



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NORTHERN COUNTIES WORKING GROUP
AT Leeds Bridge Club
ON Thursday 5 December 2013 @ 10.45am**

Northern Regional County Representatives:

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Lancashire	John Brearley	Lincolnshire	Deidre Fell	Manchester	Jeff Morris
Merseyside & Cheshire	Julian Merrill	North East	Val Gibson	North East	Ann Gaygill
Westmorland	Mike Rothwell	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet	Yorkshire	Phil Godfrey

Invited Members:

County	Name	Reason
EBU Board	Darren Evetts	
EBU Board	Ron Millet	

Apologies:

County	Name	County	Name	County

Chairman: Lesley Millet

Lesley welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Northern Counties Working Group. She introduced Darren Evetts who outlined that the purpose of these meetings, and those of the National County Working Group - referring to 'Bidding for the Future' - was to implement the section on County and Club relations.

Darren highlighted the following points:

- Communication needed to be improved at all levels. Engaging everyone is vital to the future success of the game and everyone needs to be talking and needs to be listened to.
- The demise of the National Club Committee was due in part to the feeling that Counties were not part of the structure. Although the NCC structure had worked well in some Counties (Warwickshire for example) it had failed in many.
- It is apparent that many Shareholders do not communicate with their County Committees, which is a fundamental flaw in the communications process.
- The National County Working Group will discuss all of the ideas and comments from the Regional meetings, collate them, and present them to the Board of the English Bridge Union.

There was general discussion and the following points were raised:

- The meeting supported the points made by Darren.
- It was felt that members had been committed to the National Club Committee, but some members felt that they were not listened to. It is hoped that the CWG format will address this issue.
- There is an unfortunate and false perception that bridge administrators should come from among high level players.
- It is necessary to move on from past experiences and to engage with new members positively.
- Cross County collaboration should be encouraged, to the benefit of all.
- A variety of styles, standards and abilities exist among the Counties.
- Differences in how Counties operate were highlighted. In Yorkshire, for example, as well as the Executive there is also a Council where Clubs are represented in proportion to the size of its membership.
- Lack of attendance at meetings is a problem. It is not possible to know if this is due to indifference or to an acceptance that things are okay.
- Low attendance at meetings is typical of all voluntary organisations.
- If people do attend meetings there should be feedback. Meetings tend to be all about Governance rather than feedback.
- With fewer Shareholder meetings the nature of those meetings has changed. There is little time for sharing of ideas and exploring development opportunities.
- It is possible to shape development and change for the future. For example, the County Chairmen's meeting was split into subject working groups, which is an excellent way of engaging members and informing the Shareholders within it.
- It is vital that views and ideas are listened to. Darren assured the meeting that this was an important part of this process.
- The Shareholders have the power to shape the future of the organisation and to guide the decision making process. Communication is fundamental to achieving this.
- Running a Club is often left to a few key individuals. How many Clubs are held back by this? Most members are not bothered one way or the other; they are just there to play bridge, and this appears to be more so with unaffiliated Clubs.
- There is a need to look at the EBU's approach to unaffiliated Clubs.
- There should be follow through on teaching, to ensure that students are encouraged to join an appropriate affiliated Club.
- A public relations project jointly between several Counties could work. Some Counties do not have the finances to achieve this on their own, but cross County collaboration could be the answer.
- There are misconceptions about how Clubs operate. Some believe that all Clubs pay TDs when, in fact, that is not the case.
- A starter pack for new Clubs could contain information about experiences as well as financial guidance.
- Support of Clubs when teaching should be a top priority. Sometimes people travel a 40-60 mile round trip to visit Clubs.
- Education Management is better left until the new Charity is launched.
- Some teachers are controlling students to keep them from joining EBU affiliated Club's, because it is a source of income for them.

- What can be done to make affiliated Clubs more appealing to players? Providing food; affiliated Clubs hosting unaffiliated Clubs; a form of associate affiliation; make sure we engage with unaffiliated Clubs; have a joint approach with the Counties and Aylesbury – with Andrew Urbanski – in a campaign to get new Clubs affiliating; we need to focus on new Clubs, not the comfort of the existing ones; some members do not want to change anything, or incur additional cost, and some have become Clubs within Clubs.
- Investing in the future, we need to attract younger people. There is a ‘middle age’ gap that needs to be focused on, perhaps using the local authority adult education scheme. A sample letter was suggested that Counties could top and tail to fit local situations and bodies. It was felt the Counties should push this idea forward. Local contacts are needed, especially with teaching in schools. The ‘Breeze’ arrangement in Leeds was mentioned. A closed forum of schools, voluntary organisations and relevant local government departments etc, where information, issues and developments are shared. Dementia was mentioned; a junior teach-in at Loughborough Grammar School, and work on universities is needed; research local Councils who give grants, because it is crucial to approach the right people. Ron Millet agreed, with help, to take charge of this Country wide, and to provide a running digest of grants available, and to assist Clubs/Counties in making applications; a Northern Schools team is to take part in a House of Lords schools bridge match.
- Access to Universities was discussed and it was agreed that it was difficult to find a way in.
- Is there a need for a full time publicity, communications and public relations person?
- The respective merits of field staff being based at Aylesbury and out in the field was discussed. It was felt out in the field would be a more idyllic situation.
- A national campaign is needed to raise the profile of Bridge. Some Counties do not work with teachers. Should we require EBUTA teachers to recommend affiliated Clubs to their students? There is a great variety of standards and styles in teaching. Some support may be needed for the Counties. The CWG structure will be reviewing this, and will set standards for the Counties, and possibly include unaffiliated clubs, but statistics are required to quantify and direct this.
- A venue for teaching that is convenient is needed, not just in Aylesbury. There needs to be cross County collaboration.
- A contact was identified who serves on various public health bodies, and this could be very useful to inform on research on Dementia.
- A forum for Tournament Directors was discussed. This led to discussion about a forum for all aspects of County administration. Darren indicated that this idea had also come through the Midlands region meeting. It was agreed that this was a good way forward. Topics for threads could include charity, property and finance. This would be an excellent way of sharing resources and best practice. Web seminars could also be a way forward.
- It was felt that whilst discussion was fine it is action and results that count. Darren agreed, and said that this was what would be achieved through the CWG structure.
- Communication at all levels is key to the success of the National CWG.

- The Education Trust was discussed, and how monies may be made available and used. It was suggested that grants could still be, and should be, applied for. The Education Trust will be useful for fund matching.
- Discretionary Council tax relief can be available – it is worth contacting Local Authorities.
- A variety of events for newcomers was discussed. There seems to be resistance to joining main county events by newcomers. Possible issues could be the expectations of the players. Some players see bridge as secondary to a social activity, and some players see the social activity as secondary to bridge. More focus on managing the interaction could prove successful.

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- It was confirmed that everyone had had an opportunity to contribute to the meeting.
- It was agreed that the County Working Group structure had merit and was worth pursuing.
- It was agreed that Lincolnshire will now be part of the Northern Group, rather than the Midland Group.
- It was unanimously agreed that Leslie Millet be the National Working Group representative.
- It was agreed to prepare a discussion document on publicity.
- Minutes of this meeting are to be circulated to the attendees for agreement, then to the respective Counties, then for public circulation.
- It was agreed that meetings of the Northern Counties Working Group will be every four months, and the next meeting will, therefore, be in April 2014.
- Darren indicated that he, or another EBU Board Member, would be available to attend all Regional County Working Group meetings.
- Darren thanked Lesley for co-ordinating the meeting, Leeds bridge Club for hosting the meeting, and everyone for attending