the Masters have been incorporated into the day's programme. The schedule (prepared by lead coach Chris) provides for two groups of youth swimmers in the morning (Groups 1 and 2), followed by the Masters as the final group of the day.



26/07.3 EW confirmed that 23 Masters swimmers have submitted expressions of interest.

SMu noted that the event is on the same day as the Norfolk Masters Open Meet. Some Masters swimmers may face a conflict, but the Group agreed that those wishing to participate in open water will choose accordingly, and pool alternative will remain available to them.

IM noted a practical concern that three consecutive water sessions could be demanding for the same coaching team. EW confirmed that additional coaches will be recruited to rotate through the sessions.

26/07.4 EW confirmed that the Open Water Leadership Group's (OWLG) budget will cover the youth participants' costs, and the Masters' Leadership Group budget (held separately) will cover the Masters' group's costs. The venue deposit has been split accordingly, with Masters contributing approximately one third. No increase to the OWLG budget is required to accommodate the expanded day.

26/07.5 IM raised a significant concern regarding his coaching qualifications. He had been advised by his club's affiliated body that his Swimming Teachers' Association (STA) open water qualification is no longer recognised by Swim England as sufficient to classify him as an open water coach at club level.

SMu confirmed that this matter is already being pursued at a higher level. James Salmon (JS) has been involved in raising it on behalf of multiple affected clubs.

SMu advised EW and PK to direct any further queries through JS rather than initiating new conversation streams, to consolidate the approach.

Action: EW/SMu to request that JS continues to pursue Swim England on the recognition of STA open water qualifications and then provides an update to the Group when available



26/08

Open Water Championships 2026

26/08.1

JK confirmed that all key logistical arrangements for the Championships are in place or in progress, specifically: -

- Portable toilets: Booked and deposit paid. Balance due several weeks before the event.
- Radios: In place
- Announcer/Commentator: Confirmed for the event again this year

PK noted that feedback from the post-event survey indicated that it was felt that the commentary was basic last year, as the commentator lacked sufficient information about competitors.

PK advised that in previous years, swimmers had provided short, personal snippets (e.g. open water achievements, favourite aspects of swimming) which allowed the commentator to make the event more engaging. PK proposed to add three optional questions to the entry form to capture this information for 2026.

- Barbecue: Chefs confirmed.
- Canoeists: PK confirmed that he has contacted the kayak/canoeist supporters. Of 20 invitations issued, six have confirmed availability. PK expects this number to increase as the event approaches and does not anticipate any difficulties with safety cover.

26/08.2

PK confirmed that he has drafted a statement for the website regarding catering provision. The statement will explain the provision and encourage participants to notify the team of dietary requirements in advance.

26/08.3

PK reported that he has contacted officials to ascertain travel distances and times, and to determine availability for the Saturday set-up day. This information is primarily being gathered to identify which officials may be eligible to claim accommodation.

26/08.4

SW confirmed that he will arrange traffic management and public liability insurance for the event.

26/08.5

Fine Designs (merchandise supplier) will attend the event again this year. PK noted that Fine Designs have confirmed that they will bring swim hats for sale on the day.



- 26/08.6 PK raised the possibility of the Region selling branded tote bags as a pre-order item via the entry process. These would feature an updated logo (without a year-specific date thus remaining reusable) and would be priced at approximately £5 each. The Group discussed this in detail.

It was agreed that the tote bags would not be sold on the day, to avoid any conflict with Fine Designs.

It was suggested that the most practical approach would be to allow participants to pre-order tote bags through the entry system, so that bags can be pre-packed and included in each swimmer's collection envelope alongside their transponder on the day.

Action: EW to explore options for enabling pre-order of branded tote bags, keeping the Sports Systems entry process intact.

- 26/08.7 JI shared a merchandise design example from his county — a branded technical t-shirt with the wording 'Swim Strong. Swim Distance. Open Water.'

JI advocated strongly for merchandise as a means of building identity and community among open water swimmers.

JK suggested that branded t-shirts of this nature might be more appropriate for the Open Water Development Day, where the conflict with Fine Designs would not apply. The Group agreed this was a sensible approach.

Action: PK/EW to explore the provision of branded t-shirts for the Open Water Development Day.

- 26/08.8 The Group discussed the Open Water Championships conditions.

