

Support by National Council for an EGM.

Dear National Councillors,

I am seeking National Council's (NC) support for an EGM to be called in order to submit a proposition that there should be at least four Membership Elected Directors rather than the three at present. This is within the Sport England (SE) Code of Governance. If there is an EGM called by the end of the year which then supports this proposition, it can be implemented soon after, when two vacancies on the Board arise in Spring 2022 due to 'time-served' by two long-standing appointed directors, who will have served the maximum permitted time. If it is delayed until the next AGM in Summer 2022, there will be no forthcoming vacancy for a year. It would therefore be better to fill a vacancy that will appear before the AGM in 2022 and the EGM permits us to work within that time frame. According to the Sport England Code, the maximum number on the Board of TTE is twelve. The reasons I am asking for support for this call for an EGM are:-

- 1) The closeness of the vote at the AGM; 73.95% just short of the 75% required. However, this was still a membership majority in favour.
- 2) The Chair broke Standing Orders by speaking against the Proposal without relinquishing the Chair. This is against Standing Orders and she was warned twice by the Standing Orders Committee about this. Given the closeness of the vote, this improper intervention could have been decisive.
- 3) The misleading argument that a fourth Elected Director would be detrimental to the Boards Skills balance. To support this argument, the Board's Skills Matrix was used. I invite National Councillors to view this 'mark your own homework' Matrix and decide for themselves if it is a legitimate, valuable tool for the purpose stated or just a symbolic exercise. This system consists of giving yourself 1, 2, or 3 points on each factor; with no Zero on each of the 23 factors. Consequently, the Independent Board member with no knowledge whatsoever of table tennis, would start only two points behind Don Parker on the Talent/Elite Pathway table tennis factor of the Matrix. Clearly, the system lacks 'spread'. Of the 23 factors listed, only six are table tennis related. At this time the Skills Matrix shows that the Board lacks a member with significant financial skills, yet the most senior and highly qualified Accountant who applied for an Appointed Director position on the Board was not even offered an interview. Whether or not this person should have been appointed is not the point, it does however bring into question just how important the Skills Matrix is to the Board when a Highly Qualified applicant, who happens to play table tennis, is rejected for interview by the majority of Board's nomination committee even though the Skills Matrix would have indicated the need for such experience.
- 4) Some of us more elderly members of the table tennis community lack the technical confidence needed for the Mi-vote system used. It did not suit all those who wanted to vote. Of course, the missing votes could have gone either way but it calls into question the system used. Almost a third of the potential votes were not cast, I would suggest and have heard, that at least some of these were due to difficulties with the online system and technical expertise.
- 5) The big question remains; why the TTE Articles only allow for three Membership Elected Directors when SE's code allows for more?
- 6) And my final point is who do you want to decide who governs our sport? The

Elected Directors are elected by you as representatives of the membership. The Appointed Directors are chosen by the Nominations Committee which according to the rules set by Sport England, must have a majority of 'independent Directors'. So, the choice is clear, either we, as National Councillors or League Representatives, can choose a fourth director or we leave it to others, mainly from outside the sport to choose the vast majority of people who govern English table tennis and our sport's future.

We are preparing to celebrate our Centenary as an organisation which has supported table tennis and the people who play the sport in this country for 100 years. It would be ironic if our Centenary was marked by there being less input into our sport by people who love and understand it than there has ever been in the previous 100 years.

Put quite simply, if the Membership Elected Directors formed a majority (not asking for 100%) on the Board of Table Tennis England, table tennis specific errors would be less likely to occur. The Performance strategy on talent development would be challenged as it clearly is not working. Within the Board, questions would be asked, and answers demanded from the staff about a number of table tennis specific issues. Issues like the depressing organisation of all the National Age Group Championships recently. I was not there but ALL the reports I received indicate a lack of table tennis background knowledge by the organisers. These events of course, were the responsibility of a senior staff unfamiliar with our sport. There should also be serious questions about the reduction in the number of teams playing in our local leagues. Until there is a majority of people on the TTE Board who have knowledge of the sport that they govern, Directors become followers rather than leaders because they don't understand the issues being brought to them. That should not be the legacy we leave after 100 years.

