

## **Proposals for Improvements to the Status of ACES South East Branch**

Marcus Perry reported to January Council on the perilous state of the SE Branch with a lack of branch officers and generally poor attendance. Council approved putting the branch into special measures and for Marcus to explore solutions and report any proposals to the CMT for approval. After a number of discussions and meetings with relevant members, including a former Branch Chair, the proposal from Marcus is as follows:

1. CMT to endorse the following offer to Sarah Varley to rejoin ACES with the specific intention of her taking on the (vacant) role of Chair of the South East Branch, subject to South East Branch members voting in Sarah to this role when the Branch next meets in person and on-line in Horsham, West Sussex on Wednesday 11 June 2025.
  - Free membership (no subscriptions payable) to ACES for 2025 and 2026
  - Travel costs reimbursed to all SE Branch meetings, ACES Council meetings and ACES AGM
  - Conference costs reimbursed for attending the President's Conference in Bath in September 2025, including the business conference itself, travel and two nights accommodation at the Conference hotel, gala dinner and post conference dinner
  - Should Sarah agree to stay in the role of Branch Chair for 2026, the offer package will extend to the next President's conference in Southend-on-Sea.
2. CMT to endorse the following offer to Helen Jones, ACES member for Bracknell Forest in consideration of her shadowing her colleague Sarah Varley , as noted above.
  - Travel costs reimbursed for attending all ACES South East Branch meetings.

### **Background Information**

1. Before Sarah Varley swapped jobs and moved from Bath North East Somerset authority to Bracknell Forest, Berkshire, in 2024 she was an active member of ACES and was Chair of the ACES South West Branch
2. Shortly after joining Bracknell Forest as Assistant Director - Property, Sarah resigned from ACES and proposed her Head of Estates, Helen Jones should be Bracknell Forest's representative on ACES. Helen's application to join ACES was approved and she became a paid up member at the beginning of this year. At the time she resigned, Sarah explained she did not believe she could ask her authority to pay for two ACES memberships - that, and she thought it more appropriate for Helen to be Bracknell Forest's ACES member.

3. As reported to Council in January, the South East Branch is ACES lame duck and without a Branch chair is a non-functioning Branch. Discounting Retired and Honorary Members, the Branch's membership is 21 - of whom less than 5 take any part in meetings and Branch affairs. I asked the five to consider taking over the vacant chair from David Kemp (who had - superbly - kept the Branch going single handedly since Covid) but no-one took upon my offer. Before January Council I sent a circular to the whole Branch explaining the implications of not having a Branch Chair - but not one of the so-called members bothered to reply to me, let alone offer to take over the role from David Kemp.

4. So back to Sarah Varley, whom I thought would be an excellent solution to our / my problem. With her experience of chairing a Branch, she would have a head's start if she could be persuaded to rejoin ACES and take on the vacant role of Chair of the ACES South East Branch.

5. I met Sarah (and Helen Jones) on Wednesday 02 April in Bracknell and I suggested to Sarah that ACES would consider subsidising her return to the fold if she would take on the said role of Branch Chair, SE Branch. Sarah wasn't sure she wanted to take on the responsibility but the prospect of returning to Bath in the autumn to see friends of old excited Sarah.

6. The offer to Helen to refund travel costs to SE Branch meetings is conditional on Helen shadowing Sarah in Sarah's role of Chair with a view of Helen putting her name forward to the SE Branch members as a candidate to take over the role of Branch Chair when Sarah stands down (hopefully not before November 2026). Helen is up for this.

7. Nursing the SE Branch has taken / is taking up a vast amount of my time. If my time was covered by the ACES allowance my costs would already have exceeded the financial value of the package offered to Sarah - and I still have much to do - with Sarah and our new Branch Secretary - in reinvigorating the SE Branch and delivering it from the doldrums. The three of us are up for this challenge.

8. I had the SE Branch specifically in mind when I asked Betty and Marcus Mac to help in the design and production of the ACES tri-fold publicity / recruitment pamphlet - and I am hoping to attract new blood into the Branch when we start a recruitment drive, using the pamphlet, soon.

**Marcus Perry**

**ACES Branch Liaison Officer**