



Swim England East Region
Minutes of the Open Water Swimming Leadership Group meeting
6th May 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
	Helen Stephens (HS)	Essex Representative
	Sarah Tait (ST)	Suffolk Representative
	Stephen Westwood (SW)	Specialist
	Marion Westwood (MW)	Specialist

Also present: Emma Winter (EW), Regional Administrator

26/13 Welcome

- 26/13.1 PK welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending.
- 26/13.2 HS joined the meeting at 8pm.

26/14 Apologies

- 26/14.1 No apologies were received.

26/15 Declarations of conflict of interest

- 26/15.1 No declarations of conflict of interest were raised.

26/16 Previous minutes

- 26/16.1 The minutes from the meeting held on 24th February 2026 had been circulated prior to the meeting.
- 26/16.2 The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record without amendment.

26/17 Matters arising

- 26/17.1 **Minute 26/05.1: Improved online pre-event documentation for coaches**
PK confirmed that an improved online pre-event documentation package for coaches had been drafted and shared with EW. This action is complete.



26/17.2 **Minute 26/05.2: Visual map of event locations**

PK confirmed that the visual map had been produced and was in draft. PK will send the final version to EW for distribution. This action is closed when the final version is available.

Action: PK to send the finalised visual map to EW for publication

26/17.3 **Minute 26/08.6: Branded tote bags**

PK reported that the proposal to sell branded tote bags had been rejected by the Board. The finance team advised that any merchandise pre-order sales would need to be handled directly by the supplier, with the supplier taking the orders and processing payments independently.

As a result, the branded tote bags will not proceed for 2026. However, Fine Designs have confirmed that they will bring hats for sale on the day, providing a lower-cost souvenir option for participants.

26/17.4 **Minute 26/08.7: Branded t-shirts for the Development Day**

Given the ruling on merchandise and the short turnaround, branded t-shirts for the Open Water Development Day will be put on hold for 2026. The Group agreed that this will be reviewed in good time for 2027, with appropriate Board approval sought in advance.

26/17.5 **Minute 26/07.5 / 26/05.5: Open Water qualification — Swimming Teachers' Association (STA) recognition**

EW confirmed that she and James Salmon (JSa) had contacted Swim England Talent, and received a written email confirmation from Mike Parker (currently covering maternity leave within the Swim England Talent team) that, provided at least a couple of Swim England Level 2 open water-qualified coaches are present at an Open Water Development Day, other Level 2 coaches (who do not hold the specific open water qualification) may serve as support coaches.

EW reported that Swim England no longer recognises the STA open water qualification. Coaches must hold a Swim England Level 2 open water qualification. IM noted that he has not received any explanation as to why the STA qualification is no longer recognised and indicated that he may pursue this separately.



26/17.6 **Minute 26/08.13: Jury of Appeal — feasibility**

PK reported that he had not yet formally approached the Board on this matter. SMu confirmed that it is not a Board decision — it falls within the remit of swimming and rules.

26/17.6.1 SW asked if there was anybody in the Region interested in performing the jury role, without being actively involved in running the event. PK confirmed that he had not yet explored this.

26/17.6.2 A jury chairman could be a licensed official from any discipline with relevant experience, though open water experience would be beneficial. Only one independent person is required to chair the jury. Officials not involved in the relevant protest can supplement the panel.

26/17.6.3 SMu noted that World Aquatics Rules regarding juries have recently changed and he was not entirely certain of the current wording. He emphasised that, in his experience, formal jury engagement at events of this nature is extremely rare — disqualifications are infrequent, protests to the referee rarer still, and unresolved protests requiring a jury even more so. If no jury is present, unresolved protests would be referred to the Judicial Commissioner.

26/17.6.4 SW noted that he had experienced protest situations twice in the previous season, and that East and West Midlands Regions are appointing a jury this year, suggesting that it may be emerging best practice.

26/17.6.5 The Group agreed to park the jury of appeal for the 2026 Championships and review outcomes at other regional events this season (including Midlands) before deciding on implementation for 2027. PK indicated that he had potential individuals in mind for the role but did not wish to name them at this stage.

26/18 2026 Plan and Budget

26/18.1 PK shared his screen to present the current budget position. He confirmed that income is tracking well and that entry numbers are encouraging at this stage.

26/18.2 **Outgoings and deposits:**

Pre-event deposits have been paid for chip timing, swimming hats and portable toilets.

PK confirmed that the required payment information has been submitted to the finance team, Jo Stalley (JSt), for processing the Whitlingham venue deposit via bank transfer (BACs). However, Whitlingham have not yet returned their bank details, so payment has not yet been made. PK noted that Whitlingham are very short-staffed and have been difficult to contact. He had previously needed to visit the venue in person to resolve a similar issue.

Action: PK to chase Whitlingham urgently for their BACs details so that the venue deposit can be paid.



26/18.3 **Officials' accommodation:**

Hotel accommodation has been booked for the officials, with a mix of refundable and non-refundable rooms to provide flexibility. PK confirmed that two officials who had been allocated non-refundable rooms are no longer able to attend.

