Blackpool 2026: The 162nd Annual Meeting

The Official Minutes of the 162nd Annual Meeting of the CIU, chaired by Union President Ken Roberts CMD ACM, which took place in Blackpool on Saturday, April 18

The 162nd Annual Meeting of the Union, held at the Norbeck Castle Hotel in Blackpool on Saturday, April 18, 2026 began with KEN ROBERTS CMD ACM, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNION, asking delegates to agree the Minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting as per the May 2025 edition of Club Journal.

THE PRESIDENT then asked the assembled delegates and guests to observe a minute's silence for those club members who had passed away since the last Annual Meeting as well as for people suffering due to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS:

"I will begin by referring to an item coming up on today's agenda, Union Restructure, which is item number eight.

"I reported last year that the National Executive had serious concerns about the steady decline in the Union's funds, which was putting the very future of the Union in jeopardy. A consultation between the NEC and the Union member clubs to discuss the financial viability and future of the Union was held in the West Midlands.

"Following the consultation, it was decided to place a pious motion on last year's agenda, which included a presentation by NEC member Mark Fergusson, which generated some interesting comments on Union reform.

"The Union Executive continued to review all areas of the Union's activities and services following the conference and decided to consult once more with branches at a meeting in the Leicestershire branch in November last year.

"The Union Executive has since then digested the feedback from the meeting whilst continuing to examine revenues and expenditure. Mark Fergusson will be making a further presentation on this very important subject later on.

"Turning to the Budget and other government measures. As announced in the 2025 Budget, the Government uprated all alcohol duty rates in line with the Retail Price Index – 3.66 per cent – which was effective from February 2026.

"The National Minimum Wage increased by 50 pence an hour for 21-year-olds and over. This was equivalent to an extra £900 a year for a full-time worker. The rate increase for 18–20-year-olds was even higher - 85 pence an hour.

"Although these increases would help address the cost of living for those workers, the changes would cost the hospitality industry in excess of nearly £1.5 billion a year.

“These measures, together with increases in National Insurance would certainly deter our clubs from hiring staff, and this has been proven by the rise in unemployment for young people.

“The Chancellor’s recent decision to limit business rates support to pubs is actually neglecting the broader hospitality industry, such as our clubs, and putting at risk the growth the government wanted to deliver.

“Not a week goes by without seeing newspaper articles stating things like, ‘One in eight pubs face closure,’ ‘Another nail in the coffin for pubs,’ and they name alcohol duty, business rates, national insurance, and energy increases, together with the troubles in the Middle East, as the main causes.

“The press, of course, are to be applauded for highlighting these threats to pubs. But why do they never include clubs in their articles? Over centuries, our clubs have been the beating heart of our communities, a place to catch up with friends and strangers, to listen to gossip and to discuss rugby, football, and to moan about the government and your local councillor’s inadequacies.

“Our clubs are where conversations flow freely and the worries of the world are left outside the door.

“Sadly, our affection for our cherished institutions isn’t shared by governments past and present. “And the price of a pint – scary in places. And it’s not just in cities. Small towns and villages, pubs and clubs are forced reluctantly to hike prices due to the increasing overheads.

“It is obvious that customers and members just aren’t there in the same way as they used to be. Perhaps the government should maybe look across the water where governments there recognise that hospitality and the night trade require extended support.

“I am pleased to announce that the fully updated new edition of the 500 Points in Club Law is nearing completion.

“For many years, Clubmen, aspiring committee members, committees and officials have relied on the Union’s publication for clear guidance on the legal challenges facing clubs and the full range of issues that committees encounter in the day-to-day running of the club.

“This new edition will include advice on topics including discipline, employment law, elections and ballots, licensing laws, and much, much more. The new edition has been thoroughly reviewed and updated to reflect current legislation and new legislation in which clubs now have to operate. The book will be an essential guide for those wishing to take up the challenge of the Union’s Award in Club Management.

