

Improving the Management of the Welsh Bridge Union

{Revised in the light of the discussion at March's Council. Small corrections July 2010}

Background

The Welsh Bridge Union is facing some big challenges.

Some general trends are clear. By and large, our membership is ageing. In consequence, the appetite for travel to bridge events is diminishing; many of those still travelling to events are more interested in enjoyable social events than in highly competitive ones. Many of our clubs are healthy, but again their social sessions are typically the most popular.

The WBU needs to respond. The WBU competitions and events need to be reviewed, revitalising or pruning less popular ones, improving others, perhaps introducing new more-social activities; fewer but better events should be the target. There probably needs to be more emphasis on services aimed at our clubs, and directly at our members.

Such developments don't just happen. The WBU needs a management structure with real authority which can take decisions carefully but quickly, and act on them.

Our present constitution gives the Council nearly all the executive authority; neither the President nor the Chief Executive (CE) has the power to make important decisions. This may have been appropriate in the early days of the WBU, but now Council is ill-constituted to wield this authority:

- Council is large (15 voting members, and 4 non-voting). This means that discussions are protracted and decisions hard to reach.
- There is a lack of continuity of membership, particularly of area representatives, so discussions get revisited and decisions get forgotten or reversed.
- Meetings happen only every 4 months. Attempts to communicate and take decisions by mail, email or telephone rarely succeed. Members' time and the significant cost preclude more frequent meetings.

The constitution prescribes a number of committees. Two of these advise Council, on Finance and on Tournament matters. They meet infrequently, which adds to the difficulty of taking prompt decisions.

Conscious of these issues, the Council meeting of 19th July set up a working party to make recommendations for reform of the management of the WBU. The members of this working party were Alan Screen (President), Jean Hand (Immediate Past President), Neville Richards (CE), Linda Greenland (Treasurer), Mike Tedd (Vice President) and Gwynn Davis (Council representative, East Wales). The working party met in Cardiff in August, and exchanged many emails, leading to this paper and the recommendations herein.

Following the helpful discussion at Council on 14th March, this paper and the associated suggestions for change to the constitution have been revised. The Finance Committee is retained, each area nominates one member for the Management Committee, and the proposal to change the Presidential term is confined to oblivion.

The Proposals

The Working Party recommends that most management authority should be passed to a smaller group which can meet more often than the present Council.

Equally, however, the WBU must avoid any danger that the new group might become a self-perpetuating cabal, out of touch with the concerns of our Areas and their members.

It is thus proposed that a new much smaller *Management Committee* be established as follows:

- At most eight members – up to four¹ Officers (the President, the CE, the Treasurer, and the National Tournament Organiser) and one member nominated by each of the Area Associations for the approval of Council².
- Areas should strive to achieve continuity on the Management Committee although this cannot be fully prescribed in the constitution. Each area will nominate its member annually for the approval of Council, with replacement of a nominated member only when he or she is unable to take part in the committee for a longish period.
- ‘Meeting’ about once a month. Rather than always meeting face-to-face, the group should use modern technology of email, telephone conferencing, etc to save time and money, and be able to act more quickly. Face-to-face meetings might only need to be once a year.
- To ensure *transparency*, the Management Committee should report regularly on its activities by publishing monthly reports (even when there is no business to report) on the WBU website, and by annual reports to Council and to the AGM.

The present Council should be retained, as a democratic body representing all the areas. Its management powers would be passed to the Management Committee. It would have these main functions, which it should be possible to perform with one annual face-to-face meeting³:

- approving the nominated members of the Management Committee;
- appointing committees, including the Selection Committee and the Laws and Ethics Committee;
- appointing the CE;
- receiving the Management Committee’s reports;
- advising the Management Committee, particularly on matters of concern to the Areas and clubs;

¹ It is recognised that one or two of the officers might not want to participate in the Management Committee, in which case one of the members should take special responsibility for coordinating with such an officer.

² Note that members may be on the Management Committee for more than one reason. We could well have one person occupying two offices (as has happened in the past). There is also the possibility that the President or one of the officers is about to retire from that role but the Area would like their service on the Management Committee to continue; in such a case, nominating the officer to the Management Committee would have the desired effect.

³ It would be very sensible for Council to meet at least twice in the first year of the new arrangements, to discuss how the Management Committee is performing.

