

# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 10.00am

## PRESENT:

Cumbria	Ken Johnston (KJ)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)		

**Apologies:** John Fairhurst (Hampshire)

**CHAIR:** Patrick Shields

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We welcomed Ken Johnston to our meeting. We approved the minutes from the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024 meeting. All past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website, and all meeting notes and papers presented, and a variety of papers distributed by the EBU, and more, are held on an MCWG OneDrive share; any attendee needs only to ask to be given access.

## ITEM 2: BRIDGE TEACHING

2. We discussed options for improvers as opposed to learners; the consensus was that this group are the keenest. **DB** reported that in Leicestershire monthly talks – using material from Andrew Robson – is proving popular. **IS** reported of beginners from weekend sessions last year keen on learning Stayman & Transfers. It was noted that many enjoy lessons without ever learning or remembering much. **DB** mentioned informal sessions where there was no scoring, but play and the chance to chat about the deals – and this was proving very popular.
3. **RP** reported that Oxfordshire had been looking at offering taster sessions as part of the BIABD Festival. The possibility of online taster sessions is also being investigated. It was suggested that a label of “try it out” might go down better than “taster”, and also that the emphasis should be more strongly on MiniBridge than on bridge itself. **SM** reported that the FFB (French NBO) had been very successful with an approach which got people playing instantly, and that Andrew Robson has a [regular schedule of taster sessions](#).
4. For the Festival in September, the OBA is also looking at a stand with four players playing bridge, and at creating a MiniBridge pack for schools. **SM** made the important point that beginners need to be sheltered from too much information as they start – otherwise the complexity of the game gets overwhelming.
5. In response to a question about use of the proceeds from events during the Festival, **PS** reported that the EBU was not taking any cut of the proceeds, and that the UMS collected for Festival-specific events will all go to CRUK.
6. In organising special events for the Festival, **SM** encouraged careful planning from a financial perspective and offered a spreadsheet (distributed to recipients of the minutes) which provides a template for doing that.

### **ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE**

7. **SM** reminded us of a variety of events on Realbridge that deserve advertising:
  - a. The new "[Generation Game](#)" (child + relative) has started and will continue with games on 7<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of April.
  - b. The [world-wide bidding competition](#) managed by Marc Smith (author of many books) and hosted by RealBridge continues with around 2000 entries this month. **PS** commented that (with Marc's permission) he has used various of the deals and the expert analysis in training sessions. **SM** pointed out that the variance between the expert and the popular choices gave an important message to TD's concerned with bidding judgement issues – that many people often do not bid as experts do.
  - c. The [EBL Online Women's Championship](#) takes place 7-9 June and it is open to as many teams from England as apply and pay the modest entry fee.

### **ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE**

8. **PS** reported that the latest attendance numbers for February, EBU-wide and adjusted for the month length, showed a 3% rise over 2023 and were 8% above the figures for 2022. **PC** commented that since there was (visibly) less being played online that indicated a positive picture for face-to-face club bridge.
9. **SM** noted that London CBA had recently cancelled its Championship Pairs as only four pairs were willing to play face-to-face. **KT** reported that to revive the OBA County Pairs, the style of qualification used by the EBU in the National Pairs (ie via a "normal" club game) had been adopted, with success. **PC** reported success in Staffs CBA in keeping County Pairs numbers up, but he was hearing moans about the length of the event; **PS** reported that his County Pairs Final had dropped to under 40 boards, as otherwise attendance would be much lower.

### **ITEM 5: MIDLANDS COUNTIES GAMES**

10. There was nothing to report on the Midlands Counties League.
11. MW has produced two papers analysing the position on the 9-High Swiss Pairs. The key messages were:
  - a. As MW steps down from running these, we need to consider whether they should continue (is there an over-supply of games?) or whether someone else will take over.
  - b. To avoid potential inefficiencies, we need to reconcile these events with the other NGS-restricted events and develop a more fully coordinated programme for this group of players.
12. We agreed that when an event is online, it easily becomes national in character and what we once had as a regional character (competing for your county) in these events has been eroded over time. **SM** made the point that branding was important, and that other NBOs (eg New Zealand) labelled restricted events differently – in their case "intermediate" as opposed to "open". The greater use of stratification of events in the USA was also noted as one way to give less experienced players a viable competition. Further analysis of our options is needed.
13. One suggestion made was that we consider having a 9-High division in the Midlands Counties League.

## **ITEM 6: MCWG TERMS OF REFERENCE**

14. **PS** had distributed an updated version of the TOR prior to the meeting, addressing the feedback received to date. It was agreed that one sentence relating to seeking funds from the EBU was not needed. The final version is provided as an Appendix to these minutes.
15. It was agreed that **JS**'s role for the group – engaging with EBU-central – would only be needed when an issue arose which needed a formal response.

