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The purpose of this bi-monthly newsletter is to provide useful information to our Beacon Users.

**Message from Beacon National Support and Development Lead**

Welcome to Beacon News. Christmas has been and gone, and we are now in the throws of a new year. In the last edition of Beacon News I told you that the Trust were interviewing candidates for a new post of Service Manager supporting Beacon and SiteWorks teams and providing direct hands-on involvement as and when required.

I am pleased to say that the post has now been filled by Wendy Halley. She took up the post at the beginning of December and has integrated well into the Beacon Team. Welcome Wendy, I will not say anything more as Wendy has written her own introduction, which can found on Page 5 of this Edition.

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### **Message from Beacon National Support and Development Lead (continued)**

We recently asked for volunteers to support Beacon development by becoming part time software testers and I am pleased to say that we had a good response. Wendy will be contacting you all this month to explain how the new group will work and to prepare those of you who wish to be involved for the task ahead.

Finally, as Beacon continues to grow in popularity, it is important that the team will change and grow with it in order to provide the support to u3as using it and for us to embrace the Digital Platform that is being developed to help you and the Trust to communicate more efficiently. May I wish you all the best for the New Year and the way forward.

**Frank Bailey**

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

#### **Beacon E-mails**

Beacon Users may have noticed an update to Beacon's software, implemented during October, that changed the processing of e-mail. Prior to the update, users sending e-mails to many members waited until Beacon had despatched the last e-mail to SendGrid, its e-mailing service, before receiving the message "E-mail sent successfully" that allowed them to continue with other Beacon work.

Following the update, Beacon creates each e-mail as previously but adds it to a queue for subsequent despatching to the SendGrid server. It then posts the message "Your e-mail is being sent" which allows the user to continue with other Beacon work, sooner.

Whilst the update improved the user experience, the main reason for its implementation was to eliminate the occasional but increasing incidents of

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## Beacon E-mails (continued)

Cloudflare 524 Timeouts when sending e-mail to approximately 750+ members or far fewer members if the e-mail contained attachments.

At times, depending on various factors, it may take a few minutes to send e-mails to hundreds of members and if by more than 100 seconds, a Cloudflare 524 Timeout will occur. In implementing the e-mail queue, a "send e-mail" job does not have to wait on the SendGrid server so completes in a few seconds thereby avoiding Cloudflare timeouts.

The time taken to despatch large batch of e-mails may have increased slightly but not by more than a second or two for the whole batch. Beacon no longer reports "E-mail sent successfully" however it still reports delivery failures to the sender of the e-mail, and the Site Administrator and as it did previously. Likewise, the E-mail delivery log still shows the delivery status of all e-mail sent so when sending e-mail and after receiving the message "Your e-mail is being sent", users can be confident that unless they receive a notification of an e-mail delivery failure, their e-mails will be sent.

**Roy Biggs**

Ongoing Help Lead

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## Beacon Support and Migration

The support team is a group of volunteers who are all very experienced with Beacon. Many have been officers in their home u3as and have particular experience with different parts of Beacon.

We are very lucky to have this team to help any enquiring u3a. Some of the first questions a u3a will ask are 'Is Beacon right for us? What can Beacon do that will make our lives easier?' The supporters are there to answer all these questions.

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## Beacon Support and Migration (continued)

We provide a local Demoton practice site that lets an enquiring u3a try out every aspect of Beacon from joining new members to running clubs, communicating easily with all the members to claiming Gift Aid and managing the finances.

At some point a u3a will ask for more information and we can provide live Zoom demonstrations. These give the local committee the chance to ask all the questions they want and sometimes these can get very detailed. The more questions the better so that the u3a has a good understanding of what they are taking on.

Quite often we get some lovely messages of thanks which show how much the local officers appreciate the work the supporters do for them.

The supporters and the migrators do slightly different jobs. The supporters can help the u3a prepare their data for Beacon and the migrators check it to make sure all the formats are correct before adding their data to a live Beacon site.

After going live the supporters stay in touch to make sure everything gets off to a good start.

Slowly more and more u3as are choosing to come on board and use Beacon. Some of these u3as have had Beacon recommended to them by other u3as who have been using it for many years.

The word is spreading and increasingly other u3as who have been using different systems are also coming to Beacon.

Lastly I would like to send a big 'Thank you' to all the supporters and migrators.

We wouldn't get anywhere without them!

**John Hopkins**

Support and Migration Lead

## Role of Service Manager

A quick hello, just to introduce myself. The role of Service Manager is to provide staff support around the Beacon and SiteWorks services. This is a new role, and it will take a few months for me to settle in, meet everyone and become familiar with both systems. But there are a couple of things that I'm able to help with more quickly.

First, we're doing a review of the security of Beacon during the early part of the new year, with penetration testing. This testing is a standard process for systems and provides the reassurance that the security and stability of Beacon is kept at a high level. We've appointed a fully certified company, and the dates are just being firmed up now. However, there will not be any impact on Beacon for u3a users during the testing as we won't be using the production system.

The second focus for me is to get user groups set up. This is something that I know everyone wants to have but so far no-one has come forward to volunteer as coordinator. As this is something that I can help with, look out for more information in the new year.

I hope to get to meet some of you soon and do get in touch if there's anything that you think I can help with.

**Wendy Halley**

Service Manager



## Beacon Hints and Tips

### Site Administrator (Site Admin)

Last year I sent an email to Site Admins to try to make sure that our database was up to date. This resulted in 6 sites contacting us to change their **admin**. As a consequence I thought it best to repeat how you go about any change.

