

What is GDPR?

And why is it a Good Thing?

You might just have heard about something called the “GDPR” and wondered what it is all about. If you haven't, you probably will hear about it soon. It's the “General Data Protection Regulation” and it's the new law which will replace the 20 year old Data Protection Act on May 25th. The new law applies to everyone, clubs and voluntary groups, as well as big businesses. As we approach the date at which the new law becomes enforceable, you're likely to receive an increasing number of messages as groups start to panic and want you to confirm that it's OK to talk to you.



The GDPR is actually really good news if you get fed up with the amount of unsolicited email, telephone calls, and general cold calling that most of us receive. Its key principle is that any organisation that holds data about you – whether or not it's on a computer – should make sure that you know exactly what they know about you, and make sure that it has your continued permission to hold and use that data. It applies to anyone in the EU, and we can rest assured that it will continue to apply in the UK after Brexit. But it also applies to anyone anywhere in the world who wants to hold data on an EU (or British) citizen, and it's enforceable with swingeing fines – that's why groups are getting worried!

So why is the new GDPR a good thing? Well, businesses typically collect, process, and make lots of money trading in, personal data – your personal data. That's why you get bombarded with emails and adverts for new shoes from all sorts of unrelated companies immediately after buying a new pair of shoes on Amazon, for example. In future, they won't be able to do this without your express permission.

Why am I being asked about this GDPR thing?

There is a lot of personal data that companies have been sharing around in the past without being very obvious about it. But as far as clubs and societies go, they don't exist to trade your data with others, they simply exist to provide information and services for you. They can't do that without holding your personal data, such as email and telephone number, so they can contact you, and so that you can contact relevant people in the group. All this means that any club that holds data on you must:

- Let you know exactly what data they hold about you;
- Let you know why they hold it and how long they expect to hold it;
- Make sure that they have your explicit permission to continue holding it; and
- Make it clear how you may, at a later stage, request that your data be deleted or amended.

Although this might seem like a lot of bureaucracy for small groups where everyone knows each other, it is nevertheless a really useful exercise to go through this process rigorously – you'd be amazed how much personal data can turn up that you never realised was on the records!

What do I need to do?

At some point, you will (hopefully) be presented with maybe an email that indicates exactly what data some group you deal with holds on you. You will be asked if it's OK for the group to continue to hold and use this data, and be given a suggested way of responding. It will probably be something like, “Reply to this email saying that you agree to us holding and using your data as outlined.” Again – hopefully – this will be a process you have to repeat a number of times, since every group needs this explicit permission. But you only need to do this once for each group. Once they have your permission, that's it for the next twenty years, or whenever the next major change in legislation comes in!