

Agenda Item 7. BCA-Online Database Passwords

There has been a plot over the past few years to marginalise me and this would seem to be the culmination of it. I don't know why, it is probably because I did my job as a Representative to promote the views of my region which in some cases run contrary to the prevailing view on Council.

At all times I have acted in the best interests of BCA and continue to do so. This is not an easy path to tread but I have a responsibility to carry out the duties of my elected role.

It is true I have withheld the password in the specific case of the BCA-Online database. I don't apologise for that. I will explain the reasons below.

All BCA passwords have been and are held in a password safe that is accessible to several people, including a member of the executive. Therefore the Secretary was deliberately lying when he posted on well know public Forum that I have "held key BCA systems hostage from members and Council". It is impossible for a single individual to do that.

When the new Webmaster was elected I immediately gave him all the passwords he needed to do his job. That includes the master passwords for the cPanel hosting, FTP, website and more.

Prior to his election I gave him all the information about BCA-Online including the source code, database schemas and development documentation. It resides on GitHub at <https://github.com/BritishCavingAssoc/BCAonline> where it can be viewed by anyone.

I am the elected chairman of the IT Working Group (ITWG). I have been elected to deliver its Terms of Reference, which are:

- to manage and coordinate BCA's IT infrastructure.
- to commission and implement IT projects as deemed desirable for BCA.
- to provide a resource of expertise available to BCA.

It follows from the Terms of Reference that ITWG provides the services or platforms that others then use and operate. Services include email, mailing lists, DNS, BCA-Online and database, website wiki software, diary software, domains, website hosting, source code management systems, content management systems and video conferencing.

Everyone agrees that the content of the public website(s) is a Publications and Information function and outside of the scope of the ITWG. However, according to the Terms of Reference, the software that delivers the website is an ITWG function. It is legitimate for the ITWG to ask questions that protect BCA's interests. Can the software do the job? Is it compatible with the existing systems or will it break them? Are there training implications? Does BCA own the copyright? What are the licensing terms? How will the software be supported if the developer moves on? Is it possible for BCA to maintain and enhance the software if the developer moves on? How well documented is it? Is it sensible to spend time re-writing software that already in use and available for free? Etc.

The Webmaster is a member of the ITWG and has an equal vote along with the other members. In the ordinary course of events responsibility for the website software would be delegated to the Webmaster but that has not been possible in this case because the **Webmaster will not engage with the ITWG**. That is the nub of the problem. The Webmaster has not come to the ITWG with his proposals but has instead set about implementing them independently. The Webmaster has not initiated any conversation on the

topic, I've had to make all the running. He has as much of a responsibility to resolve this as I have but he's made no effort. As such the ITWG has been unable to do its job. The only lever to bring the Webmaster to the table is to withhold the BCA-Online database password. It's not much of a lever because he doesn't need it to do his job. The database schema is documented and available at GitHub as mentioned above. No professional software developer would develop against a live database but would use a test database to prevent accidental damage to the data. This is the reason I have withheld the password. I am doing my job in the best way I know how.

I respect the role of Webmaster and have given him all the help and assistance necessary to do the job. He needs to respect the role of the ITWG and give it all the help and assistance necessary for it to do its job.

This has come about because there is a structural problem created by the AGM. As interpreted, the mandate the AGM gave to the Webmaster is in conflict with the ITWG's Terms of Reference. Council could resolve this by amending the ITWG's Terms of Reference or the AGM mandate. There are now two entities (ITWG and Webmaster) in charge of the IT Infrastructure. Ultimately there can only be one. **Council needs to decide which one, ITWG or Webmaster.**

I stood for Chairman of the ITWG based on its Terms of Reference, if they are altered or interpreted beyond recognition I will resign because it would no longer be the role I stood for.

David Cooke
Jan 2020

Comments on the Secretary's Agenda Item 7

- aka The Secretary has created this problem.

- aka It doesn't have to be like this.

The AGM motion demanding the BCA-Online password was proposed by the Secretary (Matt Ewles). It is far too technical a question for the AGM to decide, as I said at the time. I'm sure it was deliberately placed in order to create the current conflict.

Below (Appendix 1) is the full text of the email Matt quoted from, make of it what you will.

The ITWG is a committee made up of seven voting members, all appointed because of their technical expertise. If the ITWG was to turn down a proposal then it would be because it is a bad idea rather than any personal bias.

The only agenda is to do what is best for BCA.

As explained above it is impossible for me to hold the BCA systems hostage. This is emotive hogwash designed to damage my reputation.

The "first prospective IT moderniser" was totally unprofessional and reckless in his approach to the web server causing multiple issues including crashing several websites that members' relied upon.

Matt Ewles says "all options for Gary and David to work together have been totally exhausted" This is untrue. Gary's policy is to not to talk to me. Matt's policy is to not talk to

me. All the attempts at communication have been initiated by me. There have been many emails, several meetings and one phone call. Most of which end in Gary failing to tell me what he wants to do and Matt demanding an unnecessary password. There have been no attempts at compromise on their side or looking for other solutions or even seeking understanding. Matt's approach in particular has been rigid and inflexible.

The paragraph starting "*I want a simple, electronic way to renew membership ...*" from Matt is extraordinary. It is the answer Gary has been unable to provide. It is the first time I've had sensible and detailed reply to the question. Why produce it at this late stage in the Agenda for this meeting?

I agree with everything in it. If Matt/Gary had discussed it with me I would have been able to tell them 80% of it exists already. If we had had this paragraph on the table as an objective six months ago then great progress could have been made, albeit the online vote would have diverted some resource.

