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Dear Councillor

As I am sure you are aware there was a significant amount of discussion at the last National Council as a result of Peter Charters raising his concerns about poor performance of our Junior and Cadet in International competitions.

As part of the MAG arrangements Neil Hurford invited me to be part of a full discussion on this subject within the MAG meeting which I was pleased to support.

In advance of that meeting I felt it would be helpful if I gave a summary from my perspective of the current position and also offered a plan with a solution to help to rectify matters. This was very well received by the group invited for the MAG meeting and was almost unanimously supported. Therefore, I am pleased to be able to add to the consideration for Council on this subject by including a copy of this for your consideration.

This meeting included Don Parker (Board Member), Peter Charters (Kingfisher), Denis Neale (Ormesby), Colin Wilson (Corby Smash), Sam Wilson (Corby Smash), Phil Vickers (Head Coach of the Draycott Club), Jason Ramage (Nottingham Sycamore), Kevin Buddell (Joola Plymouth), Sandy Nash (Ellenborough), Liam McTiernan and three parents of the leading English youngsters.

High Performance Problem

I have been concerned, in particular, about the standard of our English Juniors and Cadets. I have been raising questions about this both at the AGM and at National Council, for some time. We are in the worst position that we have been, certainly since the second world war and probably earlier, and we all have to face up to this. It is time to be honest and to speak the truth about all of this.

The points that I have raised in the meetings are that we have no England teams in the top section of the European Youth boys or girls, juniors or cadets. Every team is outside the top 16. In Europe in terms of membership and finance as well as tradition, we are clearly among the top associations. This is clearly not acceptable. We also have no junior boys in the top 250 in the world ranking. There is also concern about the women's team. Under the new regulations with the ITTF, the question is whether the women would qualify for the World Team Championships in the future, and there is also concern about the possibility of our women finishing behind Wales for the first time in the Commonwealth Games next year.

Peter Charters, to his credit, has opened the discussion on all this with his paper to National Council. I supported Peter in the meeting saying that the current system of producing top players in this country and the people who are managing it have failed. It is my intention to make a further contribution to this debate at the next National Council meeting and probably at the AGM.

In addition to Peter, the Kent Association have recognised the problem and have put forward proposals themselves to change the structure of High Performance Management in Table Tennis England and their initiative in this respect is also to be welcomed.

Neil Hurford, in his position as Chairman of MAG, has invited me to join tonight's meeting and in my position I feel obliged to offer a contribution to this debate. I am more concerned with finding the solution rather than speaking any further about what has happened over the last few years. I also believe that I am one of the few people who has experience in this particular High Performance field being a former international player and England Team Coach at Junior and Senior level, as well as being a former member of the Selection Committee and member of the Management Committee for 25 years. I took the leading role in High Performance and part of this was the writing of a 100 page proposal to the National Lottery for the Nottingham Academy which raised several million pounds to support the Performance programme over 4 years and achieved our last set of gold medals in the European Youth. This is, of course, in addition to the involvement that I have had with high level programme and as the Head Coach in the Ormesby Club over approximately 50 years which have won many titles and produced a succession of players who have represented England at International level.

Please find attached my proposal. I hasten to add that this is not new or revolutionary in any shape of form, it is just recommending bringing back the policies that have been followed in the past and have been successful between around 1950 to 2012 and have delivered a good degree of success and kept England amongst the top nation in Europe in this period. These policies which have been largely lost and this, together with the lack of high performance knowledge on the Board and in the Senior Management group, is the principle reason for this failure. I am sure that everyone involved has tried very hard and done their best but have not achieved anywhere near the required results. From 1950 right through to 2012 we have always had two very knowledgeable High Performance experts on the Management Committee Board itself, plus a Selection Committee or High Performance Management group overseeing the programme under the Chairmanship of a table tennis expert volunteer who have brought together a team of experts, both professional and voluntary, to manage the programme and this has delivered the success we have enjoyed in the past.

Alan Ransome