May I just remind you that the Site Admin is the only contact that we keep. We do not have the capacity to keep multiple contacts for over 680 sites.

This is important because the person who has the User Name of **admin** is the person to whom we send all information on everything to do with Beacon. This includes Training Dates, information on key changes, etc.

Please help us to help you by making sure that if your Site Admin changes or they change their email address they follow the process detailed in the User Guide under [The Site Administrator](#).

We no longer accept an email to change things as our process is meant to make sure that it is the authorised person.

If you are the Site Admin for your u3a and are due to be absent in January, then please make sure that there is a deputy covering admin emails and it is sensible for them to be able to handle any other admin tasks as well.

### Requests for assistance and / or questions

We regularly see requests for information about Beacon sent to the Trust. While understanding that they are ultimately responsible for the Beacon system, the majority of questions are then forwarded to the Beacon Team to answer. You might find it better to first send these questions to [support@beacon.u3a.org.uk](mailto:support@beacon.u3a.org.uk).

Please be assured that should we feel it more appropriate, we will send them on to the Trust to answer.

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## Beacon Hints and Tips (continued)

### Beacon Training

We are starting the Training again in January. All sessions are already fully booked but soon we will be sending out dates for the February sessions.

Please note that the person who wants the session needs to apply themselves. We will not accept someone booking on behalf of another person and also do not like it when a person books and then someone else turns up in their place. Our concern is that with the high demand for these sessions we try to be fair and take applications in order of receipt. Please do not pass this information to another u3a, we send to existing sites and do not have the capacity to take people from u3as without Beacon.

**John Alexander**

Training and Documentation Lead

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### Beacon User Statistics

As of the 1st January 2026, the number of live sites and their members, are shown below.

u3as / Networks / Regions	Number
u3as using Beacon	661
Members in these u3as	325,619
Networks / Regions using Beacon	17
u3as (6) / Networks / Regions (6) pre-comparing to migrate to Beacon	12
u3as using the Demonstration site to investigate joining Beacon	41

**John Alexander**

Training and Documentation Lead

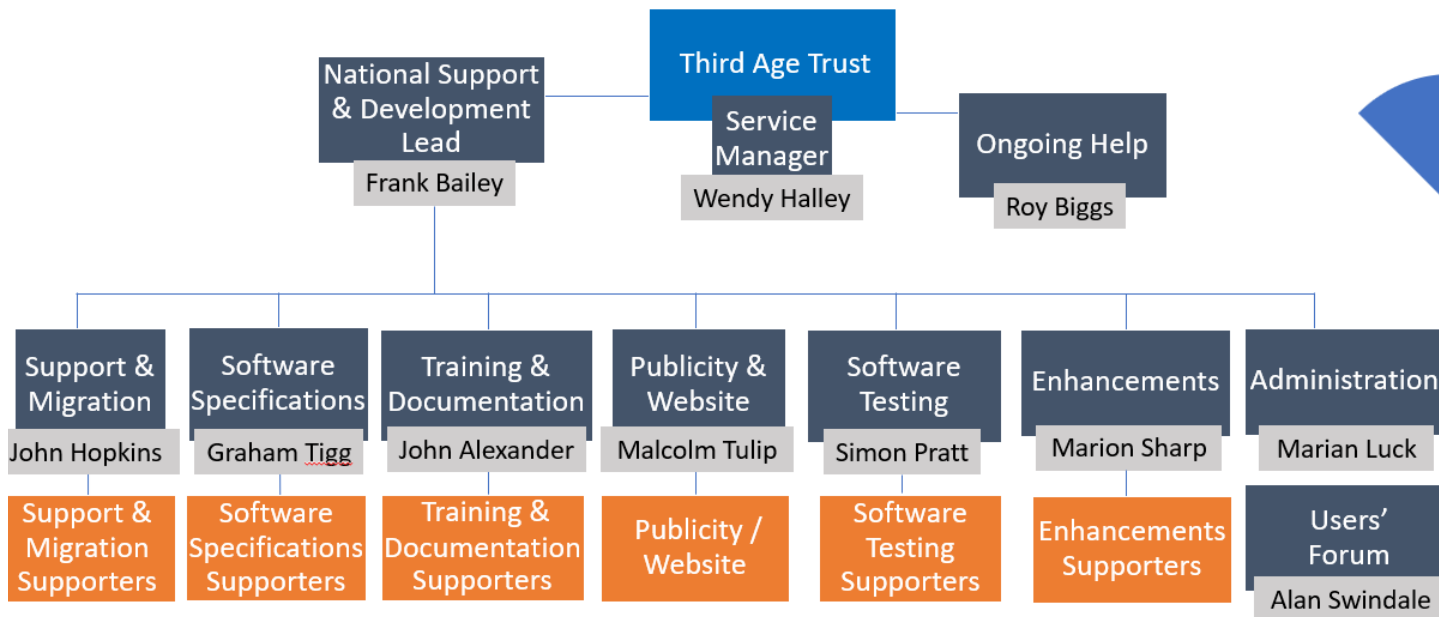
**John Hopkins**

Support and Migration Lead

# BEACON TEAM

## Who we are and what we do

### Beacon Team Structure



Individuals can have multiple roles and hence be in several Supporter roles

### BEACON WEBSITE

Beacon is an on line management system designed by u3as, for u3as. It provides a simple interface for managing members, groups and finances. Beacon is available to all u3as/Networks/Regions in the UK that wish to take advantage of it. More information about Beacon can be found through the link to the website.

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