BiCon Decides
5th August 2023

Independent Chair: Adam Killeya (they/he) – not a member of 2023 organising team or Continuity
Minutes: Kathryn Taylor (she/they)

Information about how to submit motions, and how voting will take place, was available in advance of the meeting on the BiCon 2023 website at https://2023.bicon.org.uk/bicon-decides-info/.

Agenda
1. Introduction from Chair, and explanation of how the meeting will work
2. Approval of last year's minutes
3. Report from BiCon Continuity Ltd
4. Proposals from organising team
   a) Organising BiCon
   b) Online component
5. Urgent proposals arising from matters during BiCon (if received)
6. Explanation of voting process

Process for item 2:
- Any factual issues?
- Any objections to minutes as a whole?
- If no objections, approved by consensus.

Process for item 3:
- Oral report from Bi Continuity.
- Short factual questions.
- Anyone else wish to speak about the report?
- If there have been any objections, opportunity for Bi Continuity to reply.
- If no objections, accepted by consensus.

Process for items 4/5:
- Introduction by proposer / one representative of proposers.
- Short factual questions.
- Anyone else wish to speak about the proposals?
- If there has been a debate, summation by proposer / one representative of proposers.
- Votes to be taken after the meeting.

1. Introduction from Chair, and explanation of how the meeting will work

The Chair welcomed attendees both in person and online, and thanked everyone for attending. The Chair explained that for each agenda item, they would first take short factual questions (e.g. asking for clarification), then invite open discussion. Arguments will be summarised at the end. No voting on substantive motions will take place during this session.

The Chair expressed that meetings should be founded on the principles of civility, brevity, and topicality, and encouraged speakers to keep comments brief and on topic. There followed a brief discussion of practicalities re tech (a roving microphone to enable questions from the audience to be heard in the room, plus a phone used as a second microphone for online attendees).

2. Approval of last year's minutes

Process for item 2:
- Any factual issues?
- Any objections to minutes as a whole?
- If no objections, approved by consensus.

Minutes from the Decision-Making Meeting at BiCon 2022 can be found at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ARg5b0ONzNyF4dADSD6j82SBJjVqE6JIlWpJXwUUALc/edit (also posted on the #bicon-decides channel of the BiCon 2023 Discord Server).

No factual issues were raised. No broader points or objections were made. The minutes were approved by a show of hands.

3. Report from BiCon Continuity Limited

Process for item 3:
- Oral report from Bi Continuity.
- Short factual questions.
- Anyone else wish to speak about the report?
- If there have been any objections, opportunity for Bi Continuity to reply.
- If no objections, accepted by consensus.

A verbal report from BiCon Continuity was presented by Anna Sharman (she/her, Continuity Trustee), Karen McAtamney (she/her, Continuity trustee), Elizabeth Barner (she/her, former Continuity trustee).

BiCon Continuity needs more trustees. Last year Rowan stood down and Anna joined as a trustee. Another trustee is planning to resign at the BiCon Continuity annual meeting on 1st October. At that point Continuity will have three trustees (Anna, Asha, Karen). Karen would like to step down but currently is unable to because Continuity must have a minimum of three trustees. Currently Elizabeth is responsible for bookkeeping and finances, Ian is responsible for IT, and Rowan is responsible for liaising with BiCon teams.

BiCon Continuity's AGM will be held on 1st October 2023 at 2pm on Zoom. Please join their announcements list for the Zoom link / other info: https://groups.io/g/biconcontinuityannouncements.

A key responsibility of BiCon Continuity is to hold the money. Surplus funds from previous years' BiCons (surpluses over 30 years) is used as seed money, e.g. to cover venue deposits. Continuity provides money to the BiCon organising team, which uses it to pay the venue deposit, and any surplus after the event goes back to Continuity who holds the funds for future years. This arrangement removes the need for BiCon organisers to liaise with the previous year's team to get the money.

