



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

AT West Midlands Bridge Club
ON Thursday 27th April 2017 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Roger Mallinson (RM)	Nottinghamshire	Clare Batten (CB)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Graham Brindley (GB)
EBU Board (Warks)	Darren Evetts (DE)	Oxfordshire	John Slater (JS)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shropshire	Linda Curtis (LC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Judith Currie (JC)

Chair: Clare Batten

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mike Thorley (Warwickshire) and Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire, they also advised that because of their concerns over governance Worcestershire would not be attending group meetings until after the EBU/County Chairman's meeting). The group noted with regret that Northamptonshire had formally withdrawn from this working group.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting 12 January 2017

Minutes of the previous meeting had already been agreed, by email, as an accurate record.

3. National and Regional Working Groups Value Proposition

At the last meeting DE was asked to prepare a mission statement/value proposition for the County Working Group. This document had been distributed to the members of this group who had been asked to discuss the paper under the headings of:

- What is it?
- Why does it matter?
- Why does it work well?

A discussion ensued to which all members present gave their views.

What is it?

- It brings together representatives from the different Midland counties;
- It gives members the benefit of hearing from people on the ground floor of other county organisations;
- It allows the sharing of ideas and cross collaboration;
- It enables the identification of those areas which need change and development;
- It is a group of volunteers who are at the forefront of the day to day running of county bridge.

Why does it matter?

- It is a conduit, via the national working group, between counties and the EBU. Several suggestions put forward from the national group had been accepted by the EBU board;
- It enables the counties to learn from each other regarding best practice and instigating new initiatives;
- It is a mechanism for driving and influencing positive development and potential change within the EBU:
 - The group discusses what needs to change or be developed;
 - The group suggests ways in which to affect positive change;
 - The group looks at the effectiveness of the implementation of its proposals.

Why does it work well?

- It is inclusive, in that all Midland counties can send representatives to the meetings, in fact the midlands has opened its doors to all southern counties;
- It enables counties to work together constructively and openly;
- It gives the opportunity to talk about bridge matters, whereas in a more formal meetings time is consumed with the business of the meeting to a greater extent;
- It fills a gap in bridge administration between the counties;
- It is driven from the bottom up and allows a sharing of ideas;
- It provides an input into the EBU's decision making;
- It enables ideas to be put into practice.

The question of responsibilities and as to how communications between the various parties (NCWG, RCWGs, EBU Board, Counties, Clubs, EBED, Club Liason, etc) are managed was raised. DE said that the next five year strategic plan could address the management of communication between the parties as a further development of the current plan. It was agreed that collaboration between different groups and committees was paramount.

It was acknowledged that some county committees appeared to operate a business as usual approach and dislike change and that was a common mantra. This, however, may not be conducive to bringing about positive and necessary changes to deal with the evolving demands of members.

Nottinghamshire have prepared a strategic plan, which will be presented at the AGM.

4. Update on Inviting Other Counties to Attend MCWG Meetings

- PS reported that he had contacted adjacent counties with mixed results. Some had expressed an interest; other had not replied. DE has emailed all the County contacts in the South to introduce Clare, who had invited them to join the Midlands Group. He suggested that contacting all the contacts ensures it gets to the right person. CB reported that some counties were keen to attend, but could not make the present meeting. It was agreed that minutes and agenda be sent out to interested parties well before the next meeting.
- CB (and Lesley Millet, Chair Northern Counties Working Group, will be speaking on the subject of the County Working Group at the County Chairmen's meeting in July. It was noted that, in some cases, the long distances involved would prove problematic, but Skype may be an option

5. County Finances

- CB had contacted other counties to ascertain how they spent some of their money. Some no longer gave prize money for major events(those resulting in qualification to an EBU final, Corwen, etc). The philosophy being that having the entry fee paid by the County, together with the glory of the achievement, was sufficient reward. Some counties paid some or all of the travelling expenses incurred for county matches; others had a system whereby county players contributed to a kitty at the start of the season.
- CB was of the opinion that money generated from the county component of universal membership payments should be used for the benefit of grass-roots players as well as the elite competitors. There was general agreement of this view and DE indicated that in his experience it is difficult to know how to support the developing "social player" as opposed to the "tournament player".
- Several members of the group gave examples of how their county had helped local clubs:
 - Oxfordshire had subsidized teaching in clubs;
 - Staffs & Shrops & Warwickshire had organized a basic directors' course involving movements and common rulings.
 - In several counties, members of the executive committee taught beginners and improvers.
- It was felt that it is part of best practice to look at where county funds are spent and have a plan to balance the spending between different levels of player..

6. Pairs League

JP reported that, in view of the falling numbers of top players participating in the DCBA county nights, due to the range of abilities of participants, he was considering starting a Pairs league in Derbyshire aimed at county team players from local counties. The difficulty of getting top players to turn out for county events was acknowledged as common to all counties.

DE mentioned that Warwickshire had run sessions (County Premier League) for county first team players, and those from neighbouring counties.

PS stated that Cheltenham Bridge Club runs a pairs league with eight pairs in each division, which can lead to top level competition for county pairs. Also county practice sessions had been run, where boards had been played and then discussed.

In Nottinghamshire, CB had organized masterclasses aimed at aspiring county players.

DB reported that Leicestershire had run four teaching sessions aimed at county players.

DE reported that Warwickshire were in the process of reorganizing their County Premier League with a view to it being an on-line (BBO) event. The event would be run over a five month period and will be open to county first team players and up and coming junior players.

He asked that if any counties were interested in participating they should forward names to him.

There was no need to play in every session and partnerships could vary, there will be a minimal fee per player

7. Social Bridge Competitions

JP reported that Derbyshire were considering running a Rubber bridge event and wondered if there were any EBU guidelines for such a competition. DE stated that the EBU had no remit regarding Rubber bridge and that Derbyshire could do what they wished in this respect.

8. Membership Database Update

With the new membership database up and running, JP queried whether it was now possible to ascertain the names of all members of DCBA clubs, including those members whose county of first allegiance was not Derbyshire. DE said we could relook at this in a couple of months, when the new system has settled in. **Action: DE**

9. Markham League

Mike Thorley had asked the committee to discuss how the different counties approached the selection of the Markham county teams. Should the strongest available players be picked or could the team be used to give younger/less experienced players the opportunity and experience of playing for the county? It was agreed that group members would discuss this with their county captains and report back at the next meeting. **Action: All**

10. AOB

DE asked if any county had any sponsorship. JS replied that Oxfordshire had playing cards provided by a local organization. DE suggested that it would be a good idea in the counties tried to raise sponsorship from local companies.

A discussion took place regarding the manner in which shareholders were chosen. In the vast majority of cases shareholders were elected at the county AGM and were active members of the county executive committee. It was hoped that all counties would adopt best practice on this issue, even if it meant a change in their constitution.

LC reported that Staffs & Shropshire had invited Bev Purvis, the EBU Club Liaison Officer, to meet with the chairs of local clubs. This had proved a fruitful and worthwhile meeting and LC recommended that other counties followed suit.

11. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 13 July 2017, 10.30am at WMBC.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm