

GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Chair report for GHA 2023 – 24 AGM on Wednesday 22nd May 2024

Firstly I would like to thank all the Committee members for their efforts throughout the season, without the support and commitment of everyone involved none of the hockey activities we deliver would be possible. I must make particular mention of Shaun Cullimore who has been Treasurer of GHA for more years than I can recall, but is now stepping down having kept our finances straight for a very long time. A remarkable story of service in this key role, but also a supporter of the schools tournaments through umpiring and running them on occasions. We will miss Shaun and his dry sense of humour.

The 2023 – 24 season has seen a number of notable successes with some activities continuing and some new innovations. County Hockey, Schools Tournaments and Clubs Festivals and Tournaments all have gone ahead as usual. Whilst innovations have included a Twitter (X) account being introduced, the first state schools Festival and the first year of awarding grants to coaches and schools.

It has been wonderful to see the County Hockey (Player Pathway) in full operation with DCs and ACs taking place and county teams playing other counties. In addition, a full programme of indoor has been run to give the youngsters the chance to experience this very different form of hockey. My thanks to the Administrators James Doughty and Helen Jefferies for their efforts and of course all the coaches who ran the training sessions and matches.

The season has seen a full set of schools tournaments as well as Clubs Festivals which are of course close to my heart for the U8s, U10s and U12s. In addition, the Gloucestershire rounds of the EH In2Hockey competition for U10s and U12s. Seeing all the young players on the pitches with the enthusiasm they bring has been wonderful and uplifting. My thanks to Lisa Lundie for all her efforts with the schools tournaments and also for running the first ever State Schools festival, something which is an England Hockey and West Area priority for the future, please see more later in this report. Lisa though is sadly stepping down at the end of this season and so a huge thank you to her for the last 5 years of stalwart service. Thank you also to all the clubs volunteers who stepped forwards to run the Festivals and assist me with the In2Hockey and particularly Sara Thompson of Lansdown assisted by Sara Doughty for running the U10s In2Hockey when I was away.

At the other end of the age range the Gloucestershire Masters players, both Women and Men, have been very active in Clubs and the associated competitions as well as in the Area and National sides (see Women's Masters report on the website). In the Women's Masters there have been no Gloucestershire teams fixtures, most of the players still being heavily involved in their Club teams. In the Men, the Masters Over 60s A and B teams entered the EH cup with rather mixed success. Masters is of course a priority for England Hockey for Counties, please see more later in this report.

So it is great to see the county spanning the full age spectrum of hockey in England.

I must also mention the introduction of the GHA Twitter (X) account, my thanks to Graham Wayland for getting this going and also for his efforts to increase communications with the Clubs, even if this has proven something of a challenge! This has also been the first year of the grants policy with a number of awards made. It has been something of a learning curve and the policy has been updated to reflect the experiences gained, my thanks to Andrew Hopcraft for all his efforts in this aspect of the GHA operation.

In respect of the GHA Committee Meetings, there have been 4 during the year to maintain the oversight process with both physical face to face and Zoom sessions. Work has started on the development of a GHA strategy to guide our future actions, but progress so far has been limited. The reduction of the reserves, a key aim for this season, has been less than hoped so this needs more of a focus next season.

I must also mention those not named so far in this report. Dave Gardner and Steve Foster for Mens Masters and Sally Privett for Women's and West Masters Committee membership, Liz Waltham for Welfare and of course Bob Moxom for his general support. Lastly, my eternal thanks to Andrew Hopcraft for being Secretary and chairing some of the sub-committees.

Looking more widely, West has started a County Chairs Forum to improve the flow of information to the Counties in the West and there have been a couple of meetings. West has also released a strategy in support of that announced by England Hockey last autumn. The priorities in these are ensuring governance is well executed, the officiating function is improved, ED&I is promoted through state schools hockey and masters hockey is further developed with more opportunities for older players. These are all elements that will need to be reflected in our own strategy as well as developing the actions and identifying the financing to move forwards.

However, although the strategies are useful, the challenge is of course how to implement it all and volunteers, or the lack of them is a common theme. West has at least made a start with officiating; EH seems to be limiting efforts to Network and Forums meetings with a lot of nice words, but limited action. Another aspect that is concerning is that of hockey pitches which seem to be increasingly threatened by football. EH are now trying to collaborate with football on facilities, this because the environmental issues around 3G pitches mean both have a need for something new for the future.

Beyond the GHA Committee I have been involved in the England Hockey County Standing Committee National Working Group (EH CSC NWG), but this has been immensely frustrating. There have only been a couple of meetings and these have essentially been EH updating us on their progress or lack of it in standardising the constitutions. At the last meeting though I did raise a large number of the concerns that I felt reflected the grass roots issues and a number of promises were made to look at these. However, given the lack of resources at EH and that their agenda is set by the grants bodies who provide most of their money; Sport England and UK Sport, I have serious doubts anything is going to change.

Ian Harvey
Gloucestershire Chair
29th April 2024