To dissect the paragraph in more detail:

"I want a simple, electronic way to renew membership for all categories; one that automatically populates a professional, ideally custom, database, and that links directly to options for electronic payment (including with direct debit or equivalent); or at least has the capacity to do this at a later date." This David Gibson's territory. It does this already for the important categories. It used to pre-populate but David turned it off when Matt complained the method of pre-population wasn't GDPR compliant. I felt it was compliant enough.

"I want a BCA Online that works directly off that database and that allows individual members to log in, change/update their contact details and email preferences." It does this for emails already. For the rest I'd like it to do it as well but there are procedural issues that need to be fixed first. Primarily that the BCA Online database is a copy and not the live membership database.

“, vote on ballots etc.” This has been implemented but not via a BCA-online login.

"I want a back-end to the new BCA website that incorporates an email system with different email 'groups' (e.g. Council, Groups, DIMs, CIMs, those who have not opted out of the newsletter, etc) all running from the live database." It does this already for the mailing lists that have been required so far. More can be added.

"Furthermore, the infrastructure should be built using modern coding, which any decent web developer could pick up and work with" It is, more so than Gary's method of implementation. It is using a php framework that standardises coding practice with the aim of enhancing team development. The source code is all available on GitHub with a permissive open source license.

"and a non-technical admin interface for BCA Officers to use" It has this.

"All systems (website, BCA Online, membership) should be on BCA owned webspace," They are.

"consistently branded, and seamlessly integrated." This is work in progress. I prioritise function over aesthetics.

"None of this is difficult" It's more difficult and time consuming than you realise.

“but will never happen unless the incumbent make way for (and ideally support) those with the skills to deliver this.” Is Matt suggesting I don't have the skills? How about we work together rather than alienating each other?

“Such systems are common place in other membership organisations and would stop the current practice of stressful activity for volunteers and staff alike leading up to each annual renewal.” I'm not sure what Matt is referring to here but I suspect it has something to do with Council changing the membership structure in mid Oct. (removal of joint members) when the renewal process starts 2 weeks later at beginning of Nov.

The reason progress is slower than some would like is because of a lack of programmers rather than some bizarre desire to hold back progress

And just to show it can work. I happened across Matt and Gary in the pub after the AGM. Face to face we discussed and agreed the implementation of the online voting system. We then went on to implement that plan. I did the ballot sending side, Gary the receiving side. It was successfully install and used to run the recent ballot. Why we can do the same again for other projects is beyond me.

David Cooke
Jan 2020

Appendix 1

From: David Cooke
Sent: 10 December 2019 17:43
To: Les Williams; Gary Douthwaite; David Gibson; Angus Sawyer; Matt Voysey; Ari Cooper-Davis
Subject: The Webmaster's Role with respect to the ITWG

Dear ITWG members,

I've been avoiding writing this email for some time now. I was hoping the situation would sort itself out but it hasn't. It is sad that that this email has become necessary.

So the situation is this. I've asked Gary on numerous occasions what his plans are and what he would like to achieve. I've had no answers to those questions. BCA Council don't know either because I asked Gary in the last Council meeting and no answers were forthcoming. All I know for sure is what was written in the AGM proposal to appoint Gary as the webmaster. That is "to redevelop the BCA website, including internal and external communications systems, the public website, the behind-the-scenes systems, and BCA online."

I had hoped there would be a dialogue with the ITWG to come up with agreed aims and objects then decided who was going to do what and how. It shouldn't be difficult to come to an agreement. I'd expect there to be a lot of consensus since we are all trying to do what is best for BCA and caving.

In the absence of that dialogue I think we need to be more formal and prescriptive how things are to be done. It comes down to areas of responsibility and who reports to who. This is how I see it, as established by practice and formal decisions over the years.

As set out in ITWG [terms of reference](#), it responsible for:

- to manage and coordinate BCA's IT infrastructure.
- to commission and implement IT projects as deemed desirable for BCA.
- to provide a resource of expertise available to BCA.

The P&I Officer's terms of reference (the P&I Committee has been abolished) are currently being decided but the [MOO](#) provisionally lists them as:

- Website
- Social media
- Publicity
- Promotion and marketing
- Publications
- Media liaison
- News

Both the ITWG and P&I Officer report to Council.

The Webmaster does not report directly to Council but reports to either the ITWG or the P&I Officer depending upon the areas of responsibility. That implies the Webmaster should have their respective agreement for any work.

P&I is about publishing and distributing information. The P&I aspects of the Webmasters works would encompass the public facing content of the website and Facebook, distributing the Newsletter and other such electronic communication. Note, publishing makes use of the IT Infrastructure but does not change or alter that infrastructure. The content of a website page comes under the remit of P&I but the wiki software that delivers it doesn't.

The ITWG is about the infrastructure that delivers various services. That includes the web servers and software that runs on them, incorporating the wiki's, BCA-Online, email services, mailman, phpLists, ballot software, hosting accounts, dns, etc.

The ITWG has a role in new IT projects either for advice or implementation. The ITWG should be consulted in order to be avoid the pitfalls of IT and to ensure compatibility with existing IT infrastructure. An example of this is the purchase of the Training Software (GoMembership).

If we are to go down this formal route then it would be a requirement for the Webmaster to gain the approval of the ITWG before commencing work that comes under the ITWG's remit.

Members of the ITWG can you give me your thoughts please? I intend to produce a document based on the above that has the agreement of the ITWG that I'll present to Council. NB I did ask Council to define the Webmasters roll vis a vis the ITWG but, quite rightly, they chucked it back to us.

Gary, a list of what you want to do so we can start a discussion would be really helpful.

Regards

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