

Almost Athletes AGM Minutes

April 29th 2026

There were 79 members present.

Initial Welcome and opening remarks

“Running, like life can often be about those moments in time, those experiences that stand out.

I'd like to tell you about three standout member moments – there are, of course, many more. We have around 379 members, plus supporters, friends and family, each with their own Almost Athletes moments.

- The moment of shared joy of when Dan McGovern so brilliantly executed and completed his first marathon, earlier this month in Newport. He was supported by the whole club: he had trained, and run on the day with, club members: Michelle Balchin, Thom Stephens, Matt Proome and Graeme Stopp.
- The laughter, excitement and fun of the November skittles evening and The London Marathon draw. Two of the lucky recipients of Club Places, took that memory and excitement level up many notches on Sunday. Congratulations to Steve Wood and Aline Buckley. You are London Marathon runners! For Jim Trowbridge and Neil Tring, injury woes mean that moment is deferred – for now.
- Also, a very different stand out club experience, led by Alison Hume and Olivia Wiles; the enthusiastic collection of around 200 running tops over the past few weeks or so. All for recycling and fundraising for Carers UK. Community and sustainability in one hit!
We are so much more than just a running club.

Now, may I formally welcome you to The Almost Athletes 2026 Annual General Meeting. Thank you for attending and thank you for your membership. I would particularly like to welcome our guest tonight, Rich Ayling from England Athletics, and also anyone new to our AGM or indeed, those who have joined Almost Athletes over this club year. It is my privilege and honour to be here as your Chair.

Apologies were received from John and Jo Johnson, David Chittock, Wendy Horne, Catherine Harker, Aline Buckley, Lorraine Taylor, Lola Lewis, Ross and Natalie Greening, Nichola Sanderson, Felicity Read, Wendy Haskins, Sue Sturgeon, Debbie and Russell Jones, Tina Sawle and Holly Galvin.

The minutes of 2025 AGM were agreed by members, proposed by David Garnett and seconded by Charlotte Jamieson.

Chairman's report and annual review

I'd like to run through an overview of the year, then recognise some very important volunteer contributions and finish with aims for this new year and beyond as we head towards our 40th year anniversary in 2028. It is fair to say that we have had many challenges over this past year. Club challenges, committee challenges and some very difficult personal challenges.

We are more than just a running club. We are a close family who enjoy a run and everything that goes with that. As a large family we have many different approaches and views. Sometimes, we don't see eye to eye. Things change, we adapt and learn, we move on. For the most part, we are so lucky because, in fact, we get on famously.

We can be so proud of what we do together and what we stand for. Let's consider a few moments from the year.

- Community and “giving back” is important to us. Our four main charities agreed at last year’s AGM received club donations of over £3000. (£750 each, except Big Space £860.58 from Linda Franks cake proceeds). They were Read for Good, British Blind Sport, The Archie Matthews Trust and The Big Space Cancer Appeal. I’d like to single out Cat Harker, who ran London on Sunday and had nominated the Big Space Cancer Appeal. In addition to the club related contribution from cake sales at Linda Franks race she raised an astonishing £4,000 on top. She won’t be alone – there will be very many personal member stories and endeavours both in this room and beyond.
- We are a club that cares. A special day, although one we wish didn’t happen was when, around 100 members, past and present took part in Cheltenham parkrun back in November. This to celebrate the joy of running and the life of our much-loved member, Piotr Michalski who we sadly lost the previous month. A difficult time for all.
- We are a running club. Running events such as the members only handicap race series, the Cotswold Way Relay, Bugatti 10km, Meteor Mile and Linda Franks 5 mile were all successful in membership participation, in volunteering and in community engagement. We offer particular thanks to Peter Mitchener and David Chittock for their leading part in those. The first Handicap Series race of 2026, organised by Mitch and Paul Jones, starts on 11th May – it’s fun, exclusive to AA members, open to all abilities and free to enter. Get your entries in fast.
- We can race and we can party! December saw completion of The Club race series with many a close finish and awards were made at the Christmas Party. Congratulations to all our race series participants and award winners. You may recall our overall race series winners of Joanne Johnson, Lewis Jones & Steve Axford who tied. (Paul Jones, our Race Series Officer has written an excellent summary which I will share with you, as part of our April monthly bulletin).
- Congratulations also to Pat Dendy, Sarah Wood and Alan Green, award winners in the Gloucestershire AAA race series. May I add a “good luck” to Patricia Dendy as she pulls on an England vest at the Bideford 10km on Sunday 10th May. Round of applause for Pat.
- We are a club for the members. In February we had our open members night where we shared ideas and thoughts about the club. Those conversations have started to shape actions and decisions on club life, for example:
 - changing our race series awards night by having a dedicated social and presentations night in January, and away from the Christmas party, setting up a couch to 5k programme and investing in a more significant, long-term investment such as a club memorial in the form of a quality bench.
 - we talked about sustainability and the environment. Duncan Mounsor, one of our club sustainability champions, tells me that the one area he is most proud of with AA is our efforts around car sharing. There are several WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts offering lifts etc. Look out for those - Well done to all on this. On a wider scale I know that a number of members seek to offset their carbon emissions when enjoying their parkrun tourism, overseas running events or other travels. Whatever your personal choices, the message of doing so with intention and kindness to others and the world we live in seems a fair one.
 - As well as ideas, a massive win from the evening was offers of more volunteer support with new run leaders in training and assistance in other organisational areas.

