



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at West Midlands Bridge Club
on Thursday 9th January 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

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| EBU Clubs Officer | Jonathan Lillycrop (JL) | Oxfordshire | Kathy Talbot (KT) |
| Gloucestershire | Patrick Shields (PS) | Warwickshire | Mike Thorley (MT) |
| Leicestershire | Dean Benton (DB) | Worcestershire | Mike Willoughby (MW) |
| Leicestershire | Dave Pollard (DP) | | |

in addition, remotely by video conference for about half the session

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| Somerset | Tony Russ (TR) | | |
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CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Apologies

1. We had apologies from Dave Thomas (Worcestershire), Kiat Huang (Lincolnshire), Rob Proctor (Oxfordshire) and Peter Shelley (Avon). We were surprised not to have heard from Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire, and were concerned that we seem to have lost touch with Staffs & Shrops – and we will look for opportunities to touch base with them soon. [Later note: Linda Curtis, a previous representative, suggested that the county was struggling to get enough volunteers for their committee, and hadn't realised that we now met in WMBC, and these were the causes of their invisibility]

ITEM 2: Minutes of Last Meeting (16 Oct 19)

2. The minutes were approved, and the matters arising, missing from below, were
 - JL had investigated the timetabling of events and reported that the WBF was the source of most frustrations and that with Charlie Bucknell at Aylesbury involved with both the Selection Committee (as secretary) and the Tournament Panel, coordination was happening. JL was happy to act as POC for any county on the topic of dates.

ITEM 3: Choice of Meeting Chair

3. PS pointed out that it was a year ago that he took over from Nicky Bainbridge and that we should consider the opportunity for a change, but the meeting preferred that he continued and he agreed to do so.

ITEM 4: News from the EBU/Aylesbury

4. JL said that little had happened since the AGM (the minutes of which are expected to come out today). The offer of free club membership for a 4-month period has gone to all the U3A clubs which Gordon Rainsford was able to identify; there was little reaction yet, but a hope this could provoke some discussions. There was concern expressed that this initiative was an isolated step and really needed more consideration and evaluation in the context of the relationship of the EBU to non-affiliated clubs. It was agreed that County Associations would need to be involved as they know more about local clubs than anyone else.

ACTION 200109.1: JL to provide the text to describe the offer being made, and to provide the list of who has been contacted, so that CBAs can tell who remains to be approached, and take action.

5. JL reported that the EBU is organising a national handicap pairs championship to take place on Sunday 13th September 2020, at club venues across the country.
6. The report by EBED at the AGM impressed many (as does the teacher training which EBED provides). JL commented positively on quality of the guidance EBED gets from the Teaching & Learning Advisory Group.
7. There was a discussion about the cost (high to some) of training Tournament Directors, with the suggestion it was cheaper to organise independently of EBED with an accredited trainer. We trust that the EBED charge is geared to minimising the cost and maximising the availability.
8. We discussed what contact the County Associations should have with EBED. There was little immediate concern and an expectation that the recent initiative to have a County Education Officer who act as POC was sufficient.

ITEM 4b: the EBU Strategic Aims & Plans

9. We noted that there is nothing to report on overall progress against the plan, although at the AGM the fact seemed to be taken on board that the CBAs and the bridge playing population at large had not been engaged in the venture yet. PS reported that he might be joining the EBU Board (co-opted for a year) with a view to supporting the wider engagement on the question of the future of the game (distinct from other aspects of the Strategic Aims which are focused on running the EBU business). He received encouragement from those present to take up this role, and DP offered his services if help was required to break down the Strategic Aims into workable annual plans.

ITEM 4c: the EBU Volunteer Policy

10. The existence had been noted, and while there was a suggestion that it might be heavy-weight for County use, it was generally a Good Thing to have such a policy documented and a number of counties will consider its adoption.

ITEM 5: Membership Targets

11. Our discussion at the previous meeting revolved around uncertainty about what was actually happening to our membership and what statistics would help us resolve that uncertainty. The small positive trend Jerry Cope reported at the AGM was pleasing, but it was impossible to discern how important were the separate contributions to that from growth in the number of members, growth in the number of sessions a member plays, and in new session types.

12. After the previous meeting, MW had approached Michael Clarke in Aylesbury who was able to point out various statistics which have (for some time) been included in the annual Financial Statement published for the AGM. These give numbers (for each county) of members in three categories : those members who have not played at all in the last year, those who played 1-11 times, and those who played 12+ times.
13. PS had been able to go further (but this is still Work In Progress) with Cheltenham Bridge Club membership, looking at how people moved between these categories over two years. He found, for example, that of those 62 who played 10-29 times during 2018, half played over 30 times in 2019.
14. TR reported that Tim Anderson (TA) provided him with quarterly figures of the numbers at bridge clubs across Somerset and these had proved useful. Somerset CBA is holding a meeting with all clubs on Monday 20th January to discuss these numbers; JA & TA will be attending.
15. KT reported that she had been collecting numbers from a couple of clubs, and that the key was the transition of learners into regular players.
16. We concluded that the following information would help us understand better what is happening –
 - Separate numbers for daytime and evening sessions
 - Separate numbers for (a) players who are new (b) players who are regular, and (c) players who have been occasional.

