



Scottish Bridge Union
SCIO SC051361

Registered Office: Summit House, 4-5 Mitchell St, Edinburgh, EH6 7BD

Minutes of the 2nd AGM Tuesday 23rd May 2023 1900hrs
Recorded on Zoom

1. Notice of Meeting was read by the Chair

Attendees : Alan Goodman (Chair), Bill Aitken, Brian Allen, Neil Archibald, Mike Ash, Mike Baron, Roy Bennett, Ann Binder, Charles Briggs, Anne Brodie-Allan, Hazel Brown, Damien Byron, Anne Coles, Barry Cooper, Laura Cooper (Treasurer, non-Member), John Dick, Allan Downie, Gavin Easton, Charmian Entwistle, Marina Evans, Kathleen Fallon, Joan Forsyth, Emily Garden, Sarah Gunn, John Hamilton, Mike Hammett, Margaret Hodder, Mike Hodder, Pamela Hogan, Ian Hunter, Ilene Hunter, Alan Kennedy, Thomson Kerr, Joan Lees, Ann Lyon, Elizabeth Lewis, Angus Macdonald, Anne Macgregor, Peter Mackay, Margaret Mackie, Fiona MacLauren, Jean Macleod, Ileen Macgregor, Eddie McGeough, Mike McGinley, Liz McGowan, Andrew McIntosh, Finlay Marshall, Gordon Milne, Stewart Morris, Ian Patrick, Anne Perkins, Sue Pollard, Eilidh Rennie, Tom Robertson, Bill Ross, Marc Shearer, Harry Smith, Kevin Strathern, Andrew Symons, Anne Symons, Iain Taylor, Juliet Vivers (Minute Secretary), Bob Wales, Ann Wickens, Tim Wickens, David Wiseman, Sandra Wiseman (68)

2. Apologies : Graham Bullock, Debbie Butler, Stuart Challinor, Chris Cosgrove, Maureen Findlay, Fiona Greenwood, David Hatton, Charles Jackson, Steve Male, John Di Mambro, Rosemary Millar, Annette Monaghan, Julia Palmer, Jill Russell, Julia Swann, Janet Unsworth, Janet Witheridge (17)

3. Minutes of the 1st Annual General Meeting and Matters Arising
Approved

4. Trustees Report presented by Alan Goodman, Chair

It remains a big challenge to ensure that our bridge clubs can survive and flourish. We recently appointed Marina Evans as Club Support Manager with the mandate to work with and support those clubs that need our help. She has already met or spoken with 24 clubs in the last few months, introducing or fostering at the same time a sense of a Bridge community in Scotland working as one.

As we recover from the pandemic, we must accept the changes to the bridge landscape. Ensuring members have access to both face to face and online bridge, inevitably creates conflict where table numbers face to face reduce overall, in competition with the plethora of online tournaments available 24/7 across the world. Consequently, it is imperative for the survival of clubs that both the SBU and our clubs create a balance of tournaments and activities that provide the required social interaction that members value.

The changed landscape has also had a significant impact on our financial management as income from congresses, traditional tournaments, masterpoints and subscriptions have all fallen over the last few years. Although we have healthy reserves, much of these are already earmarked to cover known capital expenditure, contingencies, and other planned projects. They will also be required to fund short term deficits for a limited period. At the same time, we have reacted by reducing overheads to a minimum, relying almost exclusively on hard working volunteers to deliver what members need. Inevitably this creates a strain on our resources and is not sustainable longer term, so increased expenditure must be anticipated, and increases in income must be sought.

Over the last 12 months there has been a lot of changes in the Operations teams, allowing more to be done to improve what we are able to deliver. It is also great to see new initiatives such as Play and Learn, and Café bridge, both of which have resulted in more people learning to play bridge and hopefully creating new club members.

There has also been a complete overhaul of our international team training and selection processes, both for juniors and adults. This is expected over time to make Scotland more competitive in international competition. Hopefully we can attract more school children and university students to the game, which will be of benefit to the bridge community longer term.

Although Mempad has served us well over several years, it needs to be upgraded. It is still the most viable and cost-effective means of running a complex masterpoints system, so is being upgraded to make it easier to use. This work will be completed in time for the new season in September.

With so many initiatives being planned, I'm delighted to announce that Tom Robertson, formerly assistant manager at New Melville Bridge Club, has agreed to take on the position of General Manager from 1st May. It is a flexible part time role to work closely with the Operational Management Team and Board of Trustees.

Congratulations to Liz McGowan who was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to bridge over many years. Liz is the first Scot to be awarded an honour for services to bridge.

Although we are undergoing massive change, we must continue to work together, so we can all continue to enjoy the game that we love.

Thanks to all our volunteers who have worked tirelessly over the last year. There is no election of Trustees this year because although Mike Ash is standing down there are no nominations to replace him.

5. Resolutions

129 Proxy Forms have been received and thanks were given to Alan Kennedy, the Proxy Officer. Two nominees were asked to count the votes placed in the 'chat box'. Those present who had previously sent in a Proxy Form were reminded not to vote in person.

5.1 **That all SBU National Events which were in place prior to the pandemic be played face-to-face with effect from 1 September 2023. Proposed by Bill Ross, Seconded by Emily Garden.**

Bill Ross feels online bridge is ruining bridge. He regards it similar to VAR in football. Some think it is wonderful, some think it is ruining football. He sees no reason why we cannot have all national competitions face to face, qualifying rounds through to finals. He has read the Board's comments in the Appendix and does not necessarily agree with them.

The Chair commented the Board is in favour of getting back to face as face as much as possible. Since there are over 30 national events, the Board favours that all the major events are face to face

but we have the flexibility for some of the events to be played on line.

The Resolution was Rejected 41 For v 91 Against, a clear majority.

(Meeting Votes : 1 Abstention, 11 In Favour, 38 Against. Proxy Votes : 30 In Favour & 53 Against)

There is clearly a mixed view on the subject; a difference of opinion.

5.2 That the people suspended during Covid for online offences be permitted to play in a Club. Proposed by Ann Wickens, Seconded by Rosemary Millar.

Ann Wickens asked if it was too late to amend the resolution so it should apply in the last year of the ban, not the entire ban. It was decided this was not possible as 129 Proxy Votes had already been placed.

Ann read out her statement. Like all of you here, I have no time at all for people who cheat. Firstly, I would like to make it clear that none of the three people who were banned by the SBU were directly aware of this proposal. They have however been informed and thanked us for our support and interest in their situation. None of the three will be allowed to play until the Spring of 2025 which is a long time yet. Also, apologise for the Secunder being absent because she is currently at a 90th birthday party for her husband.

The Law & Ethics team had an unenviable task of upholding the standards that our international teams were trying to achieve and showing that the SBU was firm and determined to holt cheating.

During lockdown we were all scrambling to learn new technologies and new ways of playing online bridge. Despite training, even some of our Directors were not aware of some of the rules. Infringements did take place, some minor, some unwittingly and some may have appeared more serious than they were.

We, as Members, must accept the rulings of our Disciplinary Team and I do not envy their task. I am asking that we find a way of applying Rule 3.3 of our own general principles. Rule 3.3.

Rule 3.3 states that where an allegation against a Member is found to be proven, the SBU will endeavour to support the rehabilitation within the bridge community. This will set if the CP (Concerned Person) has admitted their guilt and expressed remorse.

I would also like to point out that you cannot currently express remorse without admitting you have intentionally cheated. I do not think any of the three thought they were intentionally cheating.

I furthermore hope that by supporting this motion you encourage the SBU to re-consider how they apply the general principles, in particular 3.2. The SBU believes it has an obligation to its members to minimise unacceptable conduct and, as an NBO with an obligation to investigate unacceptable conduct.

As a young teacher, a nugget of advice given to me by a very experienced teacher was, when you notice trouble arising, have a friendly word with the instigators, make sure they know their behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. If this continues, punish hard. This to me is fully in line with the WBF recommendations for a first offence.

Here in Scotland a team are gathering information over many months and a tribunal results. If found guilty the CP is sentenced to a ban and the bans have been fairly long bans. It is like issuing an immediate Red Card on the football field. We are treating all players like top class players. Most club players have a reasonable knowledge of face to face etiquette and they have gradually learned and become more aware and practice online etiquette.

We must be clear what our aims are. Is it to stop cheating? Friendly advice will normally achieve this. If the aim is to set examples by issuing harsh sentences, thereby warning our own members and showing our international partners we are serious about stopping cheating, we all lose by this approach. The offenders suffer mental health problems and we lose competitors and administrators for our clubs and districts. I do not believe our current code of practice follows completely the WBF and EPL guidelines. I am disappointed that these have not been reviewed in the last year and we are still being promised a future review.

The past few years have been difficult years for our members and clubs and they have also been difficult for those in power and

influence in the SBU, especially in view of the enormous changes that the SBU has undergone. Our clubs need members and members who are prepared to contribute.

All three of the suspended people by the SBU were major contributors and none of this has been taken into consideration. In fact, it may have acted against them.

I am asking that we consider the difficulties of the times and apply our general principles 3.3 tonight and later 3.2 in order to avoid getting into situations unless they repeat bad behaviour. Fellow members, we are all responsible for the actions of the SBU and all have to abide by its rules and I hope we can influence them. I ask that you support the motion tonight.

The Chair responded:

There are five SBU members currently suspended. One married couple were found guilty of cheating to the comfortable satisfaction of the Disciplinary Tribunal. They chose not to attend the Disciplinary Tribunal hearing despite being encouraged to do so. They had the option to appeal but chose not to do so.

One person was found guilty of self-kibitzing and subsequently had the length of their ban reduced on appeal. They had the option to seek arbitration but have not done so.

In line with what happens throughout the bridge world, those found guilty of either online or face to face cheating have sanctions applied to both online and face to face bridge. Differentiation between sanctions was not sought at appeal.

It is a condition of membership of the SBU that members agree to the Disciplinary procedures and processes referred to in the Disciplinary Code. The SBU Disciplinary Code dictates that the decisions which follow our internal procedures, including any appeal, are final; the only scope left to those sanctioned is to go to arbitration.

The other two members (and I know Ann wants to exclude these) are a married couple who had sanctions levied by the English Bridge Union. We have no powers to change the sanctions levied by the EBU.

The proposer has criticised SBU for not complying with its own Disciplinary Code section 3.3 regarding rehabilitation, suggesting there is a problem in that the concerned person cannot express remorse if they do not believe they were intentionally cheating.

It is accepted by the bridge world that self-kibitzing is regarded as cheating. SBU has made this clear to its members. If you repeatedly self-kibitz, that action is intentional and is clearly cheating. If you actively look at all four hands, or you exchange information about each other's hand illegally whilst playing, you are deemed to be cheating. Whether you use the information or not, is irrelevant. It is a matter of opinion whether the bans levied were excessive. The WBF sanctions quoted by the proposer are those from WBF issued in 2015 applying primarily to face to face bridge. We have followed recent guidelines of the EBL and other NBOs and continue to review whether they are reasonable and proportionate. Finally, I would remind members that the organisation's Charitable Purposes are:

To promote, protect and support, the development of the sport of bridge within Scotland (and internationally).

The SBU is committed to preventing the occurrence and recurrence of cheating. We believe that passing this Resolution will seriously undermine those efforts, and may be questionable in terms of our Charitable Purpose.

There were no questions or clarification required from the floor about process or protocol.

This Resolution was Rejected by a significant majority, 49 v 115.

(Meeting Votes : Abstention 5, In Favour 4 and 35 Against. Proxy Votes : Abstention 4, In Favour 45 and 80 Against.)

The Chair confirmed that the Board is actively reviewing the disciplinary process and will continue to do so.

5.3 That the Annual Membership Subscription be £12 from 1 September 2023. Proposed by the Board of Trustees.

The Chair commented that many questions had been raised about the reasoning for the proposed increase, so a presentation was given prior to the vote.

Presentation by Sarah Gunn. (Attached separately.)

Questions and Answers followed.

Q : Concern expressed that we had yet to see the Statement of Accounts. Also has consideration been given towards increasing the charges for SBU competitions.

A : The Statement of Accounts is for the year ending September 2022. This proposition is about generating income for the following year 2023/2024. A draft Budget has been prepared which indicates that an increase in membership fees is necessary, but these have yet to be signed off by the Board, and too detailed to be shared with the membership.

There has been significant resistance over the years towards increasing charges for SBU competitions.

Q : It was suggested the proposal be modified to provide a difference between direct and affiliated membership.

A : The proposal is that the fee should be the same. There appears to be no evidence that equalising the fee will have a detrimental effect on club membership numbers.

Q : It was asked how we compare with other nations.

A : We are by far the lowest subscription rate compared to any other country. Collections methods also vary. England (EBU) charges around £35. We rely upon Volunteers which significantly reduces our overheads, compared to the EBU who has a paid staff of over 20.

Hamilton Bridge Club collects its fees in April. It is agreed that Clubs like this, who have collected the fees earlier in the year, will not be out of pocket. The Board will have to talk to the individual clubs concerned.

Q : Previously, the old SBU set their fee a year ahead. For future reference this may have to be considered; that it be more than 3 months notice.

A : We are in a changing, unstable world. Running an organisation which sets its fees 15 months in advance makes the budgeting

process difficult. This point will be considered, although the Board will endeavour to give as many months' notice as possible.

Observation: Aberdeen BC set their membership fee and ask for the SBU fee at the same time and recommend other clubs do the same.

The Motion was carried 97 v 31

**(Meeting Votes : 40 in Favour and 3 Against.
Proxy Votes : 57 in Favour and 28 Against)**

6. Statement of Accounts

Sarah Gunn commented that it is confusing that these accounts are just for a six month period, from the beginning of the new organisation 1 March 2022. Questions at a later date are welcomed.

The Accounts were Adopted. Proposed by Allan Downie and Seconded by Margaret Hodder.

7. Election of Independent Examiner. Re-election of Henderson Loggie was approved. Proposed by Allan Downie and Seconded by Margaret Hodder.

8. Trophy Winners and International Representation are published on the website.

See <https://www.sbu.org.uk/about/resources/agm-information/sbu-winners-list-2023> and the separately attached Word document.

9. Any Other Competent Business

Tabled Questions for the AGM were read aloud as follows.

Lesley Davidson

The EBU have organised insurance for affiliated clubs to cover their contents which includes expensive IT equipment, but thus far the SBU have failed to follow suit. Do SBU intend to organise a similar arrangement? Many clubs rent venues from organisations who do not charge for storage and are therefore not covered by the venue's insurance.

Answer

In the past, we believe that getting relevant insurance has been difficult, but we shall pursue this again. We have been in touch with

the EBU and await details of what they are able to provide to their clubs.

Stewart Morris (4 questions and 3 comments)

Finances - Accounts to 31 August 2022

Q1 - Subscription Income: The Income & Expenditure Account (page 16) shows subscription income at £16,868 yet the Annual Report indicates there are 4791 members. This would equate to a minimum subscription income (assuming all members were paying £8) of £38,328. Can you explain the apparent shortfall?

Answer

This was dealt with under item 6

Q2 - Expenditure: The outlay of "Euro team costs" and "Venice Cup" costs aggregate to almost £36,000 which represents 40% of SBU total expenditure. Is it appropriate for such a large percentage of the Annual Income to be outlaid for the benefit of so few Members?

Answer

We believe the expenditure is appropriate to meet the SBU's agreed objectives.

It should be noted that the timing of the Euros and Venice Cup both took place in the second half of the "usual" financial year- so to get a true proportion of costs it is worth considering the full 12 months expenditure of £140,000 (which includes 6 months to 28/2/22 for old SBU) gives a proportion of 25%.

The amount of time and effort that goes into supporting over 99% of our members far outweighs that which supports our international activities. Critically, nearly all the organisation's efforts are provided by volunteers at minimal cost, whereas travel, entry fees and accommodation for international activities is costly. If we were unable to rely on volunteers, our overall costs would increase dramatically, and the outlay would be a significantly lower percentage of our overall expenditure.

Q3 - The Balance Sheet as at 31 August 2022 suggests that the SBU is holding funds in the order of £250,000. Is it necessary for a charity that does not own property to hold such a large level of funds? I would've thought funds/reserves in the order of £100,000 would be sufficient?

Answer

This was dealt with under item 6.

Subscriptions**Comment**

A proposed 50% increase in subscriptions seems excessive – particular in a “cost of living” crisis impacting many Members. Some Clubs, particularly those that own or rent/hire their premises, are going to have to increase their Membership fees. If the Resolution is approved this likely curtails the level of the increase struggling Clubs can reasonably look to levy.

Q4 - I don't understand why Subscription Fees for affiliated Club members and those who are applying to the SBU direct are being equalised. Surely this will discourage many people from actually joining or continuing their membership of a Bridge Club. In addition, individual Clubs have the administrative expense of collecting subscriptions on behalf of the SBU. If they did not do this, this would likely cause an administrative headache for the SBU in additional cost. Can you detail the Trustees' rationale in taking this approach?

Answer

We can see no reason for club members to change to Direct members simply because the SBU fees are identical. Although, of our current 282 Direct members, 121 have their main address outside Scotland, some Direct Members have more recently also become members of affiliated clubs.

One of the reported reasons for this apparent anomaly is that such members reverted to Direct Memberships when their Clubs closed in the last 2/3 years. They then subsequently have since found other local affiliated Clubs to join. One or two have already indicated that they shall name the affiliated Club as their Home Club next season and cease to be a Direct Member

We think this trend of Direct Members joining affiliated Clubs may increase where clubs have rules about how often a non-member can play before joining.

The most obvious reason for current club members to resign is that they no longer use or value what is being offered by their club.

Clubs have been collecting SBU subs for many years and processes are already in place. All Clubs collect SBU subs at the same time as their own. Membership Secs or their equivalent report that they see this as no problem.

However, such submissions still require a lot of reconciliation work each year for SBU, both with regard to the payment itself and the information detail held on Mempad. Although ultimately the information is the individual Members' responsibility, it is generally updated at the time of Subscription submissions by the Club official.

Collecting Subs directly is a much less onerous administrative task once processes have been set up.

There is no obvious reason to have differential subscription, but we will review this decision in the light of experience.

Support for Individual Bridge Clubs

Comment

While BBO was an invaluable tool to enable the game's continuance during the COVID-19 pandemic I believe the game is best played on a face-to-face basis. I would encourage the SBU to look to promote and encourage as far as possible, more face-to-face play throughout its Membership.

Answer

The Board's stated view was given in its response to Resolution 5.1

Comment

Last July and August the SBU arranged for Angus McDonald and Christine Walker to provide Tournament Director courses around the country including the one at the New Melville Bridge Club and which was most useful. It would certainly be helpful to my Club (NMBC) if the SBU would again run such courses as NMBC are looking to increase the number of face-to-face tournaments during the coming year and require more volunteer Tournament Directors within our cohort to achieve this. I'm sure many other Clubs will be in a similar position.

Answer

We are delighted to hear that the course was a great success. Angus has been asked to liaise with you.

Dave Wiseman

Q - Will the Board of Trustees consider asking the Competitions Committee to reinstate the prize money for the competitions played since New Year and, at the very least, can members be allowed to express their views regarding prize money specifically with a view to having it brought back for the 2023/24 season?

Answer

The question has been referred to the Competitions Committee for a response. The chair invited any comments from those attending:

Last year's survey indicated that only 1% of members mentioned that prize money was a factor that motivated them to play in national competitions.

A differently phrased question may have received a different answer. It is appreciated that had the question specifically asked whether we should have prize money, the percentage may have been higher.

It was pointed out that SOL, Bronze League and some major competitions (such as The Winter Fours), still have prize money of a fixed amount.

The view was expressed that prizemoney is unfair in that the weaker players are subsidizing the stronger players, and that distribution of prizemoney by bank transfer is time consuming to administer.

The decision to stop prize money was taken mid-season because this was acted upon as a reaction to the survey results. The decision on prize money had been mentioned in a Newsletter.

Secretary of Glasgow Bridge Centre

I would like it noted that the SBUs continuation of online events is detrimental to Scottish bridge clubs.

A vote of Thanks was given to the Chair

The meeting closed at 2120hrs