A successful evening and a celebration of positive membership engagement!

In our club year, there were, of course, many, many more highlights than we can cover tonight. The show of medals and T shirts around the room is testament to more of those moments. Our website, Facebook group, monthly bulletins and the brilliant weekly run reports are great sources of club communications where you can also see more. Thank you to everyone involved with those.

I would now like to formally recognise and celebrate some specific volunteer contributions. I will start with our run leaders and coaches. These members are the backbone of our weekly club diary, week in and week out. Thank you all. It's a team contribution, led by Graeme Stopp but it would be amiss of me not to give a very clear AA vote of thanks to Ivana Wilson and Michael Grant. They have taken the lead on our Monday and Thursday night training sessions with such fantastic grace and commitment.

As you will hear tonight, we are investing in more in our volunteers, including leaders and coaches. This will help spread the load across our sessions, meet the needs of our members and reduce over reliance on key volunteers.

On that note, we have four key volunteers who stood down from longstanding roles in this past year. Again, as a club we thank them for their service and gifts are being made to charities of their choice. For Peter Mitchener, our outgoing Chair, we additionally presented a canvas print of some of his Almost Athletes running adventures plus a few bottles of wine. Mitch's chosen charity is Naturewatch, a local animal welfare and I would like to add a personal vote of thanks to Mitch for his stewardship as Chair and his continued support to me.

For Matt & Fi Barnes, our outstanding Club Coaches and Thursday stalwarts for some 10 years, we have donated to Sue Ryder. Finally, Phil Jeyes, Mr Clubman Extraordinaire and outgoing Club Race Director, a donation to Macmillan. I know these are heartfelt charities.

And, finally, Penny Lewis, our pearl of wisdom, Minutes Secretary and often my "right hand person" is, standing down from the Committee. Again, we say, "thank you" Penny. I would like to invite Penny to take a moment from writing the minutes and accept a gift from the club.

We are so, much more than just another running club. We are "Almost Athletes". Cheltenham's largest running Club and I would argue, most inclusive, most welcoming, most friendly, most wide ranging in our offering and the very best value for money in a Gloucestershire based, England Athletics Running Club. So, what are our plans for 2026/2027?

We want a strong club – strong in member benefits and value, strong in volunteer support and strong in its revenue position. We will strengthen our membership opportunities.

Most immediately we have the handicap race series starting on Monday 11th May and a run and talk evening on 13th May as part of our club run. Thank you to our Mental Health Champions on organising the latter.

On Saturday, 13th June we have fantastic club social to look forward to as we put up our club colours and gazebo at Patsfest – think beer, music, entertainment, running and club promotion. Full details to follow and much more through the Summer and Autumn.

The Christmas Party is booked for 5th December, and we also plan a festive club Day out to Weston Super Mare on 13th December, to include The Weston Cracker 10km, in the morning.

Of course, we will do "MORE" in our community and tonight we have 4 very worthy charities which have been proposed by club members. We will ask you to consider those shortly. Where possible we would like to engage with charities and the community, beyond the purely financial. Are there some mutual opportunities in shared relationships, for example? In terms of donations, the Committee will make these, on behalf of the club. Most likely in early 2027, the period leading up to the next AGM when we have a good idea of our own funds. We can then make an informed decision as to the amounts.

We want to strengthen our volunteer support including an investment in growing our number of qualified Coaches and Run Leaders. Volunteers, does of course, include the Committee, our subgroups and succession planning in general. Essential to the club and something which we need to work on. We want to strengthen our revenue position and plan for the future of our club, for the benefit of our members and our values as we prepare for our 40-year anniversary in 2028. Our income comes from the

membership and race profits. We plan to increase both streams this year with increases which will remain competitive and more in line with other clubs.

Having said that we want to be inclusive and do have an inclusivity fund to help reduce any financial barriers to enjoying club life. If any of these increases present you with genuine, personal financial barrier speak to me, in confidence and we will help.

When we look at the accounts, we will formally propose our new membership fees for 2026/27.

“We have a wonderful club. Together we can all take a strong and thriving Almost Athletes into the next chapter in our club’s history. Let’s continue to do what we do well, but even better, and with even more fun and enjoyment.” (extracted from Chair nomination letter to the membership, October 2025)

To close - It would simply be too much to name and individually thank everyone who has played a part in this club year. When you consider the support at our club events it can be quite overwhelming. You only have to be part of something like our Linda Franks Race as a volunteer or runner or read through the weekly run reports to get a sense of club and member commitment.