My motivation for change, continues to be the future of the English Table Tennis Teams, and the low level of achievement by our young players who will be the successors to the handful of international quality English players that we now have. Non-table tennis skills, experience and knowledge are of considerable value to the Board; however, the 'product' that they govern is table tennis.

The leaders of TTE Performance have had more than sufficient time (7/8 years) to prepare ambitious, talented young players to show signs of future greatness and it is time that the Board dealt with this matter.

Maybe some of the non-table tennis directors are looking at Liam, Paul, Sam and Tin Tin and thinking that Performance wise, England are in a reasonable place.

However, these players were all internationally prominent seniors or juniors prior to 2013; before the current TTE performance regime took over from the ETTA. They had won medals, team and individual including gold, at the European Youth Championships (EYC) but all English teams had consistently been in the top category of European Youth Teams. Today's youngsters are nowhere near that standard, in fact all the English teams are in the bottom divisions of European competition.

When a cadet and junior, Liam Pitchford had targets in his own country. Darius Knight and Danny Reed, along with Paul were European Cadet Team Champions.

Later, Gavin Evans held the European Cadet individual title. All these players, and others at various times, provided Liam with challenges in his development. Even at his Primary School he had challenges from schoolmates and Staveley clubmates, Sean Cullen and Daniel Lowe, both very good young players. In fact, Sean went on to join Liam in a medal winning English junior team at the EYC. Strength in depth was important to Liam's pursuit of a successful table tennis career. I applaud Alan Cooke's efforts during Covid, in working, in a more traditional way, one to one with a young player at Nottingham who Alan clearly believes has a great future in table tennis. Alan has the skills to be of benefit to this player although bearing in mind 'strength in depth', a preference would be working with a group of three or four. Whilst our top players are a source of pride to me, what has been clearly stated at recent meetings and confirmed by the results at the EYC's in July, there are no obvious successors to the present top seniors. Liam and Paul should be looking over their shoulders for the new challenge to their positions other than Sam Walker and Tom Jarvis. The warnings were there both at NC and a MAG Webinar that the standard of our young players had been allowed to deteriorate over the last seven years. This is not the fault of the players or their parents; the responsibility must be with the strategies adopted by Performance Department of TTE. The Head of Performance is accountable to the CEO who in turn is answerable to the Board; I am told.

But without a strong, supportive Board; one which will hold to account those persons responsible for the success or otherwise of our teams, improvements will not happen. I fully accept the authority of the Board in TTE but has a faction within the Board been making the Performance decisions for the whole Board? We accuse the Board but perhaps more accurately we should be highlighting a faction of the Board. There have been table tennis improvements to the Board of late and this should be welcomed although the issue remains that the table tennis community remain a minority on the Board. Greg apart, the entire staff Leadership Team of TTE are not from a table tennis background.

The introduction of the Kent/Cleveland proposals at the AGM, resulting in the formation of a Board Performance Sub-Committee under the Chairmanship of Don Parker, is a big step forward assuming it is given the authority to make decisions. Board members Ritchie Venner and Emma Vickers, who clearly have that knowledge, join Don on this committee. Our President, former European Champion Jill Parker MBE, will be able to add her experienced voice to the discussions. As we mark our 100 years, I feel that we are at a crossroads and I am calling on the members of National Council to help to return the decision-making and future of our sport to people like ourselves who love and understand it.

Peter Charters.

I submit the following Motion for the next National Council meeting on the 25th September 2021:-'National Council supports calling an EGM to amend the TTE Articles to increase the number of Elected Directors from three to four'.

Peter Charters, Honorary Life Member & National Councillor for Berkshire.

