**Administrator’s Report**

2024 was a landmark year for Bowls Surrey. Although this is Bowl’s Surrey 7th AGM, this AGM marks the end of the first year under the new structure.

Clubs now have more opportunities to have a say! Whether they do or not is entirely up to them! Bowls Surrey has given them the opportunity!

Already I am hearing things from members such as “I hope we are given the opportunity to be able to speak”. Yes, clubs and their members do have the opportunity to get themselves heard but in order to do so they must attend the Area meetings or contact their area committee. There are approximately 30 clubs in each area. However, at the area AGM meetings only about 14 of those clubs attended which is less than half. It is no good moaning at changes if you do not bother to go to the meetings where you can have your voice heard and more importantly find out about the changes that may or may not be taking place and may very well affect your club. The area meetings are the places to raise any concerns you have or contact your area representatives.

At the moment bowls is going through some enormous changes some of which you may or may not agree with. Bowlers have diverse opinions on how bowls should be run; some do not like change of any description. We hear the cry “but we have always done it that way”, why is it only 18 ends? Even regarding 18 ends as not being a proper game. The number of times I have heard on the green that “we are playing a proper game of 21 ends”.

Bowls is constantly evolving. For those of us who can remember, women wore skirts. Men had to play in shirts and ties. This has all now gone and we wear sports trousers/shorts and also county shirts. Clubs also have moved to wearing sports shirts and trousers using their own colours. This all started to change in Surrey in the early part of the 21st century. Bowls is now looking more like a sport which is exactly how it should be!

Although we are completely unified, competitions and county matches are still played under Surrey County Bowling Association’s and Surrey County Women’s Bowling Association’s flags. It is not proposed to change this in the foreseeable future. However, times are changing very quickly. Following the introduction of the new inter county over sixties mixed six rink competition, other counties have now asked Bowls Surrey to play mixed county matches because of their difficulties in raising teams. Clearly if we are not to lose these matches, Surrey will need to agree to these requests. This would involve even closer collaboration between the two match secretaries who have been doing a sterling job in difficult circumstances as so many times they have had to find replacements for people who have pulled out of games at the last minute.

Fortunately, administration of competitions and matches has become smoother, not least because of the continued development of the systems we have. We are no longer reliant on Royal Mail for example!

As mentioned earlier, Surrey is made up of four areas and each area committee has been busy in their first year. They have been in touch with most clubs. The purpose of the contact is to find out if the clubs have anything to say, ask or suggest going forward.

Area 4 has proposed a complete restructure of how the County should run its competitions. After discussion at the Combined Area meeting, it was agreed that a Working Party will look at competitions going forward. Terms of reference have been proposed and members will be advised at their area meetings how things are going. Any changes will not take effect until 2026.

Surrey’s match system has evolved to such an extent that other counties are buying into it and more Surrey clubs are signing up for the different modules such as club matches, competitions and rink bookings. Surrey has become a leader in technology for bowls for which Surrey should thank the tireless work of John Tucker, our General Secretary.

It should be noted that at the AGM in 2025 the elections for General Secretary and Governance Officer will take place as their two year tenure, agreed in November 2023, will have been reached and in accordance with the Constitution, elections will have to take place. The Senior and Junior Team Manager’s contracts will expire in November 2026.

Since COVID, times have changed enormously. There is less appetite to travel distances to play matches, less appetite to volunteer in clubs and similarly even less appetite to volunteer for the county and I can understand why.

The 2025 season could prove challenging for many clubs. We have become a much a less tolerant society which makes more important for clubs to have the correct procedures in place to avoid complaints. If clubs do not follow Bowls England regulations, policies and guidelines they may find themselves in difficulty as their members are more likely to complain to Bowls Surrey. Therefore, it is so important for clubs to make sure they are complying with the requirements of Bowls England and Bowls Surrey. Clubs may wish to know that having set up a working party three years ago, Bowls England have advised us that draft new disciplinary regulations and guidance due to be approved by the Board on 23 November. We have been told that counties will be given an opportunity to comment on the draft resolutions before they are adopted. We will keep clubs informed of any developments.

On 1 May all clubs must have safeguarding officers in place. Failure to do so, could result in disaffiliation. Di Double (County Safeguarding Officer) and I have been in close contact with regard to this and between us have been contacting clubs. I am still awaiting a date for a course to be held in Surrey and by the time of the AGM I am hoping it will be finalised. If you have any concerns or questions please do not hesitate to contact Di Double or me and we will do all we can to assist you.

As you know, Bowls Surrey does not have a Development Officer which for such a large county is very sad indeed. Development is key for our sport. Recruitment and retention is key. Clubs can do a lot to help themselves but Bowls England and Bowls Surrey have a major role to play in this.

As you know I have decided to give up the Administrator’s role and this will be my last AGM. I feel very strongly it is time for someone else to take up the reins. The job is entirely what you make of it. I became involved in Surrey in 2013 and at the 2014 AGM I became secretary for the SCWBA, a position I was proud to hold until 2023. In that time, we moved from paper affiliations where we were faced with one foot high paperwork, received the from clubs including all the paper competition entries. Believe me when I say, I would not want to go back to those days. It was horrendous. Now things are so much easier from an administrative point of view and although I accept that some people may still hanker for a yearbook, believe me when I tell you that the cost and time putting such a book together became prohibitive.

The role of the Administrator is the conduit between Bowls England, the County and ultimately the areas and clubs. An administrator can be as involved as much or as little as they want to be. I have told the Board that I am happy to stay on, if necessary, until the February Bowls England counties’ meeting which is when the its AGM takes place. I will also help anyone who takes on the position.

I feel very strongly that Surrey has put in place a good structure but it is now up to you, the clubs, to make it work. The areas are always there for you so please use them.

Finally, I would like to thank all the officers, over the years for their support and particularly to John who, like me, has worked tirelessly for the county over the years. I hope the county and all clubs go from strength to strength and bowling will remain a sport in which everyone can participate whatever the age or ability.

***Sheron Mitchell***

***Administrator***