“A little bit about the APPG, which is the All-Party Parliamentary Group. Your National Executive has in recent months been busy trying to resurrect the APPG. The group has been inactive for some time, mainly due to changes in sitting Members of Parliament.

“I am pleased to say that recruitment is underway, and the group should be active very soon, when we can therefore communicate with MPs issues affecting our clubs.

“Now to CORCA. CORCA is the Committee of Registered Club Associations. We continue to work with our CORCA colleagues and friends around the country by discussing matters like new legislation and changes to existing legislation.

“You may recall I reported last year that a review of the gaming laws by the Gambling Commission was due to take place, and we had Chris Haley of the Union’s preferred supplier Dransfield to talk about the proposed changes and the possible effect on our clubs. I am pleased to say that Chris is with us today and he will give us an update a little later.

“I make no apologies for mentioning arbitrations at most conferences. I repeat it once again that the Union arranges many arbitrations every year, therefore preventing the need of costly court hearings.

“We are still getting far, far too many of our clubs losing arbitration cases, mainly for procedural errors. I urge committees, therefore, to follow your rules and to enrol some, if not all, of your committee members onto the Union’s Award in Club Management, which covers in great detail the disciplinary procedures, to be followed to avoid arbitration defeats.

“I must mention the tremendous work being undertaken by our in-house solicitor, Allyn Walton, potentially saving clubs a great deal of money. You will hear from Allyn a little later.

“The CIU Beer & Trades Exhibition took place here at the Norbreck Castle Hotel yesterday, and what a great day it was. An array of products and services were on display. Thank you to all the exhibitors and to those who supported and organised the event.

“The CIU entertainment event was held last night at one of our clubs, the H&A Club. I was fortunate enough to be there, and it was an excellent evening. It is a great opportunity for clubs to pick up top-class acts. I would like to thank my colleagues on the NEC, Nathan Clarke and Glenn Doyle, for all their help in organising the event, and also to our volunteers to sell our raffle tickets.

“Thank you also to Sean Ferris and Justin O’Regan of the Club Journal for their help and also for the organisation of the trade show.

“I would at this point like to thank our Head Office Manager Stephen Goulding and his staff for the excellent work they carry out during the year and the hard work they put in in organising these conferences.

“Thank you also to our Club Auditor Brian Howarth and to our Legal Advisor Allyn Walton. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the NEC for all your good work throughout the year.

“Since our last conference, I am pleased to report Kevin Edwards of the South Wales and Monmouthshire District and Ronald Wonders of the Northumberland District who have joined us on the NEC. I hope you both have a rewarding time serving our clubs.

“To conclude, I thank you all for coming here today and the work you do in keeping your clubs going during these tough times, and of course your support of the Union is much, much appreciated.

“I do hope you enjoy the rest of the meeting. Thank you.”

THE PRESIDENT then welcomed CHRIS WEBB MP, the Member of Parliament for Blackpool South, to the podium.

Mr Webb expressed his pleasure at welcoming attendees to Blackpool, highlighting the town’s longstanding partnership with the Club & Institute Union and shared values of tradition, community, and purpose.

He noted his pride, alongside the MP for Blackpool North and Fleetwood, in the Union’s 160-plus year history of helping members flourish and giving clubs a voice in government.

Mr Webb recalled his family's connections to social clubs, including his grandfather's work at the Layton Institute and his grandmother's role in challenging a men-only snooker room, securing greater inclusion for women.

He described clubs as places of care, connection, and quiet support, where communities came together for Christmas parties, informal help for families, and companionship for those who would otherwise be alone. These memories illustrated how clubs combatted loneliness and provided peer support before such terms were common.

Mr Webb emphasised that clubs are affordable, accessible hubs for live music, entertainment, grassroots sport, and intergenerational friendship, often in areas where other shared spaces have disappeared.

