



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP  
at Dunchurch Village Hall, Dunchurch, Rugby CV22 6PN  
on Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017 at 10.30 am**

**PRESENT**

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Northamptonshire	Nicky Bainbridge (NB)
		Nottinghamshire	Graham Brindley (GB)
EBU	Graham Smith (GS)	Oxfordshire	Robert Proctor (RP)
EBU/EBED	Bev Purvis (BP)	Oxfordshire	Lawrence Haines (LH)
EBU	Ron Millet (RM)	Warwickshire	Judith Currie (JC)
Gloucestershire	Jim Simons (JS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Hertfordshire	Gary Conrad (GC)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Leicestershire	Dave Pollard (DP)	Worcestershire	David Thomas (DT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Yorkshire	Lesley Millet (LM)
<b>CHAIR</b>	Clare Batten		

**The style and detail of the minutes below has proved beyond the group's ability to verify; it has been agreed that it is right to publish them but all readers must take care not to rely on the accuracy of what is found below. It is made available for guidance only.**

**ITEM 1 : Apologies**

Patrick Shields (Gloucestershire); Linda Curtis (Staffs & Shrops):  
Roger Mallinson (Derbyshire)

Whilst waiting for Clare Batten the Meeting then discussed

**ITEM 4 : Update from Robert Proctor re Oxford Bridge Festival**

RP read out his report.

*" We wanted to put on an event with a difference combining social and cultural activities with opportunities for bridge learning and play. On the cultural side we had morning visits to Christ Church and The Ashmolean, some time set aside for sightseeing in the rest of the city and the chance to go to St Giles Fair at the end of each of the first two days. Socially we got together on different days for a superb tea, a city centre cafe lunch and a wonderful college dinner, whilst the bridge encompassed an instructional quiz, two master classes, four seminars and five bridge sessions.*

*Is it any wonder that the organisers were tired by the end? But the general consensus amongst them was that "it had been a blast".*

*What of the participants? Feedback from those visitors who took the opportunity to have a bridge holiday in Oxford was universally positive despite the many little things that could have been improved and they urged us to do it again. Clearly seeing Oxford and staying in an Oxford college rated highly for them. For locals of course this was less of a draw, but they still had a lot of fun, were forgiving of our mistakes and thought a second year would go even better. One said we would have got far more takers if we had put greater stress on the fun element in our marketing.*

*For me the biggest challenge would be to do more to assist inexperienced players to come to terms with the rules and etiquette of competitive bridge and to accept the fact that, just as I would lose heavily to Andy Murray at tennis, they will come a cropper when up against players with much more bridge experience. Equally there appears to be much for the experienced player to learn about introducing social players to their competitive game - for example discussing detailed system thoughts with your partner when your opponents sit down against you can be very off-putting for beginners. Had we had more participants we could perhaps have split the field into two but was this really the solution? We had no master points, no NGS and only small prizes, so could participants not enjoy bridge for its own sake? Perhaps we should have had no scoring! A subject for a seminar I think."*

Then RP handed out the attached document summarising thoughts arising from our festival debrief:

Finally RP raised a few issues. I am concerned that what I said should not be misrepresented:

- 1) As explained above the problem in running an event to attract non-members is not only their lack of knowledge of competitive bridge etiquette but equally in his view the lack of self-awareness amongst the experienced players. They put the social players off just by their normal behaviour - so we have to educate them too. The seminar he thought we might have run at the start of the festival would have been as much directed at the experienced player as the inexperienced. Our members needed to be more tolerant in a non-competitive environment.
- 2) The EBU agreed that Oxford should use code 22 for our event. This code is apparently the equivalent county code to club code 11 and yet I pointed out that the descriptions are subtly different. If we are going to do more to promote bridge by running events for non-members we need to be encouraged to do so and running events without master points or NGS or magazine points but with P2P needs to be formally allowed for. Our festival and such events did not and would not need to offer master points - as wrongly recorded in the minutes.
- 3) RP also commented that I thought we should consider the P2P rates that currently apply and should be seeking to get a higher proportion of income from those with most interest in what the EBU does. RP suggested that people playing in national competitions should be contributing at a higher rate than people playing in county events which should in turn be higher than those participating in competitive club events and that there should be a fourth tier lower still for social events, as even for these people there are aspects of what the EBU does that they would value (e.g. international team support).

It had cost £150 each (including food and drinks) for four days. Oxford had lost £1,000 in running the event but money had been sent to the EBU. The amount of P2P was discussed.

**(Clare Batten arrived during this discussion.)**

GC felt it was not right to lose money yet the EBU received a profit.

Nowhere is it defined at what rate of P2P such social events should be fixed.

CB said that it was important to look at the long term benefit of such events.