Continuity presented a financial report for the financial year ending November 2022 (December 2021-November 2022). At the beginning of the year, Continuity has £26k in the account (the deposit had already been paid for 2022 BiCon). The year closed with £40k. We currently have enough money to pay deposits for two BiCons (2024 and 2025). After BiCon 2022, the organising team had a discussion with the venue about quality of provision. The venue reduced the cost as a consequence, resulting in a surplus of £1.5k. We also had an anonymous donation of £500. We expected a loss last year – this is ok; holding surplus funds from previous years allows us to take financial risks. There were no significant requests for grants from Continuity last year. Continuity's running costs were £180 for the year (banking charges and IT).

Continuity appealed for people to take on the roles of trustees/directors and members. Continuity are the custodians of the finances, BiCon websites, and the BiCon trademark. BiCon Continuity is a company limited by guarantee. It can have a maximum of 25 members (whose real names are publicly available). The members are a resource for directors to ask for help, and member get to vote on who the directors/trustees are. There are currently 14 members, so plenty of space for more. Members contribute to discussions and vote, and are not expected to take on any more commitment than that (of course they can do more if desired but are not committing to a lot of work). "Wanting BiCon to continue" is the main requirement. Continuity are holding a session at 10am tomorrow [6th August] for an opportunity to talk to the trustees and find out more.

Short factual questions:
Q: Can you be a member or a trustee and also be on an organising team?
A: You can be a member and be on an organising team. We strongly advise against being a trustee and being on an organising team. There could be a conflict of interest if you need to make a decision relating to the current organising team. It is possible to recuse yourself from such decisions, but better not to do both at once.
Q: How many spoons does it take to be a trustee or member?
A: It is not generally onerous, and to some extent you can decide how much time to spend.
Q: Can you be a member or trustee if not a UK resident?
A: We think so but need to double check.
Q: Please clarify what information is publicly available about trustees and members.
A: The legal names and postal address of all Continuity members are on a spreadsheet, which any member of the public can ask to look at. In practice, this has never happened. The full legal names of Directors/Trustees are publicly available; they can put Continuity's address rather than their home address.

There were no further questions. The report was accepted with thanks by a show of hands.

4. Proposals from organising team

There were two proposals from the organising team:
a. Organising BiCon
b. Online component

Process for items 4/5:
- Introduction by proposer / one representative of proposers.
- Short factual questions.
- Anyone else wish to speak about the proposals?
- If there has been a debate, summation by proposer / one representative of proposers.
- Votes to be taken after the meeting.

a. Organising BiCon

Al Edwards (they/them, 2023 organising team lead) introduced the proposal re organising BiCon.

The way this year's BiCon was organised is not sustainable, and involved a large amount of work for volunteers. The purpose of this proposal is to make organising more sustainable and easier for future teams. For example, some of the work done this year (setting up a bank account, setting up a Community Interest Company, writing a safeguarding policy) could be re-used for future years rather than another team having to do the same work again. One of the proposals is that Continuity should have a "project sponsor" to liaise with and support BiCon organising teams. The proposal asks Continuity to make their best efforts to implement the suggestions.

The Chair thanked Al and their team for the proposal, and stated that Jennifer Moore had made a blog post on the subject of the motion overnight and recommend that those who had not had chance to read it do so. The Chair explained that they had invited Jennifer to speak first after short factual questions and to summarise their views. (Link to blog post which explains Jennifer's thoughts in more detail: https://www.uncharted-worlds.org/blog/2023/08/bicon-futures-bicon-structures/.)

Short factual questions:
Q: Has the proposal been discussed with Continuity trustees, do they have any comments?
A: Briefly. The 2023 organising team has let Continuity know the outline of the proposal in advance, and appreciates that implementing the suggestions will need more volunteer capacity.
Q: What exactly will we be voting on?
A: The proposal is to recommend that Continuity implements the bullet pointed list of proposals. The wording "reasonable efforts" allows some flexibility.

