



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at Dunchurch Village hall
on Thursday 9th November 2017 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Warwickshire	Judith Currie (JC)
Northamptonshire	Nicky Bainbridge (NB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Chris Cooper (CC)	Worcestershire	David Thomas (DT)
		Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Clare Batten

ITEM 1 : Apologies

1. Apologies were received from Dean Benton (Leicestershire) and Graham Bindley (Nottinghamshire). There was no presence from the EBU, although Gordon Rainford had in correspondence indicated his intent to come, but he didn't know the date and found that he was committed to be in Riga on the day of this meeting. Jim Parker reported that [Liz Hall](#) was going to join in as a Derbyshire rep.

ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (27 Sep 17)

2. It was agreed that the style and level of detail in those minutes (reflecting the style of the meeting) made verification impossible. There was no value in combing through them, so we would accept them. We ask that they be published with a caveat to this nature added, so that nobody mis-interprets what is said there.

ACTION 9nov17.1 : CB to arrange publication of these and the previous minutes on the EBU web site, suitably marked.

ITEM 3 : Proposed Terms of Reference

3. CB reported that, having consulted with Lesley Millet, there had been no issues raised by the Northern RCWG about our draft TOR. There had been some EBU Board complaint about the use of the word independent, but nothing more. The following points were made
 - a. Although the RCWGs were set up from a top-down (EBU) perspective, they are also needed from a bottom-up (County) perspective, and that as the RCWGs are staffed by volunteers from the counties, the members of the RCWG must have the last word.
 - b. There is value in, but no absolute need for, alignment of TOR between the different RCWGs.

- c. Any set of TOR can be subject to continued wordsmithing but there are diminishing returns and we need to draw a line somewhere.
4. The meeting resolved that the current draft was fit for purpose and that we should run with it until such time as proposals for change were forthcoming, at which point this group will be happy to review those proposals.

ITEM 4 : Group Officers

5. CB indicated the desire of herself as Chair, and of JP as Deputy Chair to stand down. CB explained that after joining the EBU's Task Team, she was uncomfortable with the constraints imposed on the members of the task team and the fact that she could not be fully transparent with this group. The MCWG members expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that she was put in this position. A vote of thanks was made to Clare and Jim for their work over this difficult period.
6. NB was proposed (by MW) and seconded (by RP) as the new chair, and when no opposition was expressed, she was declared as the new chair, to take over at the end of this meeting. NB was asked to consider what supporting officers she needed (only an EBU Liaison lead is mentioned in the TOR) and will do so. NB indicated that she intended that there will be no secrecy in any of the group's operations or in the group's dealings with EBU-central.

ACTION 9nov17.2 : NB to plan the needed support.

ITEM 5 : Task Team Recommendations

7. CB explained that she had become (unexpectedly) involved in the "Task Team" and that issues arose over the publication of its outcomes but these were overcome and, with help from Bev Purvis, the outcomes as presented to the EBU Board were made available to this MCWG (albeit only in the last 24 hours). Membership of the "Task Team" (referred to by Graham Smith as "the CWG Task Team") has not been made explicit and seems not to have involved the breadth of counties which the discussion in the Chairs meeting indicated was necessary. The core reactions of the MCWG to the recommendations was
 - a. The thrust was strongly about membership and affiliation, and seemed to assume that these was all that mattered. This was a presentation of actions but what the actions were intending to achieve was not explicitly stated, so that testing their suitability is fraught. A number of those present believe that "membership and affiliation" cannot be the totality of the aim – we need first to work out what the bridge playing population of today (a less competitive population than in the past) wants.
 - b. The proposals overlap with what was discussed at the last MCWG meeting but are missing some of the points raised there – for example the expectation that proposals on a health check will be treated as an insult by most clubs.
 - c. The recommendations (19 in number) were all brief – some are actions on the national body, some are proposals on which individual counties must decide whether to take action, and some are candidates for action at RCWGs. How one decides on what goes forward is not clear; the EBU Board just doesn't have the authority to tell Counties and Clubs what to do. Any RCWG, including this one, must decide for itself which actions it takes forward to further the aims of its constituent counties.
 - d. We have not been given time to consider these recommendations properly.

8. The fact of the recommendations did generate a useful discussion from which the following emerged –
- a. The existence of a National CWG is thought to be an inhibitor for action, rather than an enabler and the respective roles of any such body alongside the Chairs conference and the Shareholders meetings need to be understood. None are currently documented.
 - b. There are concerns that any higher level of UM charge than the current proposal (up by 1p) would be unacceptable, and that the fact is that county events with the top competitive players pay a lower UM charge than clubs with more social players – and this is an anomaly which gives the wrong message. Interest remains in being able to explain to players and clubs where the UM funds go, but the current financial reporting does not allow this to happen.
 - c. While the EBU and a number of counties, but not all counties, have “duplicate” written into their constitutions, some like Oxfordshire are currently considering removing that to allow them to support other bridge players.
 - d. A number of issues of key importance to our Counties and our members need clarification, and the EBU AGM offers an opportunity. We should therefore organize what we can in the way of questions and submit them before the 14th November deadline.

ACTION 9nov17.3 : PS and RP to work with JS on wording of questions to the AGM reflecting concerns re UM charges, involvement in the next 5-year strategy, and the Counties perspective on the changing bridge-playing population.

ITEM 6 : EBU AGM

9. We were asked to note that there is competition for EBU Board membership, and we should consider for whom we all vote. There was some disquiet around the AGM practice of treating all those present equally (votes by show of hands), when some present might represent a single EBU share and some may represent multiple shares.

ITEM 7 : AOB

10. **EBU Summer Festival Midweek Events** : the suggestion of enabling players all round the country to participate in these events was welcomed, and the group felt that the best approach was for each county to look to finding one or more venue which could participate, thereby maximizing the value to members as well as the entry numbers.
11. **County Events/Nights** : CB reported that in Nottingham the attendance at the top (by bridge standard) evening had fallen below workable numbers, but that the institution of a once a month County Night (now Wednesday) was now proving attractive.
12. **Midlands Bowl & Edgar Foster Cup** : dates for these were unknown, but PS offered to research and can report now that the Midlands Bowl is scheduled for Sunday 1st July in Cheltenham, and the date of the Edgar Foster has yet to be chosen by Worcestershire.
13. **Bridge Master Classes** : a number of counties reported that classes were proving very popular, with waiting lists in some cases. And a better fund raiser than Green Point events! In some cases (where a club was a charity?) the premises were offered free for teaching purposes. PS reported that Cheltenham was soon to be favoured by a visit and a class from Zia Mahmood (happening on 8 December 2017).

14. **Midlands Improvers Pairs** : PS announced that Gloucestershire were holding a heat (adding to WMBC and Spondon). Those running the heats were asked to survey the attendees about what they liked and did not like about these events. [LATER: heats at WMBC and Cheltenham have both been cancelled]
15. **Behaviour at Bridge Clubs** : instances were reported illustrating the need for improvements in some regular bridge players' attitude, as they can so easily put off newcomers. PS mentioned the GCBA proposed campaign "The TD is Your Friend", and that talks had recently been given on how to be more forgiving to newcomers.

ITEM 8 : Date of next meeting

16. It was suggested that as some people spend 3 hours travelling to and from these meetings, it would be better to use more of the day for productive discussions. There was general consensus that this was right but also a proposal that we trial this concept at the meeting after next.
17. We agreed on January 18th for the next meeting and April 19th for the subsequent one, but in the same venue courtesy of Northants CBA..

END OF MINUTES