

THE SOUTH HOCKEY LEAGUE

Response to England Hockey restructure proposals

This submission is written after seeing papers submitted by Southern Counties Hockey Association and the South Women's Hockey League. The League agrees with the bulk of their comments and will endeavour not to repeat them, concentrating on the men's league issues only.

It is also written after consultation with its clubs following a full circular from the League to every one of its teams, including the full EH proposals.

The League is the largest in England and indeed the first. It was founded contrary to the wishes and instructions of the governing body of the day, the Hockey Association. Such attitude was necessarily but reluctantly followed by SCHA at the time. Consequently the League necessarily had an independent constitution and largely retains it.

Forty eight years on, the governing body of hockey, now England Hockey, wishes to effectively abolish the League and replace it with three separate leagues.

There is some logic to the general proposal, based as it is upon a desire for a symmetric number of eight areas.

However if this general course is taken, why not four areas instead, a large saving in probably non-existent volunteer administrators and also in expense?

As far as hockey in the South is concerned, one of the biggest problems would be the need to create three of everything rather than one, i.e. three South Managements, three South Councils, three league administrations etc.

Theoretically a part of this could be reduced by merging men's and women's leagues committees but in our view in practice such committees would soon split into separate administrations.

The concomitant consequence of this is alarming, if not impossible, in the required number of administrators and also expense. This appears contrary to the stated intention of the proposals.

On the matter of numbers, it is highly unlikely that more than a few of the present administrators would carry on. There is admittedly already an age problem with retirement looming for many volunteers but the proposed re-organisation provides no traditional area with existing loyalties to produce the required volunteers. Indeed, for leagues, the organisations above needed to recruit and supervise them will not themselves yet exist to organise their birth.

The consequence of this, if it can indeed be achieved at all, will be a need to recruit a large number of paid personnel - with mainly no essential local knowledge.

England Hockey has already stated that there will be no funds forthcoming for this and that any increased funds will have to be provided by member clubs.

At present, a dedicated and experienced collection of unpaid volunteers provides the whole scenario needed to maintain league hockey at an annual cost to teams of only £25, a sum that has not increased for over twenty years. Any form of calculation relating to paid employees results in a considerable increase on this.

Allied to this, the League has built up over the years an excellent website to serve the needs of its members - to be replaced presumably by some EH system to administer three new leagues. With or without respect, experience of EH IT systems does not inspire confidence in the proposed future in this respect.

More widely, there is the old question of "if it ain't broken, why fix it?"

There is an inference that existing leagues are no longer fit for purpose. This does not appear applicable as far as the South League is concerned,

As a League, we have constantly developed over the years to adapt to the needs of league hockey and of our clubs.

This has extended to providing league hockey when required to all senior men's teams throughout the South and indeed beyond. Tolerance and varied rules provide for the differing needs of lower teams and geographic adjustment is provided to accommodate the varying location and density of clubs. For instance we provide league hockey for the bulk of all teams in the

whole of one Western county and in various other areas for clubs from four other counties outside South region boundaries. Put another way, we already provide what England Hockey is stated to be aiming for.

Ironically, the one change apparently wanted by England Hockey, other than the substantive total break from one into three, is the creation of a London area. Ironic, because as England Hockey knows, the creation of such an area, a symmetric fourth region for us, is something that we were moving rapidly towards when the publication of these proposals put it on hold.

A further loss that would be occasioned is that of the standard of hockey for many of our teams. We would contend that our Premier division is the strongest outside the National League. Under these proposals it would be split into three with an obvious considerable drop in standard in its new format. And so on, all the way down.

England Hockey contend that this could be balanced by a reduction in travelling. We do not believe this is correct but, as England Hockey has not yet published the detail of its proposed new areas, we find it difficult to argue the matter.

For these and other reasons stated elsewhere, let alone the wider picture, we do not believe the proposals justify breaking up an institution which has served hockey in the South well for nearly fifty years.

In any event we believe that it is impossible to achieve what is outlined in the proposed time scales.

It is proposed that the scheme should be approved in March 2020 and the new arrangements set up in time to advise clubs/teams of what they are playing for before the start of the season six months later

This cannot be done with all the numerous new bodies to be created and involved (largely out of season) whilst also dealing with the allotment of teams to new areas and with objections and appeals when clubs find out what is happening - whilst also dealing with the new registration of players and new commonality of league rules. The governing body has already tried formally to do the latter three times in the past twenty years and failed early on each occasion.

The contentions above are in general form because so too are the proposals. England Hockey should publish the detail of the proposed implementation, including placings and costings, before any definitive step is taken.

We do not believe that what is proposed is in the interests of hockey in the South or its members or indeed is even practical but in any event we believe that any decision on possible implementation should be delayed at least a year with England Hockey, in the meantime proceeding to publish full details for consideration later

If a decision to continue with planning is needed, so be it, but do not commit to implementation so quickly and, in any event, not until proper detail is published and debated.

South Hockey League