## **ITEM 7: COUNTY UPDATES**

16. We heard at the meeting the following new events:

- i) Cumbria: **KJ** reported that face-to-face bridge is almost non-existent in Cumbria, and the county congress has been cancelled because of venue and TD issues.
- ii) Derbyshire: **JP** reported that no DCBA teaching is currently being offered although avenues to bring social players into club and county events is being worked upon. The start of the Summer Swiss Teams – following efforts by the CBA officers – has seen a 50% increase in numbers participating. The DCBA is finding it difficult to field teams for online MCL matches, and efforts to kindle interest in RealBridge have failed. The DCBA believes that formulating the competition criteria for the MCL 2024/25 event needs to be resolved soon.
- iii) Gloucestershire: **IS** reported that the only County Blue Point event has restarted this year and went well with 16 tables playing.
- iv) Leicestershire: **DB** reported that the Green Point Swiss at the start of March worked well with 15 tables and broke even; half the attendees were from the county, half outside. LCBA County competitions are still not obtaining the numbers desired.
- v) Northamptonshire: **FD** noted that NCBA is holding their AGM over Zoom, while Lincolnshire next door is holding their AGM face-to-face.
- vi) Oxfordshire: **RP** asked how CBAs and club were addressing the need – if any – to arrange to pay tax on investment income, given that interest rates have risen recently. **DB** reported that Ashby BC were talking to HMRC about this. [Some recent research suggests that the average CBA reserve is around £22k]
- vii) Worcestershire: **MW** reported that the WCBA had [four events already planned for the Festival of bridge.](#)

## **ITEM 8: AOB & DONM**

17. The next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024, now at 10:00am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

# **MIDLANDS COUNTIES WG: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

## **Role of the Group**

### Purpose/Goals

- To ensure that in their missions to promote bridge,
  - the constituent Counties and EBU-central<sup>1</sup> are adequately coordinated and coherent in their approach,
  - any activities best addressed at a regional level are well managed,
  - to do this by providing a means for meaningful dialogue between counties and between Counties and EBU-central.

### Context/Relationship to others

- The Shareholders' Meetings are how the EBU Board is appointed and directed, and the EBU Board & EBED Trustees direct and manage the staff at Aylesbury. The MCWG and these bodies are independent but share a mission to promote bridge, and therefore strive to be supportive of each other.

### Scope

- All aspects of organising bridge-related activities, including teaching and training.

## **How The Group Will Work**

### Authority

- The MCWG has no authority (and no-one has authority over it) but the MCWG achieves its effect through influence on its constituent Counties and on EBUcentral (the latter either directly or via the Counties acting as shareholders).
- The MCWG has the power to develop agreements amongst its constituent counties (subject to these not being at variance with some higher authority), but it does not have any power to enforce these. Compliance is up to each county.

### Membership

- The members are those Counties which the group (by a simple majority of the counties present) has deemed it appropriate to invite or who have applied for, and been approved for, membership.
- Such Counties as are agreed as members can send 1-2 (occasionally 3) representatives to any meeting.

### Meetings and Reporting including Governance

- The MCWG shall elect from its regular attendees someone to act as chairperson. The chair shall be responsible for ensuring that meetings are kept to order, that decisions are faithfully recorded and made available to group members for use within their counties, and that agreed actions are either carried out or re-assigned. The chair shall be re-elected at the first meeting of each calendar year.

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<sup>1</sup> the EBU consists of its playing members and counties, so we use the label EBU-central to refer the officials of the EBU and EBED organisations and the staff they employ.

- The MCWG shall elect from its regular attendees someone to manage the engagement of the MCWG with EBU-central and with the EBU Board and the EBED Trustees. This person shall be responsible for communicating to those parties any messages the group wishes to impart. Such messages might not be uniformly supported, and the strength of the support should be part of the message. The messages should be limited and succinct in order that the EBU and EBED can easily provide a response, which they are encouraged to do. The engagement lead shall be re-elected at the first meeting of each calendar year.
- EBU-central is encouraged to send a representative to all MCWG meetings. The EBU-central representative in an MCWG meeting should ensure that the counties represented adequately understand any issues which EBU-central wishes to bring to their attention and should support the MCWG's engagement lead in communicating outside the group.

#### Resources & Budget

- The group has no allocated budget but depends on the goodwill of the Counties involved and their volunteers to provide accommodation and to cover any expenses related to the meetings.

#### Accountability

- The MCWG is accountable to their members since the member counties participation is discretionary and they may withdraw their resources if they are dissatisfied.

07 April 2024