Welcome to our AGM.

When we had our AGM last year in September, we had returned to the pool and thought that the hardest times were behind us after a lengthy lockdown. I don’t think any of us envisaged the year that we would have. This year has been a challenging one for pool operators and swimming clubs, with many not surviving the continued uncertainty of lockdowns. It has also been difficult for our swimmers and their families, our coaches, and our volunteers.

As a Club we have now been unable to hold 3 of our Open Meets (2 since the last AGM) which are key to covering the difference between the costs we incur and our fees. All pool operators have increased their costs, driven by COVID challenges and restrictions have limited how many swimmers we have been able to have in the pool at one time, resulting in us moving to a ‘Pod’ system in September last year. This has brought our Club some financial challenges and much uncertainty.

However, I am keen to highlight the numerous positives over the same period:

1. Our networking arrangement this year with Bristol North Swimming Club has offered our squad swimmers a joint cooking session, and our senior squads a session on the Optimal Athlete Development Pathway, and we look forward to more opportunities with Bristol North for all of our squad swimmers.
2. Our Crowdfunder activity, organised by Emma Dodd, raised £10,894 for the Club, which has been essential in helping us to keep running.
3. The majority of our swimmers have returned to the pool, and it is clear that they are enjoying being back.
4. We have been able to participate in virtual competitions – with Junior Arena League, and Level X competitions, and we look forward to a live Regional meet for our senior squad swimmers in just over a week, and our own Club Champs at the end of the month.
5. We have strengthened our relationships with our pool providers at Kingswood Leisure Centre, Winterbourne Academy, and the University of Bath, and I am very grateful to them for their support in helping us return to the pool.

We look forward to resuming training again in September bigger and better than ever. Getting this far is down to a team effort, and I would like to thank:

1. To our Head Coach, Jon Wills, who has spent more time on Zoom than anyone should ever have to! Jon kept our squad swimmers fit during the lockdowns with his on-line workouts and has got them back to fitness when we resumed training, with some incredible Level X times being swum.
2. To all of our volunteer coaches, assistant coaches and learn to swim teachers, who have all come back after lockdown and continue to give up their time to teach our swimmers. We could not do this without you, and we are grateful for your time and commitment
3. To our committee – we have some long-term members stepping down this year. Thank you to Alison Williams, our membership secretary and Stuart Mason, our Welfare Officer who after many years of support are stepping down this year. Thank you to Matt Chubb and Emma May who took on the roles of Treasurer and Secretary last year. It’s been a baptism of fire, but they have done an amazing job in difficult circumstances. Thank you to Rachael Thomas our Assistant Treasurer who has helped Matt keep the finances ticking over, and to Fi West, who not only has taken on a Welfare Role, has also organized our Swim 22 endeavor, which will raise money for Diabetes UK and for the Club.
4. To Barbara Gaunt, who is leading our re-submission of our SwimMark accreditation, which is essential for us to demonstrate that we are working within Swim England standards as a Club.
5. And finally, but by no means least, I want to thank Emma Dodd. It takes a huge amount of effort to run a swimming club, and like most clubs we don’t have all of our roles filled. This year has been especially challenging, and Emma as well as being Vice Chair, has taken on the role of COVID lead, ensuring we were able to return to the three pools we train at, conforming to the ever-changing COVID roles. In addition, Emma spearheaded our fundraising activity, took on our Learn to Swim administration to help reduce our costs, and teaches poolside too. Emma’s work behind the scenes is not always noticed, but without it we would not be in the position we are today.

It wouldn’t be a Soundwell AGM without me canvassing for more support! If you don’t already volunteer with the Club, please do consider it. There are committee roles and poolside roles during competition such as Team Managers and Officials. All roles have different time commitments and skillsets so there is something to suit everyone. We don’t leave anyone unsupported, and every volunteer that comes forward reduces the overall load and commitment we need to give. This will be particularly important as we start back in September and hopefully return to competition. You don’t need to commit tonight, but please reflect and get in touch if you want to discuss which roles might suit you and your skills and availability.

I’ll close by just adding one final thank you – to all of our parents and swimmers who have continued to support the Club over the past year. Our swimmers have adapted so well to the ever changing rules, and kept cheerful, even on those cold mornings coming out of the pool and into the car park in their wet costumes. I’d like to highlight the resilience of our two over 18 swimmers, both National level swimmers, who were not allowed to return to training during any of the lockdowns and only rejoined us in May this year. Thank you to parents who supported our fundraising activities and those who took the time to send encouraging and supportive emails as we have navigated through this year. We look forward to the new swimming year in September, and a return to competition and look forward to seeing your swimmers back after a well-deserved Summer Break. Before that, we hope to see you all at our Club Champs at the end of July. It’s not too late to enter, and for parents to consider putting that swimming costume on and doing the swimmer/parent race on the last night.