## **ITEM 2 : Minutes of last Meeting**

(a) Paragraph 18

There had not been many responses. CB had received many suggestions but there was no consensus with everyone having different priorities.

(b) Paragraph 18

Nothing had been received, it will be going live in a few days.

## **ITEM 3 : Update from Graham Smith on Regional Working Groups**

GS said the report was in draft form and could not be circulated but he would go through the contents. This report will be going to the EBU Board.

GS listed five major items identified by the Task Team from their review of the issues raised at the County Chairs Conference:

1. Getting rid of "them and us" attitudes.
2. Reviewing methods of management and control.
3. Identifying recruitment and development priorities for clubs and counties.
4. Identifying benefits of affiliation for clubs.
5. Identifying benefits of EBU membership for members."

The first item to discuss was the issue of Management control.

Why should clubs affiliate and what are the benefits to members. There was a feeling that the EBU are trying to dominate everyone in Counties. There are two layers of management control, there is control of any organisation by the shareholders and separate management control. There is a better way of managing what we do now. Recruiting people at another level of membership – there are two levels of affiliation, £36 and **£72**, could there be a third category?

Benefits of affiliation include master points, NGS etc.

The current draft recommendations include bringing Aylesbury together with Counties and Clubs and get everyone round the table to redraft Terms of Reference. The Chief Executive and EBED **designated Board member** would be on County Working Groups and this would give direct access to Aylesbury resources. The EBU people would be ex officio members on the Working Groups and could input into full discussions but have no voting rights.

The EBU **are keeping the same number** of Working Groups from seven to five. Hereford has been consulted and agreed and to be integrated into the Midlands Working Group. The Isle of Man will go into Northern and the Channel Islands will go into South Western. There will now be the following Working Groups – Northern, Midlands, Eastern, South Eastern and South Western. Responsibility would go from Central to Regional level.

GS asked how members felt about the new set up. Each Region would have one vote. Costs would be controlled by Regions.

NB said Regional Groups should be more autonomous. She felt that it was going in the wrong direction with so many EBU people on the Groups. GS replied that they will be there to listen but not to vote. Their remit was not to write Terms of Reference.

NB said Terms of Reference are important and the Working Groups did not need a controlling structure.

RP said Terms of Reference should deal with the Group.

GS said Groups must be autonomous and should have Minutes, not notes, of Meetings.

RP said he was not criticising the EBU Board but Groups must be able to say what they felt. GS replied that things could be sorted out round the table.

It was felt the Groups were not able to criticise the EBU. NB said we send in paperwork to the EBU but this is not mentioned. It agreed there were several examples of this going on.

MW said this seemed to be a communication structure, not a controlling structure, and asked how quickly would it start.

GS asked how often Regional Groups met.

MW said meetings are the best way of communicating to get things done quickly. GS agreed that Regional Working Groups know what is needed.

RM said the Terms of Reference are fine for a fall back position. If four or five Working Groups have a view and can put that forward then there is immense pressure to get it done. It needs a letter or resolution, a discussion is all very well but there must be a firm request to get it done.

DT said Working Groups talk to each other outside their meetings.

GS said bad people achieve nothing, good people can achieve.

NB said there was a lot of history in not getting anything done and wants to see everything on paper.

GS felt there was broad agreement with the draft proposal. If this does not work within 18 months then the EBU will tweak it as this is not set in stone. There is no time scale.

RP asked about making a list of any proposals.

RM said the EBU would like people to attend the meeting and put in proposals. MT agreed that face to face discussion is the most effective.

CB said we would have liked someone from Aylesbury to be at meetings when discussing certain things so we could get a complete picture, GS replied Aylesbury are very keen to do this.

MW asked if there were any plans to get the other Regional Working Groups up and running. GS replied he was visiting Northern next week. He wants the proposal in time for the Shareholders meeting in November. There is recruiting in South East and South West. DP asked if they are going and GS said already there had been some interest expressed. The South East should come here to see how it works.

CB said it is difficult to get the right people interested to form the Groups.

RM said he was interested in membership. We are all facing declining membership. Yorkshire has several clubs on the edge of the precipice, existing members are getting older (80+) and the longer we leave it clubs will collapse. Perhaps the EBU will only have 200 clubs in a few years time. The Regional Working Groups should try to get membership.

GS talked about Club recruitment. Only about half of Clubs are affiliated and less than 20% of bridge players are EBU affiliated. MW said about five times more clubs are not affiliated and gave the U3A as an example. Some of the large clubs (eg in London) are not affiliated.

NB mentioned websites and pointed out that many non affiliated Clubs have websites.

