

National Council Meeting

5th November 2016

Pre-Meeting

The pre-meeting took place and was mainly used as a discussion of the agenda. The agenda was different as it did not include the presentation of departmental reports by the senior management team. An alternative agenda was suggested, but rejected on the basis that we should try the new agenda.

Main Meeting

The meeting started a little late as the pre-meeting had over-run.

A minute's silence was held for the following people who had died since the last meeting.

Derek Sherratt, John Dignum, Ron Bolton MBE, Martin Kinsella MBE, Gerry Stokes, Ken Alvey, Fred Hayman, Terry Burroughs, Jeff Meehan, Ron Douglas.

Chair of TTE

Sandra Deaton presented her own report, the board report and in the absence of Sara Sutcliffe also took questions on her report. In line with the agenda, the heads of department did not present their report, but any questions about those reports were directed to them.

Congratulations to Sandra on her election to the board of ITTF.

In February, a paper was produced regarding "EXPANDING THE SUPPORT FROM THE DEVELOPMENT TEAMS" was presented from National Council, but no reply or feedback has been received from the board.

The main issue of discussion was the funding for the next 4 years. TTE has submitted a provisional plan, previous called a whole sport plan. NGBs have applied for more money than is available and therefore TTE needs to completely review and revise the plan. Sport England is providing a consultant to help with this process and this work will start on 7th November. The consultant will be working with the senior management team and the board to produce a "concept" by 23rd November.

Funding is due to be announced in February/March. Consultation so far suggests that core funding will be reduced, but Sport England will fund PING! And the talent program. There are to be various other pots that can be accessed – mass market, children and young people and capital funding. So the funding should end up at roughly the same level, but from the different pots.

Voting rights were due to be discussed shortly after the AGM, but nothing has been heard back. This issue has been put on hold as a new Code of Governance report had just been published and the workings of boards and committees will be reviewed in line with this.

There was congratulation for the staging and coverage of the recent England v Greece match. But criticism for the lack of feed from JBL and other top domestic events.

The information on the Priority Zones was commended. But questions raised as follows:

- Have leagues/clubs increased their membership?
- Sustainability?

Previously there were regional development officers and coaches for each region, but these have been reduced/discontinued.

Discussion Groups

Due to the fact that the review of reports ran over the time allotted, we were only able to have one set of the discussion groups rather than the scheduled two.

The topics were as follows.

- Is there a better pricing/charging structure that can be delivered within the sport?
- How do we get more women into the sport?
- How can the club structure be strengthened?
- Is the league structure a barrier to growing the sport?

The findings from each of the groups were presented to the room. These will be summarised in a separate document over the next few days. This should include any action plans that TTE intends to take forward.

Since we did not get to discuss the following topics, they will be carried through to the January meeting.

- How can clubs link to schools in a more effective manner?
- How can the sport build on the success of both the Olympics and Paralympics?
- How can we help development officers improve table tennis in our area?
- How can table tennis become more commercial and generate more income into the sport?

As these issues are all interdependent and will form part of TTE planning for the funding bids, it would be helpful if interested parties would write in to Jonathan Bruch with views on any of these subjects.

Any Other Business

A vote was held concerning the date of the January meeting. Following the vote, it was passed that the meeting will be on 28th January. As I will be unable to attend, Estyn Williams will be taking the chair that day.

The dates of future National Council meetings should be set for the following season at the meeting in April or at latest the July meeting.

The agenda for the January meeting is pretty much set and will probably include a discussion of the new Code of Governance and affiliation fees

The meeting ended at 3.40pm.

Overview

I would remind any readers of this document, that it represents my view of the meeting. It is not the minutes of the meeting. These will be produced shortly by TTE. Therefore, the points made will not require any correction. I would also make the point that the views expressed in this report I my own and do not represent in any way the views that may be held within TTE.

The meeting was dominated by the proposed changes to the agenda. I under-estimated the ability of National Councillors to accept the necessary changes for the meetings to become interesting and useful.

Interestingly, the term customer came out of the discussions. The members of TTE are customers and therefore TTE needs to find out what its customers want, and hopefully provide what they want.

Similarly, TTE is the customer of the National Council. TTE pays around £20,000 per year to stage the National Council meetings and like any customer, wants to see a return on its investment.

It was generally agreed that the afternoon discussion groups were interesting for participants. Hopefully, councillors will have had more opportunity for their views to be heard and noted than they have had in past meetings. It will be a question of fine-tuning of the schedules to make sure that adequate time is allotted to each topic.

The views will be taken by TTE. Hopefully, the range of views drawn from the collective experience of the councillors will help TTE to formulate its plans and enable it to make robust funding bids in the future. In this way, National Councillors become part of the decision-making process.

Since the Portas Report, the power of the National Council has been reduced. It is no longer the decision-maker within table tennis in England. This has led many of the councillors to question the relevance of the National Council to TTE.

This new format of meeting gives the opportunity for the National Council to re-position itself within the decision-making process. The discussion topics have been chosen as issues that TTE is currently considering. Therefore, National Councillors are getting an input up-front before decisions are taken.

The questioning of reports is not a productive use of council time. Invariably, it is questioning decisions that have already been made or events that have already happened. Therefore, any replies are likely to lack useful detail. Therefore, it is a largely pointless exercise and should be kept to a minimum.

If councillors have specific points that they would like to raise about the content of reports, they should write to the relevant report writer with TTE. These questions and answers should be collated and published outside of the meetings. This would free up the valuable meeting time. This would also enable more fulsome and useful responses to be made than could be provided at the meetings in the allotted time.

The review of reports has been a major part of meetings over the years. I would question how effective it has been over many years as table tennis is now a sport with dropping membership numbers and tired event formats that do not encourage new participants to join the sport and no money in reserve, being almost totally reliant on Sport England funding. That does not represent success for the recent management regimes.

The National Council should be a forum for constructive criticism to enable TTE to review its practices. Most National Councillors have fantastic experience and have done more for table tennis than I will ever achieve. This experience needs to be harnessed positively.

In order to survive evolution is necessary. If the customers do not get what they want, they will stop buying the product. Failure to evolve has seen established enterprises, such as Woolworths, C&A,

BHS, to disappear from our high streets. This will happen to table tennis unless TTE restarts providing the products that its customers want.

The new code of governance will give TTE an opportunity to review its own system of governance. This will include the roles of various levels of management. Encouragingly, the code of governance does recommend that a national council exists as an independent body to provide constructive criticism to the board of a sport. However, it is not prescriptive about the make-up/construction of the national council. Therefore, TTE could decide that the National Council may simply be regional or large club representatives rather counties.

The main thing is to ensure that National Council represents value for money to its customer, which also funds the council meetings. It is important to give TTE value for money. This may have been provided by the afternoon discussion.

The afternoon discussions were generally acknowledged as being interesting, useful and worth attending the meeting. The morning session was not acknowledged so positively. Therefore, by a simple application of democracy, the popular afternoon discussions should be extended and the report questioning should be kept to a minimum.

Whilst I was frustrated on Saturday, my resolve to make the necessary changes is in no way reduced. If the National Council fails to evolve, it will simply become more irrelevant and possibly die. Like the dinosaurs.

Tony Catt
Chair, National Council