He warned that the loss of such 'third spaces' fragments communities. As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Hospitality and Tourism, he recognised clubs' economic importance and pledged to help revive the APPG for members' clubs. He acknowledged pressures including rising costs, changing social habits, and unexpected increases in National Insurance, making the CIU's national advocacy and mutual support more vital than ever.

He noted growing government recognition of community spaces and cited a Blackpool estate where the residents' top demand was the return of their social club, leading to plans for a new community cooperative.

Mr Webb thanked attendees for their dedication and confirmed he would continue to fight in Parliament for clubs and communities.

The next guest speaker was CHRIS HALEY, Managing Director of CIU Preferred Supplier Dransfields.

Mr Haley updated members on the Gambling Commission's consultation on gaming machine technical standards, issued in January 2025.

He noted that the consultation covered Category B4 and B3A machines found in clubs, aiming to enhance player protections and protect vulnerable players. While he supported that goal, he described the proposed measures in the way they would apply to clubs as "frankly quite crazy."

He outlined the key proposals: players must set a maximum spend limit of £450 and a maximum play time of one hour before using a machine, with defaults of £150 and 20 minutes. When a limit was reached, the machine would display safer gambling messages and an enforced 30-second break, after which players could set new limits or cash out.

Clubs would need a new back-office system to alert staff when a player reached their limit, including details of play time, money inserted, and net position. Staff would be required to act "appropriately and in a timely manner," though this was undefined.

Mr Haley raised multiple concerns: privacy issues for players, with sensitive information visible on screen and potentially to other customers; practical difficulties for bar staff expected to leave the bar to intervene; player frustration and negative reactions; and the need for costly hardwired back-office systems.

Traditional reel-based machines, such as Cops and Robbers, would become obsolete and require removal, while new compliant machines and installation costs would add financial pressure. He stressed that machine income is vital for clubs, subsidising charitable and community activities.

He argued the consultation was flawed, as the Gambling Commission's concerns arose from venues where gambling is the primary purpose (casinos, betting offices, arcades, bingo clubs), whereas clubs are social spaces.

No evidence had been presented of problem gambling being prevalent in clubs, and no prior research or consultation with clubs had been undertaken.

Clubs already self-police, with members or committees quietly intervening or banning those displaying problem gambling. He questioned why pubs (Category C machines) were rightly exempt, but clubs were not.

Working with the CIU and CORCA, Mr. Haley publicised the issue in the Club Journal and, as the largest supplier of gaming machines to clubs, wrote to all customers with a simplified response form and online portal.

Of the circa 900 total consultation responses, 740 came from clubs. He submitted these to the Gambling Commission, including clubs' own comments such as "If we do all this, we might as well shut the doors" and "Who's looking out for us?"

Over 90% of clubs requested an exemption for B4 and B3A machines in private members' clubs. He personally took the consultation lead officer to a club to demonstrate the importance of machine income for wider facilities.

The consultation closed in May 2025. The lead officer subsequently had time off due to illness but has returned, while the Gambling Commission's Chief Executive resigned and a replacement is awaited. No response has yet been received, with the latest indication being autumn, though similar promises were made the previous year.

The 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The 2025 Annual Report was proposed for acceptance by NEC Member and West Midlands Branch Secretary JACK HAUGHEY CMD ACM and this was seconded by MANDY CROCKFORD, the NEC Member for Wessex and Western Counties and Branch Vice-President of Wessex.

The Annual Report was accepted on a show of hands.

THE 2025 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

In presenting the Union's Annual Financial Report, UNION ACCOUNTANT UTO EKANMEM said: "I am pleased to present the Financial Report of the Club & Institute Union Limited for the year ended September 2025 on behalf of the National Executive Committee.

“For the year under review, the Union recorded a total recognised gain of £143,624 compared with a loss of £369,774 in the previous year. This represents an improvement of £513,398.

“This is a significant turnaround, and I will highlight the main factors behind it. For full details, I refer you to the revenue account on page 11 of the Annual Report and the accompanying notes.