Jennifer started the discussion with a response to the proposal. Jennifer agrees with the bullet pointed list of suggestions, but does not agree that Continuity should be carrying out all of these tasks. Continuity was set up just to hold the money, and over time there has been scope creep of expectations, and a feeling that Continuity should be in charge of everything. This is unwieldy and unrealistic because there are only a few trustees, and sets up an unhealthy expectation that other people cannot volunteer without Continuity's agreement. Responsibility and ownership should be more widely distributed around the BiCon community rather than Continuity being in charge of everything. Jennifer addressed the suggestions in turn:
- Appoint additional directors and trustees – agree
- Finding and vetting volunteers for new teams should **not** be Continuity's job. The wider community should provide a team and ensure that they have the necessary support to do it.
- Project Sponsor – agree
- Handover – should be outgoing team's job rather than Continuity
- Document setting out remit and responsibilities of Continuity and organiser teams - agree
- Provide advice to organising teams – this should be done collectively, with previous organisers contributing
- Additional forms of funding – this should be an initiative from the wider community to find the money.

To summarise, Jennifer agrees with the suggestions but believes that the community should be responsible rather than Continuity. Empowerment in the wider community rather than expecting Continuity to tell us what to do.

An attendee commented that the proposals are excellent idea, and it's not possible to run an event of this scale on "good vibes" alone; we need structure, organisation, and a central point to co-ordinate. There is a risk of putting inexperienced volunteers in charge of a large event, responsible for significant funds, and with high expectations.

Another attendee commented that they broadly agree with Al's proposals. The majority of the recommendations are things that Continuity is trying to do already. They noted that the organising team have been overwhelmed by burdensome requirements and demands, and that there is no specific recommendation to the community to stop doing that / be more civil.

Another attendee commented that sci-fi fandom has a number of conventions. In particular, EasterCon has run every year for several decades by a different organising team who bid for it in advance. EasterCon is a large event with up to 1000 people. The World SF Society has a legal entity but does not do anything similar to the proposed list of recommendations. The attendee recommends that Continuity look at how SF conventions are run.

Another attendee commented that there is currently no handover of sensitive information (e.g. list of people who have been sanctioned in previous years for conduct issues).

A Continuity member commented that they largely agree with both the proposal and the counter argument. The role of Continuity in vetting teams is important and specific to BiCon. Financially, vetting is necessary to limit risk, for example, does the team have a plan? It's ok to take risks or to aim to lose money, so long as this is planned. Twice in 10 years Continuity has needed to ask a team to step down, to protect the mental health of the team lead, or if Continuity believes that unsafe people are on the team. Vetting should sit with Continuity, and the process of vetting people should be tied to releasing money.

Another attendee agreed that protecting safety is one of the most important things that Continuity does. Continuity does **also** run on "good vibes"/goodwill, and they are volunteers too. Demands on organising teams leading to burnout happens regularly. There was a previous proposal to have a dedicated person to filter complaints, respond, and feed appropriate complaints to the organising team in a civil way.

Response from Continuity:
- We would love to implement all of the suggestions, but capacity is a problem. The argument that Continuity should have a limited role also makes sense, since it is important to get the legal/financial/conduct stuff right and not be distracted by other things.
- We agree with both the proposal and the counter-argument. Al's proposals are sensible but Continuity does not currently have capacity. There is a question about how big a role Continuity should have. There are no proposals yet for a 2024 BiCon despite a call for volunteers on discord. We need to consider the ideal vs. the practicality of how much time people have to devote to community work. Continuity can connect people to previous organisers.
- Passing on sensitive information is definitely something that Continuity intends to do and should be doing.

An attendee commented that the person in the complaint-fielder role will need to respond to some questions saying that these are unrealistic expectations that BiCon should not be expected to

finance. This year's team took a long time to be approved by Continuity. There should be a cut-off date for approval, e.g. if a team has not been approved by X date, don't go ahead.