However, I will purposefully name 9 people whose commitment has shone through this year. They are your committee members who have worked behind the scenes with professionalism and care.

Your Committee - Kevin Beamish, Michelle Balchin, Steve Taylor, Penny Lewis, Zakia Hussain, Cheryl Rodham, Paul Jones, Graeme Stopp & Mark Wreford-Bush.

So, a collective thanks to each and every club member. Both for your choice to support the club through membership and for every single little bit extra you do to make this club what it is. We can be enormously proud of this community, this group of runners, the friendship groups that develop, the social contacts and our wider connections in Cheltenham and beyond.

Mark Wreford Bush, Club Membership Secretary will shortly be inviting payment of membership subs for the period to 31st March 2027. Join us, pay early, make his life easier and support this amazing club as we continue to do “MORE”, together.

Running, like life, can often be about moments in time, those experiences that stand out, those lasting memories. Let’s look forward to a new club year, to the development and future of our club and many MORE shared moments together.

Thank you from myself and the Committee team as we share this Chair’s report for the year ended 31st March 2026.

Treasurer’s report

Accounts were emailed out before the AGM with updated copies on the night. Net movement in funds was £ -772, but leaving a healthy bank balance of £6040. Next year we are projecting a similar movement but will seek to address this through increasing our revenue position (see Chair’s report re plans for 2026/27).

This includes holding off on Charitable donations until early 2027 when we have a better handle on our financial position.

Subscription fees – It has been suggested by committee that subscription fees are raised to £40, with second claim rising to £20. Steve Wood proposed and Claire Davey seconded that, as a club, we should accept these fees. A show of hands from club members clearly agreed.

Acceptance of the accounts – proposed by Rob Hume and seconded by June Franks.

Election of the new committee

Current members to continue are Dave McGrath, Michelle Balchin, Kevin Beamish, Cheryl Rodham, Steve Taylor, Paul Jones, Zakia Hussain, Mark Wreford Bush and Graeme Stopp.

Membership approval was requested on the following 3 points:

- Existing Committee members who have completed 4 years to continue in post
- Under the time rule of 4 years plus mid-term appointment to Chair; Dave McGrath to be permitted to continue as Club Chair
- Formal reinstatement of the position of Vice Chair (Steve Taylor)

Proposed by Matt John and seconded by Pat Dendy and accepted by those members present.

Re-election of the committee were proposed by Rachael Nolan and seconded by Jim Trowbridge and accepted by the members with a show of hands.

Penny Lewis is standing down.

Rob Hume is standing for committee and has been proposed by Hazel Everett and Jackie Slaughter. Accepted by all with a show of hands.

Charity nominations for 2026/2027:

These are:

Ward Buddies – Patricia Dendy, seconded by David Garnett
Cots for tots – Sandra Stuart, seconded by Corinne Cooper
Teenage Cancer Trust - Kevin Keegan, seconded by Clemens Orth
Endometriosis – Zakia Hussain, seconded by Michelle Balchin

These four charities were accepted by the members present.

Any Other Business

Duncan Mansoor asked if there is enough appetite for the Devils Chimney Race to be reinstated? Dave McGrath said that he felt there could be and we should look into it.

Nicky Woodman requested could there be a special 40th anniversary commemorative kit in colours other than the main club purple. Committee are to take away and consider this and other ideas.

Matt Proome said that he is still having issues with kit due to its weight. It was recommended that he discuss with Steve Taylor about the new lightweight kit available.

The main business of the meeting was then concluded.

We were delighted to welcome our guest speaker Rich Ayling. He is our England Athletics Club support manager.

Rich gave an informative and enlightening presentation around his work with EA and the benefits enjoyed by AA, as a club. He was most praising of Almost Athletes, stating that we should be proud of our membership offering and the value to our membership. Of 20 affiliated clubs in Gloucestershire, we are the largest adult only club. Rich was particularly impressed with the Community outreach of AA and commended the club and its membership. Mindful of our 40-year anniversary, Rich emphasised the importance of planning for the Club we want to be and offered his continued services to support AA in that work.

Presentations of the club trophies.

They were presented to the following: -

Our much-coveted **Runner of the Year** trophies, symbolise an exceptional year as an Almost Athlete club member. A standout year of running, of commitment to the club colours, of a spirit which has captured our members hearts.

Female runner of the year – **Zakia Hussain**

Male Runner of the year – **Prash Patel**

The Cross-Country team member of the year – for a member who has shown commitment and teamwork and has given a standout contribution to the XC season

Jamie Baron

Douglas Waymark award – for exceptional volunteer contribution and support to the club

David Chittock

Rich Walklate trophy – for stand-out running achievements across the club year, combined with meaningful support to the club and its members

Ivana Wilson

The Dedicated Runner of the year award – for a member who has shown sustained effort, commitment and personal improvement in their running over the past year

Zakia Hussain

There were no life memberships given this year.

The meeting closed at 8.43pm