



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLAND COUNTIES WORKING GROUP
AT West Midlands Bridge Club
ON Wednesday 9 October 2013 @ 10.30am**

Midlands Regional County Representatives:

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Derby	Arnold Chandler	Derby	Mick Gavigan	Gloucestershire	Jim Simons
Leicestershire	John Thompson	Leicestershire	Dean Benton	Nottinghamshire	Graham Brindley
Oxfordshire	Robert Procter	Warwickshire	Chris Harris	Worcestershire	David Thomas
Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby				

Invited Members:

County	Name	Reason
EBU Board	Darren Evetts	
Warwickshire	Edward Legg	Minute Taker
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara	Former NCC Representative
Essex	John Williams	Contributor

Apologies:

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Gloucestershire	Alan Wearmouth	Lincolnshire	Glynn Elwick	Lincolnshire	Glynn Elwick
Oxfordshire	Sandra Nicholson	Staffs & Shropshire	John Withers		

Chairman: Darren Evetts

Darren welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Midland Counties Working Group. He outlined the purpose of a County Working Group (CWG) nationally, indicating the draft Terms of Reference for the group - which will remain in draft form until the CWG is formed - the emphasis being very much on what Counties, Clubs and Members want. This pilot meeting of the Midland Counties Region will form a basis for other regions to follow. The CWG structure is to replace the National Club Committee (NCC) structure. All attendees had received a copy of the draft Terms of Reference for the CWG. Darren explained that the aim is for each region to nominate two members to serve on the CWG.

Darren introduced Colin O'Hara from Bedfordshire and John Williams from Essex. Colin is a former member of the NCC, and John, as Chairman of Essex, has committed considerable time and resources into County development.

Colin and Chris both recounted some of their experiences with the NCC. Among the concerns expressed about the NCC was that it appeared to some to bypass the Counties. Chris said, however, that was not the case in Warwickshire, as the Chairman had made the Warwickshire representative an ex-officio member of the Warwickshire Executive Committee, which meant that everyone contributed to the decision making process. It was acknowledged that if there is a communication problem with some Counties, it is because some Counties do not communicate effectively within themselves. It is essential for all communication channels to be open and well established to enable the English Bridge Union (EBU) to operate successfully.

John gave a brief outline of the work that had been undertaken in Essex. Working groups had been setup to look at various aspects of the County's administration.

There was general discussion and the following points were raised:

- Effective and two-way communication is essential in all areas of Bridge administration.
- There is a huge disparity in how Counties communicate internally. It was apparent from some of the Shareholder meetings that some County Executive Committees did not communicate with their Shareholders.
- There is an urgent need to engage with all (affiliated and unaffiliated) Clubs and Members.
- The EBU has an unfortunate image among many unaffiliated Clubs of not being there for Members; that it has layers of bureaucracy, and unaffiliated bridge players feel there is little benefit to them in belonging to the EBU, and they can be quite aggressive about it. Changing these perceptions will be a challenge.
- Amongst those who engage in communication there is a feeling that elements of the EBU hierarchy do not listen, and that communication is one way ie top down.
- There is a need to establish better communication within the EBU so as to ensure that ideas, initiatives, suggestions, feedback, etc, is both heard in the right places and responded to appropriately.
- The success or failure of any structure is reliant on the people administering it. This is particularly so in volunteer organisations.
- The CWG structure should be successful in its role, providing that Members are engaged at all levels.
- It is vitally important that this working group structure is driven from the bottom up. Darren was keen for this to be the way forward.
- Circa 50% of bridge players are members of unaffiliated Clubs and that 'out of the box' thinking and more imaginative promotional initiatives are needed to encourage those unaffiliated Clubs to affiliate. The popular phrase from unaffiliated Members nationwide is, 'What is in it for me', and they are not impressed with the list of benefits provided by the EBU in answer to this question.
- Universal membership operates successfully for other organisations, golf and chess being two examples. Establishing a culture change is what is needed, perhaps by a change of approach, and rather than actively seeking unaffiliated Clubs to join the EBU, we should be providing a service which makes unaffiliated Clubs want to join the EBU. Not all Clubs want the same things from a national organisation. We need to differentiate in some way.
- The playing of bridge for a large number of players and groups is not just about duplicate bridge. We need to acknowledge this in some way, as it could provide a conduit for many players into duplicate bridge. For example, set up a 'Bridge Lite' programme for those who have been introduced to the game through a route other than EBU teaching style lessons. Basically, such a programme could be the forerunner to becoming a fully fledged affiliated

Club with Associate Membership of the EBU. There would be no need to have bidding boxes, substantial regulation, etc.

