

Members Advisory Group

Members'
Advisory
Group

Transparency & Accountability

Report and Recommendations

April 2022

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Background

- Following the 2021 EGM, the TTE Board asked MAG to provide advice on how it should approach issues relating to transparency and accountability
- MAG assembled a project team to address the issue and make recommendations
- This report summarises the key points from the discussion and makes recommendations on how to address transparency and accountability within TTE

Methodology and Participants

Methodology

1. MAG formed a project team to formulate ideas on how TTE should address transparency and accountability
2. Two discussion sessions were held to share thoughts and perspectives from amongst the project team
3. These ideas were shared with the TTE Chair (S Deaton) and the Chief Executive (S Sutcliffe)
4. The summary of the discussion was submitted to the Board which has subsequently formed the basis of this report

Participants

1. MAG Members – N Hurford, S Nash, D Randerson, S Pratt, J Andrews, P Ashleigh
2. Non-MAG Members – S Venner (MAG Board Liaison), E Williams (Chair, National Council)

Key Points from Discussion (1)

1. The Board should be pro-active in ensuring an appropriate level of transparency and accountability across TTE. It is a key role for the Board and an essential part of ensuring good governance.
2. High levels of transparency and accountability improve the operation of the organisation for everyone
3. Sharing information (ie transparency) is the first key step in ensuring accountability
4. The principles of transparency and accountability should apply not only to the Board but across TTE more widely, ie they should apply to the TTE Senior Leadership Team and the various TTE committees that forms its advisory network
5. There is no standard “off-the-shelf” approach to transparency and accountability. Accordingly, the Board should develop a “Transparency & Accountability Charter” which sets out how it will deliver transparency and accountability within TTE

Key Points from Discussion (2)

6. Transparency implies a presumption of openness
7. Accountability is best met by extensive engagement with members and volunteers. On-line meetings via Zoom and Facebook provide a low-cost means of doing this that most people are now comfortable with
8. Financial transparency and accountability are important, particularly in an organisation that relies heavily on volunteers to give freely of their time.
9. The Board and TTE will correctly want to present a positive picture of our sport. How do we distinguish between a “positive outlook” and “spin”?
10. The expectations of members and volunteers for transparency and accountability are set very high. But this is a two-way process. Member and volunteers have both rights and responsibilities

Recommendations

1. Transparency and accountability charter
2. Transparency – a presumption of openness
3. Accountability through engagement
4. Financial transparency and accountability
5. Rights and responsibilities

Transparency & Accountability Charter

- This would outline TTE's approach to transparency and accountability
- It would confirm TTE's adherence to all relevant best practice on accountability as set out in the Nolan recommendations, the Higg's review and the Sport England Code of Governance
- It would be clear that feedback on how to improve accountability & transparency would always be welcome
- TTE would produce a report in the Annual Review on how accountability and transparency has been delivered – plus any changes planned

The report on transparency and accountability would contain a specific check-list showing how compliance with SE Code requirements is achieved

Transparency Strategy – A Presumption of Openness

- Everything is open unless a good reason for not doing so. “Confidentiality” is a good reason for not making information available – but “confidentiality” needs to be clearly and openly defined
- When publishing information – the focus should be on what members would like to know. When something can’t be published or when the answer to a question is not known – simply say so
- Board Members should be empowered and encouraged to discuss current issues when they speak (formally or informally) to members and volunteers
- A FAQ should be available on the website to provide information about the governance of table tennis (broadly defined). This can be continuously added to
- Clear targets provide a means of being transparent about the successes & failures of the organisation – and hence doing better in the future. The “Impact Report” developed for showing progress on Mission 2025 should be developed and promoted to provide a “Data & Information Dashboard” for TTE that members can view

Publishing data about the organisation should be engrained in how the organisation operates

Accountability Through Engagement

- The current methods of engagement are limited – primarily these are via National Council, the AGM and the Clubs/Volunteer Conference. There have also been two “Ask Us Anything” sessions.
- Board/Senior Staff meet informally with members, players and volunteers at tournaments and events. They also attend League & County AGMs on request.
- There is scope to expand the level of engagement - increasing engagement with key stakeholders will naturally lead to improved accountability
- The “Ask Us Anything” sessions should be formalised to twice a year and entered into the calendar in good time
- Board Members could hold on-line regional sessions with Leagues & Counties. One each for the North, South, East and West per year. These would be more interactive than is possible via FB Live. The aim should be to share information and promote working in partnership for the good of our sport
- Members of the TTE Clubs team should be encouraged to hold similar regional engagement sessions with Premier Clubs

It is recognised that increasing accountability through engagement is demanding of resource and a challenge to implement. It needs to be at a level which the Board and Staff think is deliverable.

Financial Transparency & Accountability

- There has been an enormous improvement in the presentation of financial information in the last 5 years. The approach of explaining “where the money comes from – and how it is spent” is the correct one and should continue.
- The explanation of what members get for their membership fees is comprehensive – though no doubt can be improved further. The main issue to address is getting the message into the wider table tennis community. That’s where “Ask Us Anything” and engagement sessions can play a role.
- A similar exercise would be useful for explaining what the Sport England grant is spent on – and in particular how it benefits “grass-roots” table tennis
- The concept of “ring-fenced” funding from Sport England is not well understood. Again, a suitable topic for “Ask Us Anything” and/or the wider engagement sessions
- There are aspects of TTE activity that would benefit from a similar treatment to that given to membership fees. An obvious example is entry-fees for competitions and tournaments
- Normal, common-sense principles around “proportionality” and “materiality” still apply. Don’t spend thousands of pounds to explain how hundreds of pounds are spent

The principle of explaining “what we get for our money” should be applied to as many TTE activities as possible

Rights and Responsibilities

- Transparency and accountability is a two-way process involving TTE/Board and the wider table tennis community
- As the pages of “Table Tennis News” reveal, an adversarial approach has a long history in table tennis. But it has got worse in recent years. This does not promote problem-solving and is not helpful for the long-term health of our sport
- A key part of transparency, and particularly engagement, is to develop a more cooperative approach to dealing with the issues faced by our sport (which are substantial). Developing engage mechanisms that inherently encourage cooperative approaches will be helpful for our sport.
- TTE members have the right to be provided with all relevant information about their sport and to be able to ask questions of those that set the strategy and run our sport
- In return, all TTE members should treat other members, particularly volunteers and staff, with dignity and respect. That’s the other side of the “transparency & accountability” coin.