How easy it is to provide these is not clear. There was hope expressed that across the databases held in Aylesbury there might be chances. Knowing what is available would help us formulate the right questions to ask.

ACTION 200109.2: JL to ask for what information we can have on the fields which are held in the various databases and might therefore be combined to produce useful statistics.

ITEM 6a: MCWG Thread on Non-affiliated Clubs

17. PS reported that he had stumbled across, in the Master Points & Licensing Handbook, the restriction that a County cannot invite Non-affiliated Clubs to be represented in a licensed event except for the lowest division of a county league, or by limiting the Master Points allocated. This was felt to be inappropriate as involvement in such events would be a useful advert for the County & the EBU, as well as generating extra revenue for the EBU.
18. We discussed the issues around persuading non-affiliate Clubs to join the EBU, and noted
 - Some (and affiliated clubs too) engage in non-duplicate bridge (which is easier to manage as not everyone needs to start at the same time).
 - We need to be able to clearly identify the value of affiliating, and to communicate this to clubs, while accepting that not all (particularly Proprietor owned clubs) are going to affiliate. We should be asking clubs/players how would they expect the game to survive if we had no National Bridge Organisation holding the reins.
 - One service non-affiliated Clubs visibly respect is the training of directors.

- We are concerned that the remit of the EBU which seems to focus on only competitive bridge is too restrictive.
- We noted input from Rob Proctor suggesting that a survey of the views of non-affiliated Club was appropriate, and we all agreed, but saw no need to coordinate this across the nation.

ITEM 6b: MCWG Thread on Classroom to Club Room

19. Our discussion on this raised four points to note

- KT reported on events run with restricted Master Points holding between the pair, that had been successful.
- MW reported on an annual Pro-Am event run by Worcestershire, for which the partnerships were hand-tailored to ensure compatibility. It was proving popular with about 12 tables in play.
- Warwickshire run a Mentored Teams event in which three newcomers sign up to play in a pivot teams with an experienced player.
- Personal contact is good for encouraging people to move on, as is organising a group to move on at the same time.

ITEM 6c: MCWG Thread on Club Room to Tournament

20. We noted first that our expectations of Tournament Bridge need to be different from that which we experienced 20-30 years ago; we cannot expect similar numbers of highly competitive players, and we should plan accordingly. We noted

- There is a special offer at the Eastbourne Summer Meeting for people coming to the event for the first time (and we all took leaflets away to advertise this). There is also a bulk discount available for club entries to J-high events.
- Many of us have found that for promoting an event, passing out leaflets (so people have something physical to take away) can be effective in catching players' attention.
- PS suggested that were clubs to organise groups of members to go to a congress, so that people had friends playing in the same event, it would be good for both the club and the congress.
- KT reporting that Oxfordshire has run a J-high event (successful but not huge) and other counties declared that they are considering this. Positive interest was expressed in a more restricted rank event (but the name will never be as catchy), with MW noting that only 50 of 650 of their county members would be not allowed at a J-high event.

ITEM 7: Schedule and Plan for 2020

21. We agreed that our timetable of the second Thursday in each of January, April, July and October was appropriate, so the dates coming are 9th April, 9th July and 8th October. We can of course adjust if necessary, but MT will make a room booking for us on this assumption that these are our dates.

ITEM 8: AOB

22. Midlands Improvers Pairs: we remain interested in this proceeding and have no worries about groups in different counties or clubs playing the same (“simultaneous”) hands on different nights. Catching the end of lessons is attractive, so a date just before a summer break would be ideal. We leave Jim Parker to make a suggestion.
23. Robots: PS reported that Cheltenham/GCBA were working to make more use of these and asked about whether players’ scores against robots should count or not. Being flexible until such time as everyone is comfortable is key, so their plan is to decide on an event by event basis, and to allow people to opt out (but only before playing the relevant boards). We noted that the basic BBO robot has an EBU number and an NGS ranking of 9.
24. Speedball: PS asked whether any had considered running such an event. The answer was negative but the popularity of the Speedball at the recent Peebles Congress was noted, as was the fact that an earlier than usual (ie pre-midnight) Speedball was planned as part of the Eastbourne Summer Meeting.
25. Technology Day: we noted the [Technology Day held by Yorkshire CBA](#) in November, and will be on the look-out for the need/opportunity of such an event in the Midlands.
26. Counties as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation: PS reported that Cheltenham BC was in the process of becoming a CIO, and asked whether any counties had considered doing this. JL could tell us that both Hampshire and Norfolk have, but none present had yet considered it. MW noted that if a county was looking to set-up/buy its own premises then Gift Aid status could be very helpful.
27. County need for Employer Liability Insurance: PS reported that his (limited) investigations had suggested that were a county to employ staff even just for serving teas at county matches, the law suggests that ELI was necessary. Others had not yet noticed the concept but would not look into it. The EBU does offer counties some Public Liability Insurance.
28. [Later but worth capturing here] DP reported that EBED has organised, at the County Bridge Club Leicester, TD training on the following dates
- February 15th and 29th
 - April 4th and 11th
29. The meeting finished at 1255.

END OF MINUTES