- making recommendations to the AGM on such matters as the Constitution and Rules of the WBU;
- advised by the non-officer members of the Management Committee, negotiating the duties remuneration etc for the CE and honoraria for other officers.

The Tournament and Master Point Committee should be abolished, and its functions passed to the Management Committee. The committee meets infrequently, and lacks management authority. The useful role that this committee has played is to ensure that area concerns are voiced, and so an obligation should be placed on the NTO to consult his or her area equivalents.

Proposed Changes to the Constitution

To effect these changes to the management of the WBU, a number of changes to the Constitution are proposed. This section should be read in conjunction with the version of the draft constitution showing the proposed changes, dated March 2010.

- The Management Committee is introduced in 8.4.1.1a. Its nature and its duties are described in the new section 8a.
- In 8.3 (Meetings of Council) the frequency of meetings is changed from “at least twice a year” to “at least once a year, including a meeting within two months of the Annual General Meeting of the union”.
- Section 8.6 is changed so that Council is advised on honoraria etc by the disinterested members of the Management Committee, rather than by the Finance Committee. In 13.1 an obligation is placed on the NTO to consult his or her area equivalents.
- Sections 8.4.1.3 and 17 are deleted to abolish the Tournament and Master Point Committee.
- Sections 8.1 (Council Introductory) and 8.5 (Powers of Council) are revised to recognise the movement of authority to the Management Committee.
- Sections 11.1.4 & 11.1.5 (Treasurer) are changed to reflect the Treasurer’s reporting to the Management Committee.

While reviewing the Constitution, the Working Party observed a few places where other more minor improvements should be made. These are:

- Section 3.2 should be changed to reflect the long-standing requirement that clubs communicate their membership and subscriptions to the Membership Secretary, not the Treasurer.
- After 6.2.2 (in Agenda for AGM) there should be mention of electing the Auditor for the following year.
- 6.2.3a and 14a: Provide for the election of, and define the role of, the Honorary Membership Secretary (currently not mentioned in the Constitution).
- In 8.2 (Composition of Council), there is a rather confusing mixture of officers elected by the AGM, representatives of Areas and the immediate Past President. It is proposed to separate these categories of member.

- 8.2.2.7: The Auditor should not be a member of Council, to maximise his or her independence, so this sentence should be deleted.
- 8.2.3.1 (Appointment of CE) mentions ‘employment’ and ‘salary’, which preclude other forms of engagement and payment. Both 8.2.31 and 8.6 should be reworded to avoid this problem.
- 8.4.2. The L&E committee asked for this requirement (that they invite the President and CE to all meetings) be relaxed to ‘at least one formal meeting each year’, since it is impracticable to invite to all their (often less formal) meetings. This sensible change may as well apply to Finance and Selection as well. The President and CE are happy with this.
- The description of the President in 9.1 needs a little refinement in the light of our having a CE. The President is the principal *elected* officer, but the CE is the chief *appointed* officer.
- Section 9.2 (loss of President) should add “resignation” to the ways the WBU might lose its President. Also, the phrase ‘last surviving immediate Past President’ needs improving.
- Section 10 (Honorary Secretary) – these duties are now undertaken by the Chief Executive, with the assistance of a minutes secretary for Council. This section should be changed to describe this and other aspects of the CE’s duties.
- In Section 13 (National Tournament Organiser), the responsibility for producing the annual competition brochure (the Journal) should be deleted, and the CE given the duty of arranging it. This reflects current practice, and does not preclude the NTO doing it if this is agreed with the CE.
- Section 14.1.2 mentions ‘rating cards’; it would be clearer to refer to these as ‘ranking certificates’.
- In 21.1, the period of notice for changes to the constitution is changed to 28 days, to match the period given in Section 7.3.
- Various changes are suggested to remove any implication that members are male. For example in 4.1.3 (Direct Memberships) “he” should be replaced by “he or she”. Other modifications are suggested to 4.1.1, 7.1, 12.1.2, 18.2.1.3 and 18.2.4.2.

Finally, when the General Meeting has agreed what changes should be made to the Constitution, relevant sections should be renumbered appropriately. For example, the introduced section 8a should become section 9, the current section 9 should become 10, and so on.