

I am saddened to present a downbeat Report but I feel you should be aware of the current position of the WBU

I should say that I have already shared my opinions with the Management Committee and received its whole hearted support.

Our organisation, your bridge union, has reached a life threatening crisis

First some facts:

1 We are trying to please and appease 3 separate groups or factions within the Union. There is a core group of tournament players who want to compete outside their clubs at Area and national level and attend congresses. There are many so called social players (although they must be competitive if they have bothered to learn to play duplicate bridge ) and then there are the international players who have greater ambitions and skills and are willing to stand up and be counted outside the Principality. Understandably each of these group members are really only interested in their own expectations of the WBU. UNFORTUNATELY THE OLD SAYING THAT YOU CANNOT PLEASE ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME RINGS ONLY TOO TRUE HERE

Fact 2 We aspire to be a professional organisation but are hampered by insufficient and steadily decreasing financial resources; you have already heard about that in our financial report.

3. Our membership is ageing to the extent that 60 year olds are considered "young" Many are reluctant to compete in and travel to competitions and congresses or even to stay away from home. This has resulted in decreased income and the abandonment of some elements such as qualifiers and is linked to Fact 4

4 A similar decline in volunteers willing or able to take on roles at every level from Club to National. Two Areas are currently having difficulty in recruiting Officers and it is not easy in the other Areas with the old hands reluctantly staying in post.

5. When I was previously President 7 years ago the WBU was a very different organisation. We were much stronger financially and resting on the disproportionate cushion of income from the BGB. In 2010 the new structure was put in place with a slimmed down Management Committee as the Executive body replacing the somewhat unwieldy Council. Initially it worked well but now in my opinion it is struggling. Members work hard but there is just too much to do. Many more brickbats are now received and create more work in solving them Our Chief Executive does far more than was originally envisaged. Our officers also do more than they expected to do. The absence of volunteers will ultimately result in more paid workers. The EBU has 18 salaried workers.

So how do we resolve these dilemmas? It is not difficult to realise that we must increase income. Our subscription is pathetic when you compare the £6-00 payment with the price of a cup of coffee or a pint beer let alone the levy that other national sporting and social bodies e.g. golf, tennis, angling, Rotary and Soroptimists raise from their members. It has not been helped by the fact that it has not been increased despite the increased cost of everything in some 16 years. This is poor financial management.

Unless we can turn things around the WBU faces a very uncertain future and that is an understatement.

Turning to the more positive items or the more usual cosy and comfortable part of the report

So what has been done apart from general management since the last AGM? A lot of time has been spent on the suggested changes to the Constitution. It has featured on the agenda of all 6 of the Management Committees held since I took over in November.

One of the urgent tasks we had was to re-establish contact with every member be they social, tournament or international sorts. We were fortunate in finding a willing Editor for our Newsletter that had not been published since 2013. The first edition came out in January. It created much interest. Most reaction was favourable but criticisms were to be expected and they came although on the whole it was well received. The Management Committee wanted a better balance of interest within the content and hopefully that has been achieved in Issue 2. We had hoped to distribute that today but unfortunately there has been a technical problem with printing the suit symbols and it is not ready. The Editor decided to include virtually all contributions in issue 2 and there were many, a reaction to reaching an oasis after a trek through the desert. Inevitably contributions will decline but please do send in your thoughts and ideas laced with humour. There has been continuing criticism of the absence of a paper Journal. However this can be viewed on line. In particular Competition rules and Masterpoint rankings are lengthy and expensive to print. You may ask how much is the Newsletter costing. Our Chief Executive has struck a very good deal with a mid-Wales printer and it is so important that we reach out to all members in our three core groups. Hopefully it is part of a reply to the question What does the WBU do for us bearing in mind the differing expectations mentioned in Fact 1. I must thank our Editor for the good work that she has done. Another reply to that question is that we have now provided full insurance for all officers and clubs; this includes legal cover costs should anyone sue a club and its officers.

At the last Management Committee in May, it was agreed to set up a matching money fund for small grants to be made available to affiliated Clubs.

We have set up a working group to consider future strategy for the WBU.

Thanks are due to all my colleagues on the Management Committee, to Margaret Richards who has minuted most of those meetings and particularly to Neville Richards who has such a variety of topics to work through and takes criticism on the chin.

Do you wish to ask any questions on my report?

JGJ 1sr June 2016