Total income for the year was £1,229,066 compared with £1,069,573 last year, an increase of £159,493, or 15%. Our main sources of income remain annual fees and pass card sales. Pass card income fell from £332,089 to £287,858.

However, annual fee income increased significantly, rising from £336,249 to £568,360, an increase of £232,111.

“This reflects the increase in the annual fee from 50 pence to £1 per member, as approved by members.

“Trade account sales declined by 31% and lottery income also fell during the year.

“I will now outline the Union’s expenditure for the year. The cost of sales decreased to £236,992, down from £349,468 last year. Combined with the increase in income, this resulted in a gross profit of £992,074, up by 38%.

“Operating expenses also dropped by £179,705 during the year. The main areas of reduction were office expenses, down 18%, occupancy costs, down 4%, Executive Committee expenses, down 16%, and professional fees, also down 16%.

“As a result, the operational loss reduced from £968,524 last year to £516,850 this year, an improvement of £451,674, or 47%.

“The operating loss margin also improved significantly from -91% to -42%. This reflects the combined impact of increased income and tighter cost control. While further work is needed to reach breakeven, this is a clear step in the right direction.

“I will now turn to other factors affecting the overall result. During the year, the Union recorded a profit on the sale of a fixed asset of £203,304 and advertising income of £48,215.

“The asset sale arose from the disposal of property by the Durham County branch, while the advertising income was generated by the Head Office.

“Net investment gains declined by £109,888. Net finance income and rental income also reduced, reflecting lower returns. Taking everything together, the Union recorded a surplus before tax of £207,681 compared with a loss of £352,416 last year. After tax, the surplus for the year was £143,624.

“However, it is important to put this result into context. Included within the year’s result is a profit on the disposal of a fixed asset and advertising income, which together amounted to £215,519. “The profit on disposal arose from a one-off transaction and advertising income is not guaranteed to continue beyond the next financial year.

“Excluding these items, the Union would have recorded an underlying deficit of £107,895. So, while the overall position has improved, this highlights the need to continue strengthening our core operations.

“Encouragingly, our operations improved during the year, due in no small measure to the continued support of our members. However, further progress is essential to secure the Union’s long-term sustainability. The National Executive Committee remains fully committed to improving financial performance and operational efficiency.

“But lasting progress will depend not only on this effort, but also on the continued support and active engagement of our members. Your involvement remains vital to the future strength of the Union.

“Net assets increased from £4.66 million to £4.81 million during the year, largely reflecting the surplus achieved.

“I will now turn to the final section of the Annual Report, which follows the financial statements and provides a brief summary of the financial results of each individual branch for the year.

“Across the branches, a total gain of £92,710 was recorded, compared with a loss of £135,314 last year. However, this result was largely due to the profit on the sale of the fixed asset of £203,304 mentioned earlier. Without this sale, the branches would have reported a loss of £110,594, a modest improvement on last year’s losses.

“During the year, two branches closed – the North West Metropolitan Branch and the West Yorkshire Branch – leaving 19 in total, of which 10 reported a loss.

“Branch net assets increased from £1.66 million to £1.75 million.

“In conclusion, this year has seen a clear improvement in the Union’s overall financial position. However, we must remain focused on strengthening our underlying operations to ensure long-term sustainability.

“The Union has long supported its member clubs through a range of advice and practical services designed to promote their welfare and protect their long-term interests. The National Executive Committee remains fully committed to continuing and strengthening this support in a financially responsible way to help secure the Union’s future.

“Members are encouraged to remain actively engaged with their local branches so they can continue to benefit from this support and stay informed about developments across the Union.

“We are mindful of the financial and operational challenges facing both our clubs and the Union as a whole. In response, we continue to review the cost base carefully with a focus on improving efficiency and long-term sustainability.

“During the year, we achieved a reduction in the cost of sales, mainly through changes to the way the Club Journals are delivered. By making greater use of technology, we have been able to reduce costs while maintaining the level of service.

