

GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Gloucestershire Hockey Association – Committee briefing on the England Hockey AGM Resolution on Governance Final Proposals document.

Prepared by: Ian Harvey, Shaun Cullimore

Reference England Hockey document:

File name "AGM Final Resolution Proposal.pdf"

A Structure Fit for the Future – Recommendations for the 2020 AGM Updated December 2019

Following a review of the EH AGM Resolution on Governance outcome final proposal document it is felt that GHA should decide on a common position for casting a vote at the EH AGM on 17th March 2020. The Committee meeting on 25th February will decide this, but ahead of that meeting set out below are some thoughts for consideration by the Committee.

The Vision and Principles outlined in the document seem sensible and fair and are set out below. The remainder of this review focuses on the Executive Summary and then the detail of the proposals and any concerns identified. The original document though has 71 pages and there is considerable repetition as well as further expansion of concepts with much overlap between sections. This makes review very difficult so the commentary that follows is a summary of aspects of concern collated from many different sections of the document.

VISION

A robust governance structure that allows for maximum participation in hockey within a safe environment underpinned by an organisational structure that ensures consistency, accountability, transparency and communication at all levels.

PRINCIPLES

Seven overarching principles of future good governance in hockey were established by the Working Group. These principles are derived directly from the results of the consultation process. They are as follows:

- 1.** As National Governing Body, England Hockey has overall responsibility for the sport in England
- 2.** There is a fundamental role for local organisation and decision making
- 3.** Clarification of accountability of all organising bodies to their stakeholders and ultimately to England Hockey is required
- 4.** Simplification of structure should be the aim to make it easier for all involved
- 5.** Clarity of purpose is key for all organising bodies
- 6.** Common principles of governance are necessary for all organising bodies
- 7.** Consistency of overarching policies, rules and regulations is required for all aspects relating to playing hockey

Executive Summary section commentary (with some observations drawn from detail in the following sections):

The new South West area broadly maps to the current West region and the South West - North sub-area broadly maps to an extended Gloucestershire (e.g. with Marlborough coming in from Wiltshire in the south and Leominster from Herefordshire in the north). West HA is limping along with many posts unfilled and some of those "in post" wanting to pack it in. A vibrant West (or South West as it will become) is vital to making this work.

The proposals for Areas and Sub-Areas mean that they are going to establish new organisations directly linked to EH with new constitutions doing away with the Regions and Counties as they now exist. They also want to make them all consistent so the legal status of each organization will be the same. What this means for the transition from the currently constituted bodies to the new is not clear.

The alignment of League structures and rules are not really a concern for GHA as this operates independently from GHA already and in the West is quite straightforward. The alignment of womens and mens league rules may turn out to be an area of contention, but ought to be resolvable.

Junior Festivals and competitions will eventually move to Areas to be managed. This is a concern since at the moment what is going on locally is mostly run by GHA. This is probably an exception to a lot of other places, but the proposal seems to have missed this in their list of those exceptions. This will not work for aspects such as Festivals which need to be run locally to minimise travelling. Indeed the current approach does not really cover all of Gloucestershire being confined to the north of the County with some exceptions such as Worcester further to the north, Swindon and Marlborough to the south. However, the timescales for juniors does allow for further discussion.

EH state that umpiring organisations will "evolve" to align with the new structure. It is not clear what will drive this. The current umpires local association covers three counties. Also, the report implies that consistent rules across the leagues will facilitate umpire movement across boundaries. To umpires only the laws of the game matter. There may also be a missed opportunity here to integrate Club and Association umpires with proposals only focused on HUAs and appointments. There is a risk of ending up with a system that manages only the elite and then runs out of resources because umpires will always start out with Clubs. An integrated system which treated everyone as simply having attributes would seem a better solution, that way every umpire in the country could be reached and local ones would feel more engaged with the wider community encouraging them to become involved and maybe even take appointments on an occasional basis. Hence they might move on and up!

Masters hockey seems to be seen as mostly satisfactory and the continued evolution will be left alone.

Timescales look challenging. In March 2020 draft constitutions are supposed to be approved for the new structure. Surely these should be available now. Ideally all of the new bodies will be legally incorporated. This seems the best way forward but the EH proposals are not clear on the topic.

Detail section commentary (some already covered in the Executive Summary section commentary):

The Player Pathway will continue to be managed by the Sub-Area so GHA role in this will not change and so all the reforms being introduced can continue.

Adult representative teams would continue to exist at the Sub-Area level as long as demand exists. This seems odd given the extent of consistency being applied throughout all other aspects and suggests this is an area where there is no clear conclusion.

The concept of binary numbers of groupings at each level, e.g. 8 Areas makes competition structures seem simple. However, it will likely lead to some arbitrary divisions; it is not clear whether the new South West would have 4 or 8 Sub-Areas?

It is noted and welcome that EH will collect all affiliation fees. They point out that at present fees are variable, ranging from £2 to £65 for the county (we charge £40) and £4 to £25 for the region (West HA charges £25). Club affiliation fees only constitute about 8% of our income so the effect of any realignment should not be particularly significant.

There appears to be no reason why policies and procedures could not be templated by EH, promoting best practice and eliminating every county/region having to come up with their own. Clubmark provided some model texts, etc. but it was still a major undertaking for a club. However, there is no specific mention of policies and procedures. If the stated aim of consistency across the whole sport (not just Leagues) is to be achieved this is something that has to be implemented in every Club, Sub-Area and Area. Everyone hates the topic because it is bureaucracy, but it is a fact of life nowadays. Similarly the management structure of Clubs requires the same treatment, every Club should have a Welfare officer as an example.

The principles around the adoption of technology (IT enabled) to reduce duplication are very laudable. However, even the most well managed organisations struggle with this when it comes to implementation. This is probably one aspect over which there is the most doubt of England Hockey's ability to deliver the proposals.

It is reassuring that EH state that they are not out to grab the reserves of the regions/counties. They agree that the money should be used locally. We feel very strongly about that. We have been prudent. Our money came from our players and should ultimately benefit our players. However, how the surpluses in the existing organisations would be managed seems to have been deliberately left vague. This will be tricky and it does suggest we should make every effort to reduce our reserves ahead of the changes.

Even if less volunteers are needed overall this will still be a problem. The resources at EH are also limited.

Overall conclusion.

The document contains an immense amount of detail in some areas such as structures. Other aspects such as the detailed final set of regulations for Leagues are for the future. There is a lot that will still need to be worked through (does Brexit come to mind) and almost certainly there will be difficulties.

Overall though we are in favour of the rationalisation of the organisation and management of the sport. The proposals seem to present more of an opportunity than a threat. The timescales do though seem incredibly ambitious/optimistic, not least because people have to be found to fill the new roles. It is also likely to be the case that for GHA the impact initially will be small though longer term it is likely to be significant with a lot of administrative work to transition from the current state to the new.

We though believe GHA should vote in favour of the proposal.