GS suggested offering a “health” check to Clubs to see how good they are and what benefits they could gain from the EBU. The Regions should offer this to Clubs locally. It was pointed out that some Clubs do not want to see EBU personnel. Social Clubs are not interested in master points or NGS. Most Clubs will say there are no problems but the EBU could go to see how they could help.

Some Clubs are reluctantly affiliated and need to be reminded of the benefits of being affiliated.

NB said she has been trying for three years to get a Club affiliated. She added she would like them to come and give her a health check. She will work with BP.

GS said each County should have a nominated person for recruitment. Yorkshire does have a nominated person for recruitment.

RM said the most important thing which affects everyone else is that if we had a 10% increase in membership then P2P could be kept down.

GS said that we are trying to get younger people on board. The EBU **should consider producing** a bridge game for mobile apps. MW said we need a good product.

GS would like to have “beacon” Clubs to show how clubs should be run. We need to identify these beacon clubs from Counties to act as mentors.

CB said this shows the importance of meetings.

RM acknowledged that NB is doing the right thing in trying to attract the non-affiliated club into the EBU.

GS said that the EBU/EBED **should** run training for officials in clubs and this training would raise standards and EBED would ensure standards are maintained.

RP said that it is not just officials who should be trained. Counties get very little mention. One problem is getting volunteers for succession as it is very difficult to get volunteers.

GS said the EBU were going to reintroduce the half price offers for training. This was not successful last time but they will try again **with the proviso that 'no shows' and late cancellations are chargeable at full cost.**

IT support was then discussed in some detail.

DT said IT User Groups are a good idea.

RM said there is not a National IT group.

MW said that if there were IT user groups then they could put a paper through to the EBU detailing problems.

NB pointed out that we still did not know who the IT person is at the EBU. For example, there is a problem when someone moves from one County to another County. Their County of affiliation does not change and it is a difficult process to get this changed.

RM thinks there is a change of attitude in Aylesbury.

GS asked if we would like them to recommend an IT **User** Group, regions must have an IT contact.

CB suggested a Regional IT contact first.

It was pointed out that in the past, every time this has been recommended it has been turned down.

NB said the EBU reaction is incomprehensible. GS said the EBU has changed now.

GS said there is financial assistance for Clubs and Counties.

RM said there needed to be a programme of skills development. A club in the North is folding because of lack of people to do jobs. He is suggesting training courses for jobs other than secretarial, eg TD, scoring. Training should be done on site as it is better to go into the club and train four people at once.

(EBED) said that some clubs have shadowing of experienced people by inexperienced people.

GC said that two clubs in the South East had received grants (Parish and Lottery) to get projects started. Aviva are offering grants to small clubs.

RP said that in Oxfordshire there is £3,000 a year available to spend, they have to show how they are growing membership. It is not going to failing clubs. In Oxfordshire there are more growing clubs than failing clubs.

GS said that the EBU are trying to make the magazine "English Bridge" more important to players and to reflect the general membership. Players must be aware they are supporting the England team when paying P2P.

(EBED) suggested that new Regional Groups work with EBED to develop a database.

GS noted that some clubs employ a teacher and other clubs bring in self employed teachers.

NB knows four or five teachers who are full time professionals. She has a problem with the fact that some people pay £20 and are then “accredited” teachers whilst there are other teachers like herself who have gone through the full course but the difference in the term “accredited” is not noted.

GS then said that the above outlines their position.

RM said the Board thinks this is the best way forward and said our task is to believe in it and make it work. Having got ourselves successful we need to work with other Regional Groups when they are live and working.

DT said we believe in it and keep going.

### **The Chair then took over the Meeting.**

She suggested that items 5 to 10 were held over for discussion at the next Meeting.

### **ITEM 11 : Any Other Business**

- (a) JS said that in Items 5 – 10, he would not be putting forward Gloucestershire’s suggestion as it would be covered in Graham’s proposals but would like to come back to it at a later meeting.

GS replied that meetings are no longer prescriptive, Regions can set their agendas, etc.

- (b) IT pointed out that the EBU Five Year Strategy is coming to an end. BP agreed the whole thing needs to be looked at and Regions will have an input. They must not feel excluded from decisions.

CB said our strategy should tie in with EBU strategy. Regions have to be part of the process of setting up a new strategy.

- c) JP said they should be getting a new Shareholder in Derbyshire as their numbers have increased. Discussion took place about how many members are needed per Shareholder per Region.

### **ITEM 12: Date of next Meeting**

This should take place before the next Shareholders’ Meeting on 21 November and would be held on Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November to be held at 10.30 a.m. at Dunchurch Village Hall.

### **CB brought the Meeting to a close at 12.25.**

She thanked the EBU personnel for attending the Meeting.

GS thanked the Group for having him at the Meeting.