“The cost base of the branches is also under review, with efforts focused on achieving savings at branch level without compromising the quality of services provided to member clubs.

“We have seen a decline in income from the CIU Lottery this year, and we encourage members to continue supporting this important initiative.

“While this year’s results show clear improvement, they also underline the importance of continuing to strengthen our underlying financial position. Through careful cost management, growing our income, and maintaining active member participation, we can build the Union’s financial resilience.

“As Henry Ford once said: “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.”

“By continuing to work together and remaining engaged, we can build a stronger and more resilient Union for the future.

“Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks on behalf of the Union to all our member clubs and their members for your continued loyalty and support.

“I would also like to thank BH Accountancy Limited for their professional advice during the year.

“I wish you all every success in the continued management of your clubs.

“Thank you, Mr President.”

DAVE ROLLASON, Vice-President of Leicestershire Branch, moved to accept the Financial Report. This was seconded by IAN HARVEY, President of the West Midlands Branch.

The Financial Report was accepted on a show of hands.

THE PRESIDENT welcomed guest speaker DR RUTH CHERRINGTON to the podium.

Dr Cherrington began by thanking CIU staff and the late Kevin Smyth, who had granted her access to over a century of club archives for her research. She recalled helping clear the grave of CIU founder Reverend Henry Solly with Kevin and his wife, Yvonne.

“Speaking on the theme of “Our Clubs – Changes and Challenges,” Dr Cherrington noted that while she could document problems, she did not have all the solutions. She observed that external macro-level forces – such as industrial decline, political decisions, the smoking ban, and upcoming cost-of-living pressures from wars and rising oil prices – have severely impacted clubs.

Internal challenges include keeping up with complex legislation (gaming, licensing, equality laws) and the difficulty volunteer committees face in remaining compliant.

She highlighted the positive historical role of clubs as community hubs providing education, entertainment, and intergenerational gatherings, arguing that this legacy is often overlooked in favour of negative stereotypes.

To survive, she suggested clubs should improve their online presence, revive old-fashioned word-of-mouth, offer varied events (retro discos, tribute nights, live music), and enhance games and sports to rebuild team spirit and mentoring.

She went on to praise the CIU’s training and magazine updates and noted emerging outside support from organisations like the Centre for Democratic Business.

She urged lobbying MPs and promoting the unique value of member-owned clubs compared to private gyms or pubs.

While acknowledging some clubs cannot be saved due to regeneration or external factors, she concluded optimistically that clubs should go “back to the future” – learning from past successes, adapting, and celebrating surviving clubs as models of good practice.

The next speaker was NEC Member and South Yorkshire Branch Secretary MARK FERGUSSON CMD ACM who updated delegates on the continuing efforts to ensure the future sustainability of the Union.

Mr Fergusson opened by noting that if the Union does what it has always done, it will get what it always got. He acknowledged that while it was nice to reminisce about past conferences when Blackpool was full of club members, those days were not coming back.

He outlined the first steps taken years earlier, including downsizing the NEC, staff cuts at Head Office and the sale of convalescent homes.

He referred back to the a special meeting held at Oscott Social Club in March 2024 to discuss the future of the Union where members debated such subjects as the Union’s social media presence, the Union lottery, pass cards (with some warning that compulsion would cause clubs to leave), and a proposed increase in the annual fee to £1 per member – which was later passed in Blackpool.

At the 2025 AGM, a consultation was launched. Fergusson presented a flexible proposal including amalgamation of branches (to make them stronger following club decline), standardising the role of branch secretaries, centralising accounting so everyone used the same system, and reducing the size of the NEC if branches were reduced.

A second open forum in November 2025 in Leicester discussed branch amalgamations. Delegates were proud of their branch identities and, while agreeing in principle, many were reluctant to merge with nearby branches due to tradition and for reasons of geography. The location of Head Office, income generation, and compulsory pass cards were debated again.

The overwhelming concern was that local connection to branches and branch secretaries should not be lost.

A survey conducted with Club Journal publisher Alchemy found that 82% agreed the Union must undergo radical transformation to maintain its mission. 55% favoured amalgamating into five branches, 33% opposed. On selecting branch secretaries, most said that this should be decided at branch level. Large majorities also favoured fewer NEC members and a restructured NEC.

Mr Fergusson reported that comments from members acknowledged the Union was no different from clubs: both risk being seen as old-fashioned, but that did not have to be the case. Common sense and careful local knowledge were needed.

Looking to the future, the NEC had been collating branch data with the Union’s accountant. The increase in the annual fee has put branches in a stronger position. Instead of simply merging branches based on geography, the NEC would take a more pragmatic approach: first addressing branches in imminent danger of insolvency, then those making a loss, and finally those breaking even.

He concluded that while some decisions were within the NEC's remit, others would need to be voted on at future AGMs and that another consultation meeting would be arranged later in the year to finalise the next steps.

The next speaker was ALLYN WALTON, the CIU's Legal Consultant, who gave what he termed a 'whistle-stop tour' of important new legislation.

He reminded delegates that clubs are now virtually 100% defined in law as micro-businesses, meaning they have an annual turnover of less than £2 million and/or employ ten or fewer people. As a result, clubs benefit from certain advantages under the ombudsman's rules, including Oftel (micro-businesses cannot be sold a telecoms contract of more than 24 months without expressly waiving that right) and Ofgem (brokers must disclose their commissions on energy contracts). However, despite lobbying, the hospitality industry had not been given any exemptions under the Employment Rights Act, meaning clubs are treated the same as large corporate offices.

Mr Walton then outlined key changes under the Employment Rights Act: Zero-hours contracts: If bar staff work a regular pattern for several months, they now have a right to guaranteed hours. Clubs cannot keep people on standby indefinitely.

Reasonable notice for shifts: Cancelling a shift at the last minute or as a staff member arrives may require compensation. Even if employees are cooperative, the new Fair Work Agency is likely to see an imbalance of power.

Unfair dismissal: The two-year qualifying period has been reduced to six months. Probation periods must now be meaningful, clubs must assess suitability from day one, act fast, be fair, and keep a written audit trail.

Sick pay: Statutory sick pay is now a day-one right with no waiting days, increasing administrative burdens and requiring budgets to account for illness.

Right to switch off: Clubs should not badger staff with non-urgent communications (for example, text messages about rotas) outside working hours. If not a genuine emergency, it can wait.

Fire and rehire: This is no longer available unless the club is on the verge of insolvency. If it becomes necessary, Walton recommended three conditions: consult a solicitor, follow proper notification and consultation procedures, ensure all staff are affected (not just individuals), and maintain a full audit trail.

Trade union rights: If a staff member invites a union representative into the club to discuss membership, the club cannot prevent this.

Mr Walton noted that the Fair Work Agency was being developed and would add another layer of administration. He added that the Union was rewriting contracts, the staff handbook, and providing advice through the Club Journal and other resources. He urged any delegates with problems to contact Head Office or their branch official.

THE ADDRESS BY THE UNION GENERAL SECRETARY KENNETH D GREEN CMD ACM

"Good morning. I hope you all enjoyed the trade show here and the showcase at the H&A Club yesterday.

"As you are all aware, it is a legal requirement that we have an annual general meeting, and although we had no motions this year, I hope you can all take something away from this weekend back to your clubs which will be useful in the future.

"As you are aware, the NEC strives to keep the Union in top shape, and we can only do this with the members' – your clubs – help.

"The time has come to reorganise the way we do things, mainly from a cost issue, and we need to reallocate funds in a more productive manner. This must include more use of technology, and we started this last year by having the Club Journal published online monthly as opposed to a printed version, which saved on costs of printing and postage to the tune of some £60,000 per annum. So, there was a reason for doing it.