Jennifer summarised the argument and thanked Continuity. BiCon existed before Continuity, so that is proof that the community can do stuff. Previous teams did have support from the community, and Continuity is not the only way that information can be passed on. Safeguarding and ongoing record-keeping is very important, and Continuity is the appropriate means to hold that knowledge and release funding to organising teams as appropriate. Jennifer agrees with the idea of the organising team having a person who's job is to interface with community and filter complaints/make appropriate responses – this is distinct skill to running a BiCon, and there is no reason why the same person should have to do both.

Another attendee commented that, apart from safeguarding/legal/financial stuff, it is a feature and not a bug that other stuff is decided by the organising team, so that BiCon events can evolve. They therefore felt that there was a risk in having events follow too similar a format decided by a central body.

Al summarised their proposal, and thanked attendees for their comments, including disagreement. Organising should be by and for the community, but nevertheless needs some form of governance for sustainability.

The Chair thanked the organising team and Continuity, repeated that the vote will be just on whether to accept or reject the proposal, and thanked all contributors for the clear, civil and constructive way in which they had made their comments, which had led to a good discussion.

b. Online component

Al introduced their proposal to consult on the online component of BiCon. Online BiCon is a relatively new feature. BiCon 2022 was the first hybrid year, and BiCon 2023 is the second. Organising in-person events requires a huge amount of effort, so there is a risk that the online component gets less attention. Al proposed two solutions: a dedicated online team/person as part of the organising team, or separate in-person/online BiCon events. The proposal is to survey 2022 and 2023 online attendees and ask if they have a preference for one of these two options, or any other suggestions.

An online attendee commented that online attendance is a backup option if transport or budget does not allow for in-person attendance, therefore the same event for both in-person and online attendees is a good option.

Another online attendee commented that there were only a handful of online attendees in the meeting (only six who were not also in the room).

Another attendee commented that in-person attendees can also attend some sessions online from their rooms, so should be included in the survey.

Another attendee commented that it is good that proposal is to consult online attendees rather than in-person attendees deciding what should happen. Hybrid meetings are commonplace now; can we learn from what others are doing, and what we do in other aspects of our lives? They were not keen on the idea of separate events.
~135 in person, ~20 online

The Chair suggested amending the proposal so that the consultation would not be limited to online-only attendees. There were no objections to this suggestion, and Al accepted it as a friendly amendment to their motion.

Another attendee commented that the online option is good for health reasons, and protecting other people's health as well as one's own. In particular, the existence of an option for anyone testing positive for Covid to attend online makes them feel safer.

A member of the 2022 organising team commented that the 2022 tech team effectively worked as online sub-team. They tried different styles of hybrid sessions: lectures, powerpoint, discussions, Q&A including online. See the BiCon 2022 report on hybrid sessions – there are different ways to run hybrid sessions and they all work.

An attendee asked about the financial implications / additional costs of hybrid event. Are these costs covered by online attendee ticket prices?

Al summarised the proposal. They commented that there was minimal immediate cost for the hybrid aspects of the event (we used the venue's wifi, volunteers lent equipment, otherwise there would be a small cost for buying tech). The point re Covid is a good one. There was only one Covid cancellation, and our refund policy for Covid was to provide a full refund and a free online ticket.

The Chair clarified that the vote will be to run a consultation on the two options, rather than voting on which of the two options should happen.

5. Urgent proposals arising from matters during BiCon (if received)

No urgent proposals were received.

6. Explanation of voting process

Al explained that rather than only the people present at the meeting being able to vote, voting will take place after the meeting. All BiCon 2023 attendees will be able to vote, whether or not they attended the BiCon Decides meeting. Minutes will be available before the vote.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the tech team and everyone who spoke. Clear, useful, and divergent points were put respectfully, and as requested all speakers adhered to the principles of civility, brevity, and topicality.