PK highlighted that the entry closing date has been set at 15th June - four weeks before the event. SMu suggested this could be brought forward to three weeks before, if necessary, but that four weeks is preferable given the need to provide hat numbers to MW in sufficient time.

SW emphasised the importance of beginning hat preparation well before entries close, by working from expected numbers rather than waiting for the final list. PK agreed.



- 26/08.9 PK confirmed that the Masters age-group categories in the conditions have been updated and are now fully aligned with those used in pool swimming, with no gaps or anomalies.
- 26/08.10 SMu reviewed the conditions relating to para-athletes and identified the following:
- The reference to swimmers participating 'for development purposes' should be removed — para-athletes should simply be able to swim in Event 1, and if they wish to swim in Event 2, they may do so. PK agreed and noted that the original wording was introduced cautiously when para participation was first introduced. The Group now has sufficient experience to move beyond it.
 - The reference to WPS Rule 1015-1 (medals: minus-one rule) was queried by SMu. SMu clarified that the minus-one rule is actually rule 10-15-2, not 10-15-1. PK confirmed that the conditions will be corrected accordingly.
- SMu confirmed that WPS Rules, effective from 1st February 2026, are already in force and do not require ratification by Swim England. They apply as World Para Swimming Rules directly.
- 26/08.11 PK requested that once EW has completed the changes, the conditions be distributed to all committee members, who will have approximately one week to respond with any comments before the entry form is progressed further. The aim is to get the entry form live as soon as possible, given that delays in 2025 meant entries opened in mid-to-late April.
- Action: EW to distribute updated entry conditions to the full committee for review, then progress with entry form setup via Sports Systems.**
- 26/08.12 JI asked if a decision had been made regarding the medal presentations and where they should be presented. PK confirmed that following discussion in October, it was agreed that the presentation arrangements for 2026 will remain as in previous years.
- 26/08.13 SW raised the possibility of establishing a Jury of Appeal for the Championships, noting that at least one other Region (Midlands) is planning to do so in 2026 following issues experienced at events this year.
- SW asked whether this is something the Group wishes to consider for the East Region event?



PK agreed that a Jury of Appeal is desirable in principle for all events but noted the practical challenge of keeping jury members completely separate from event operations throughout the day given the current volunteer numbers.

Action: PK/SW to consider the feasibility of establishing a Jury of Appeal for the 2026 Championships.

26/09

Allowances package

26/09.1

PK introduced the review of the allowances package, noting that it was last reviewed in 2024. He reported that officials from other Regions have raised concerns that the East Region's accommodation provision is more restrictive than that in many other Regions. East Region currently requires officials to assist on the Saturday set-up day as a condition of receiving accommodation. PK noted that most other Regions provide accommodation to any official attending, without this precondition.

PK asked whether the Group was content to continue requiring officials to assist on the Saturday as a condition of accommodation, or whether this could be relaxed.

SMu declared a potential conflict of interest in this discussion, as he may be involved in approving the budget, and confirmed he would listen to the discussion without seeking to influence it.

The Group agreed that accommodation should be offered to all officials travelling from a considerable distance who are available on the Saturday, without rigidly enforcing the requirement to assist in set-up, provided they intend to be present for the event.

26/09.2

PK noted that the current mileage policy provides 45p per mile for the first 300 miles (approximately 150 miles each way), reverting to 20p per mile beyond that. PK proposed simplifying this to a flat rate of 45p per mile regardless of total distance, in line with the Swim England national policy.

A discussion took place and it was agreed the mileage rate will move to a flat rate of 45p per mile for all distances, in line with Swim England policy.



26/10 Any other business

26/10.1 PK advised that he is planning to arrange officials' training sessions during 2026. He invited committee members to put forward names of individuals in their areas (clubs or counties) who are interested in becoming open water officials.

PK is compiling a list and will contact candidates to offer training at various times (weekdays, weekends, mornings, afternoons, evenings).

EW confirmed she has a name on file of someone who had expressed interest in officiating courses via the website and will forward their contact details to PK, along with information on their availability.

Action: EW to send PK contact details of individuals who have expressed an interest in officiating, including their preferred training days and times

26/11 Confidential items

26/11.1 There were no confidential items.

26/12 Next meeting

26/12.1 The meeting dates for 2026 are as follows: -

6th May 2026
18th August 2026
6th November 2026