"There will of course be some members who disagree with the unavoidable changes to come, but hopefully there will be a better, more efficient Union at the end of the day. I believe no one would benefit from the loss of the Union and feel sure no one would want this to happen.

"Among other things, we have a lottery which is drawn every month, with hopefully extra funds coming into the Union for little outlay from members. If we could get 50 members from each club to purchase a ticket for a quid, someone would be around £25,000 richer every month, and the Union's balance sheet would be far healthier than it is now.

"We also have a number of preferred suppliers from which we receive commissions. The list is always in the Journal, and when you change something in your club, have a look first to see how your club and the Union could mutually benefit from dealing with them. Look to most of your club's needs and there will be a preferred supplier who can help.

"One, if not the biggest cost of keeping a club open and thriving, is energy. With most commercial businesses using a broker to act as an agent between you and the supplier. Not everyone knows, but these brokers are an unregulated part of the energy supply business. This means many brokers charge excessive amounts for energy supply and get away with it.

"Our solicitor Allyn Walton has spent numerous days in court challenging these corrupt brokers, mainly winning, when unfair contracts and even forged secretaries' signatures have been used. That's from personal experience as my own Club Secretary had his signature forged on an energy contract.

"The moral of the story is to read, at least twice any contract a broker may put in front of you, including letters of authority, which may give the broker a right to enter into contracts which may not be beneficial to your club. Then contact your Branch Secretary, who will have a direct contact with our trusted broker, who could save your club a lot of heartache, many days in court, and a bundle of money.

"I believe most clubs will benefit from at least two or three of your management team attending our education course, the Award in Club Management, which covers the most important areas of clubs' needs, ranging from accounts to legal obligations and club rules and necessary actions between members and the club's committees.

"We are looking to provide a hybrid way of delivering these courses, with online training being a goal, but we find not all people like this form of delivery and the classroom environment suits some members.

"While on the subject of education, again, I make no apologies for raising the issue of arbitrations.

"Again, for what I believe to be the 10th or 11th time during my address to conference, there are still too many arbitrations being held and, sad to say, too many clubs disagreeing with decisions made by arbitrators.

"When a decision is made against a club, whose fault is it? That's right, it's the Union's. When an appellant loses, whose fault is it? That's right, it's the Union's!

"Whatever an arbitration panel decides on, it will be wrong in someone's eyes. A solution to this could be within a management's grasp if they only follow their own rules and the course of natural justice.

"Firstly, look at the charge you are making against a member. It is not correct to put a member on a charge of looking at the Secretary in the wrong way or such other erroneous charge.

"Look to your rules. If your rule book, which most do, states that two-thirds of members present must be in favour of a decision and a quorum must be present, any deviation from this would lead to a decision no doubt being overturned.

"As would any sentence passed which is not within your rules. That is such as a suspended sentence – no such thing – warning as to future conduct, or even a fine.

"Most rule books allow for a member to be suspended from all rights and privileges for a maximum of 12 months, or expulsion from membership.

"Any other timescale, such as sine die, would be overturned on appeal. This usually leads to the committee blaming the Union and/or having egg on their faces, or members losing confidence in them.

"The arbitration procedure is a simple process carried out under the Arbitration Act 1996.

"Please ensure you, at every stage of a disciplinary event, follow your rules to the letter.

"The outcome of an arbitration is always final and binding on all parties and cannot be challenged in a court. However, this always depends on the procedure being carried out correctly and fairly.

"A few people have tried to challenge arbitrations, but up to now have failed. I for one hope this does not change.

"Thank you for listening. I hope a little bit of this speech keeps your club on the straight and narrow, and come our next AGM, we have found a solution to the problems of the Union we are undergoing and we are still strong and united and in a better position than we are now.

"Thank you very much."

THE PRESIDENT announced that the next AGM will take place on Saturday, April 17, 2027, and declared the 2026 Annual Meeting closed.