PK advised that those officials who had been in refundable rooms will be moved into the non-refundable rooms, and the refundable rooms will be cancelled, minimising cost impact.

26/18.4 JI asked if there is a figure for safety cover on the lake.

PK stated that this will be discussed under the Championships agenda item.

26/19 Open Water Championships 2026

26/19.1 **Venue and formal event approval:**

PK confirmed that the venue has requested information on safety and the venue usage in order to issue formal written acknowledgement of the event. An event registry number is already in place. PK has not yet received formal written confirmation from the venue and will chase this alongside the outstanding bank details.

26/19.2 **Logistical preparations — status update:**

The following arrangements are confirmed or in progress:

Portable toilets: Booked and deposit paid

Radio communications: In hand

Officials' accommodation: Booked (see 26/05.5)

Chip timing: Deposit paid and provider confirmed (see 26/05.6).

PA system: The PA provider has confirmed attendance with a £10 + VAT increase on last year's cost. His invoice has been passed to the regional finance team. Payment is typically made after the event.

Fine Designs (merchandise): Confirmed for the event. The usual Fine Designs representative will not attend in person as he is on holiday. A replacement will be present. Fine Designs will bring hats for sale on the day.

26/19.3 **Fine Designs — pre-orders and queue management:**

PK has spoken with the Fine Designs representative at the recent regional pool event. Fine Designs have agreed in principle to offer pre-orders via a link on the website, allowing swimmers to order personalised items in advance of the event. PK confirmed that he needs to obtain the 2026 logo from Fine Designs so that the pre-order link can be set up on the website.

Feedback from the 2025 event highlighted excessive queuing times (reported at over an hour). Fine Designs agreed to display their designs and colour options further back in the queue so that participants can make selections before reaching the front. Fine



Designs also indicated that if the pre-order closing date aligns with the entry closing date, they can print and post items directly to swimmers so that personalised items are received before the event.

Action: PK to obtain the 2026 logo from Fine Designs and arrange for the pre-order link to be set up on the Region's website

26/19.4

Officials — current numbers:

PK confirmed that 13 officials are currently signed up online for the Regional Championships. Two of these are expected to withdraw due to international duties. PK noted this number is lower than hoped at this stage. Two national reminders have been issued to officials to support their local Region, but these were circulated to all Regions equally.

PK noted that several regular officials have not yet signed up but are expected to do so.

SW asked for a formal update on official and volunteer numbers in four weeks' time, with the possibility of calling an emergency meeting if numbers remain critically low. PK agreed.

Action: PK to provide a formal update on official and volunteer numbers to the Group within four weeks

26/19.5

Volunteers:

EW confirmed that only one person has signed up via the volunteer page at this stage, but HS was confident that volunteer support would be forthcoming.

The Group agreed that a proactive approach was needed, and SMu suggested that an appeal for both officials and volunteers be included in the next regional newsletter and on the website.

HS confirmed that her approach is to wait until entries close and then contact all those who have previously helped. She confirmed that there are several loyal, regular volunteers but acknowledged the need to secure support for roles such as car park management and general stewarding.

Action: EW to include a prominent appeal for volunteers and officials in the next regional newsletter and on the website

26/19.6

Para athlete participation — Category S5 swimmer:

PK advised that a Category S5 swimmer (a classification denoting significant lower limb impairment) has applied to compete in the 1K event. PK spoke at length with the swimmer's coach and mother at the recent pool event and was satisfied that the swimmer is capable of completing a 1K open water swim.

PK has also visited Whitlingham to discuss the management of a swimmer with this condition. Whitlingham confirmed that they practise weekly the skill of recovering an inert person from the water — the standard required in the event of a swimmer with this impairment needing recovery assistance. Their insurance has also been confirmed as appropriate.



The risk assessment has been updated accordingly.

A discussion took place around how the swimmer will enter the water and how they will be identified in the water.

IM advised that he has an S12 swimmer (visually impaired) at his club who may be interested in competing in open water, but who is only 12 years old. He asked if she could compete in the event as an able-bodied swimmer with a guide.

SMu reported that the World Para Swimming Rules stipulate that all para-athletes — regardless of classification — must be a minimum of 14 years of age as at 31st December in the year of the event. This applies to all classifications - physical, intellectual (S14), and visual (S11/S12). The swimmer cannot compete as a para-athlete in 2026. She could, theoretically, compete as an able-bodied swimmer; however, if she requires a guide, that indicates she is competing as a para-athlete, which triggers the age restriction.

26/19.7 **Martin's Law — implications for the venue:**

SMu raised Martin's Law (currently in the form of a White Paper, expected to come into law in April 2027). He noted that venues with over 799 persons on site will be classified as 'enhanced' under the legislation, with the venue bearing responsibility for security planning.

A discussion took place around Martin's Law, and the Group should keep the matter in mind for 2027.

26/19.8 **Car parking arrangements:**

SW confirmed that the traffic management application has been submitted. Confirmation has been received that the application is in and awaiting review.