- Some Counties include a list of unaffiliated Clubs on their websites, as well as their affiliated Clubs.
- Some County Chairmen have made themselves available to visit all of their affiliated (and unaffiliated) Clubs. Visits to affiliated Clubs have proved a positive experience, whilst the response from unaffiliated Clubs has been minimal.
- The balance between engaging with unaffiliated Clubs/Players and engaging with affiliated Clubs/Members is important. .
- Attracting volunteers from the large number of new Members gained through Universal Membership has not thus far proved very successful, despite a number of Succession Planning initiatives. It may be felt by some members that only the most experienced bridge players should become bridge administrators. This really is not so.
- Establishing a service level benchmark for Counties is a good idea but, within a volunteer resourced environment how can this be achieved?
- Counties could work collaboratively on marketing. Pooling financial resources could be beneficial.
- Engaging Schools and Universities is considered to be very important. MiniBridge initiatives are operating very successfully in some Counties.
- It is necessary to establish what the County's role is in terms of Education. Darren suggested that matters relating to Education should be put on hold pending the formation of the Education Trust, which will become active on April 1 2014.
- Various activities were cited which may appeal to Members and non-Members alike:
 - Cafe Bridge events have been run in Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. These were hugely enjoyable events attracting circa 100 Members and non-Members.
 - Seniors' Pairs events with lunch have also proved popular and successful.
 - A national Bridge day could be organised, where all Counties do something eg Cafe Bridge. National press coverage of such an event could be arranged.
- We are all trying to reinvent the wheel. The sharing of resources and best practice should be an integral part of what we do nationally.
- Media coverage of bridge is virtually non-existent. Some results are published but, in general, bridge coverage - even international successes - is hard to get in the media.
- The data available from P2P statistics could be useful to Counties and Clubs.

Future Meeting(s):

- Darren indicated that because of his role on the Board and with the CWG he felt it would not be appropriate for him to Chair this group. Alan Wearmouth (Gloucestershire) agreed to be nominated and Robert Procter (Oxfordshire) also agreed to be nominated. It was unanimously agreed that Alan and Robert should be joint-Chairmen, and also be the representatives for the CWG when it is formed.
- Darren indicated that he would make himself available to attend all Regional County Working Group meetings.
- It was agreed that the next meeting of the Midland Counties Working Group would be 6 months hence.

AoB

- It was noted that the formation of the CWG would be, perhaps, 12 months hence.
- The minutes of this inaugural meeting will be circulated for agreement, and subsequently the agreed minutes will be circulated to all Counties, as the outcome of the inaugural Midland Counties Working Group meeting is of interest nationally.
- It was unanimously agreed that when the minutes of this meeting are circulated they will be emailed without using BCC, so that all members of the Midland Counties Working Group will have each other's email addresses.
- Darren's contact information is: Darren@EBU.co.uk, Tel 01543 439561.

Action Points:

- 1) The following questions were asked, and answers clarified post meeting:
 - a) What is the current default position regarding a Member's County of Primary Allegiance, and what was it when Universal Membership was introduced?
 - A member of the EBU prior to April 2010 has as their County of Primary Allegiance whatever it was prior to Universal Membership. A Member's County of Primary Allegiance who joined the EBU in, or after, April 2010 is the County of the Club who registered them. Members can change their County of Primary Allegiance once per year by calling the EBU Aylesbury office.
 - b) What is the current default position regarding a Member's Primary Club, and what was it when Universal Membership was introduced?
 - The Club that first registers a Member becomes their Primary Club. A Member can, however, change their Primary Club whenever they like, either in their online Members area, or by calling the EBU Aylesbury office.
 - c) What does 'Primary Club' actually mean – ie are there any benefits to a Club in having a person as a Primary Member?
 - There are none at present. However, it is possible that there may be benefits at some future time.

- 2) All Counties agreed to make contact with all affiliated and unaffiliated Clubs and Members/Players, to establish what Clubs feel is important to the future of the game, its administration and what unaffiliated Clubs want from the EBU in order to make joining the EBU appealing.

Action: ALL COUNTIES

- 3) All Counties agreed that they would make use of an online forum for Bridge Administrators. This forum will support the County Working Group initiative in allowing administrators to discuss ideas, and to share best practice and resources.

Action: DE

Darren thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 12:50pm