JK noted that the decision on whether to use the field adjacent to the Flint Barn or the car park across the road will be weather-dependent. If the field is not suitable, the Group will need to paint marked parking spaces in the car park as was done last year.

JK advised that Whitlingham have recently installed solar panels on the wasteland between the car park and the road. This does not reduce the available parking space as it was previously unused land. The car park itself remains unchanged.

26/19.9 **Role allocations for the event:**

SW noted that, if he is acting as Technical Director, he will be indoors for much of the event, which means additional volunteers will be needed outside — particularly for the initial car park management period. JK confirmed that their son is expected to be available this year and may be able to assist with car park management at the start of the day.

HS suggested that James Salmon (JSa) may also be available to assist with car parking.



Action: EW to ask JSa whether he can assist with car park management on the day of the Championships

26/19.10 **County championship charges:**

EW asked if counties are being charged the same fee as previously to use the regional event for their county championships.

PK confirmed that the budgeted county charge is £1,800 in total, equating to £300 per county (six counties).

26/19.11 EW confirmed that 89 entries have been received in total to date - 88 standard entries, plus 1 para entry.

Entry breakdown

1K: 14 entries

2K: 35 entries

3K: 25 entries

5K: 14 entries

Para (3K): 1 entry

Total: 89

26/20

Officials' recruitment and training

26/20.1 PK will deliver the national open water officials' theory training on the following dates in May:

Thursday 14th May — 9:00am session

Thursday 14th May — 6:00pm session

Saturday 30th May — 9:00am session

PK invited members to refer anyone in their county who wishes to take the theory training. Places remain available on all three sessions.

26/20.1.1 JI asked what the next stage is after completing the online theory webinar.

PK reported that trainees must attend a minimum of two regional events to complete the required practical training. There are seven roles in which to demonstrate proficiency. These are starter, timekeeper, chief timekeeper, finish judge, chief finish judge, turn judge, and clerk of the course. At level 2, trainees must also demonstrate awareness of the safety officer and course officer roles.

The national training director has confirmed that trainees who have completed the theory and attended one event are welcome at national events, as it is recognised that they have received a thorough grounding.

26/20.1.2 ST confirmed she wished to continue her officiating training. PK confirmed that she is welcome to do so and asked her to email him confirming which competencies she still needs to cover.



Action: ST to email PK with details of officiating competencies remaining to complete.

26/21

Open Water Development Day 2026

26/21.1 EW provided a full update on the Development Day, scheduled for Saturday 6th June 2026.

Youth swimmers: 44 youth swimmers have signed up. One or two spaces remain.

Masters swimmers: 13 Masters have signed up to date, including two swimmers from Sandwell (West Midlands Region). The Masters section has been opened to swimmers from other Regions. Information has been sent to London Region, East Midlands Region, and South East Region, and posted on the unofficial Masters Facebook swimming page.

Coaches: Seven Level 2 open water coaches are currently confirmed. One coach holds an STA qualification rather than a Swim England Level 2 open water qualification and will therefore attend as a general Level 2 support coach. At least one additional coach is being recruited to allow rotation off the water and ensure that coaches are not on the lake all day.

26/21.2

Timetable:

Coaches' kayak competency test: 8:50am (team to arrive 8:00am-8:30am)

Youth groups: Morning sessions

Masters: Final session, finishing at approximately 4:45pm

EW confirmed that she and JSa will be present.

26/21.3

PK confirmed that two or three trainee officials have expressed interest in attending the Development Day to assist with running the event and to gain practical experience towards their official licensing.

26/22

Any other business

26/22.1

Issues log — new requirement from the Audit, Risk and Probity (ARP) Committee:

SMu advised that the ARP Committee has requested that each Leadership Group maintain an issues log, identifying any matters arising from meetings that require escalation to or action from the Board. This is an administrative requirement. Items would typically be limited to one to three per meeting — or none if matters have been addressed within the meeting itself.

Action: EW to produce an issues log for this and future meetings, in line with the ARP Committee's requirements.

26/22.2

MW confirmed that hat preparation for the first heat of all four distances has been completed, covering the first 100 swimmers.



- 26/22.3 PK reminded all members to refer to him any individuals interested in becoming open water officials. Members with potential candidates in their counties are encouraged to make contact. The training sessions on 14th and 30th May are still open. Those wishing to attend should email PK directly.

26/23 Confidential items

- 26/23.1 A confidential item was discussed.

26/24 Next meeting

- 26/24.1 Meeting dates were discussed. SMu confirmed that the Board's request not to hold Leadership Group meetings in August is a recommendation rather than a requirement, and that the Group may hold a meeting in August if operationally necessary.

The Group agreed to move the August meeting to September 2026.

The next meeting is confirmed as follows:

Wednesday 16th September 2026 at 7:00pm via Zoom

The November meeting remains as previously scheduled:

Friday 6th November 2026

Issues Log

26/25

- 26/25.1 26.19.7 Martin's Law - currently in the form of a White Paper, expected to come into law in April 2027