

A Strategy for TTE - Where are we now?

Introduction

The Board reported to Council in September 2021 that it had restarted the review of the 10 year Mission 2025 strategic plan which was on hold during the pandemic. It provided an overview report and invited comments. In December, with Sara Sutcliffe leaving, the Board decided the new permanent CEO should be able input into the work when appointed.

I submitted comments in September. I thought it would be useful to use the unexpected delay to promote discussion between the Board, staff and councillors. So I attach my original comments below and invite the Board, staff and Councillors to say how far they agree with them. (I have also attached the Board's September report as an appendix for ease of reference).

One of the things I said was that it would be useful to collect insight and make it available to councillors and the membership. I hope the Board will be able to tell us more about what insight has been collected and whether it will be made available to councillors.

Estyn Williams - February 2022

Comments on the Strategy Development Plan

I broadly agree with the ideas in the Plan and supply some comments below. I have reproduced extracts from the Plan below *in bold italics* and commented on them in ordinary type.

A strategy needs to have purpose, outcome and be sustainable.

Agreed. We should consider:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to get to?
- How do we aim to get there?

'Where are we now' will not be in the strategy itself but is needed to help us produce it. We should collate and make available whatever data is readily available on:

- The current state of the sport
- Trends over recent years
- Comparison with similar sports
- Comparison with table tennis in other countries.

A weakness of Mission 2025 is that some parts say where we want to get to but not how we aim to get there. For example the section on membership says we would like lots more members and the section on performance says we would like to win medals and have

players with high rankings. We would indeed! But the strategy needs to say how we aim to achieve that.

I agree that details should be in the operational plan but the strategy should be more than a series of aspirations and targets with no thought as to if or how they are achievable.

It is a strategy for table tennis in England (wider) not just a strategy for Table Tennis England (narrower).

Agreed. The strategy should say that, as the NGB, we accept responsibility for leadership of the whole sport, not just the parts where our members are currently involved. We should also say how far we aim to widen the scope of our membership appeal to cover aspects where members are not generally involved at present.

Measurable outcomes need to reflect the fact that Table Tennis England can influence but not directly control the wider environment. The strategy needs to reflect that we must work in partnerships both internally (e.g. clubs, leagues, counties etc) and externally (e.g. Active Partnerships, other strategic partners e.g. Jack Petchey Foundation)

Agreed. We should assert the importance of TTE and its leagues and clubs working together and say how we aim to develop the relationship.

Similarly we should explain how TTE aims to work in partnership with the external bodies currently involved in the sport and how we might encourage other external bodies to get involved with table tennis.

The strategy needs to identify a small number (probably 3-4) 'big picture' strategic priorities that drive change rather than be a descriptor of what we do. Business as usual can be covered through a general commitment to delivering the role of an NGB efficiently and with excellence. This needs to be clearly articulated and communicated as most of what we do will be covered by 'business as usual'. The strategic objectives/priorities are about driving substantive change in specific areas of focus.

I broadly agree. However there are a few parts of the day job that are so important that they should be included. For example we should include commitments to:

- safeguarding young people.
- ensuring a good supply of coaches, officials and other volunteers.

Diversifying the sport to be representative of the England population will be placed at the heart of everything we do. ALTERNATIVE Ensuring the sport is accessible and inclusive to all will be placed at the heart of everything we do.

I agree. We should say that diversity goes much wider than gender and ethnicity. In particular:

- Table tennis is uniquely qualified to promote age diversity. I think we should commit to promoting the sport to people at all stages in their life – children and young

people in schools, universities and colleges and elsewhere, adults, families, empty nesters, retired people etc.

- We should say we aim to bring the sport to minority and isolated groups.
- We should commit to promote the sport to people with disabilities including dementia.
- We should take into account geographical diversity. The way we help local development of the sport needs to be different in cities from smaller towns and different again from sparsely populated rural areas.
- We should aim for economic diversity. Table tennis is a relatively inexpensive sport and as such more open to people on lower incomes.

We want to support recovery and growth of our sport. We will support the table tennis community, our clubs, leagues and members, our coaches and volunteers to recover from the effects of the pandemic and drive future growth, capitalising on the opportunity to reinvent, reposition and re-energise table tennis.

Agreed. Excellent work has already been done and I am sure will continue to help with recovery. We need to think further how we can support medium and long term growth where (prior to Covid) we have not done well for many years. In December 2019 (before Covid struck) National Council discussed the following ideas and sent them to the then chair of the sub-committee on the strategy review:

- How can we work with our leagues and clubs to increase their membership?
- How can we aim to have a pathway to guide those who take part in mass participation projects towards joining local clubs, leagues and other suitable outlets?
- How can we widen the organisations affiliated to us beyond the traditional leagues and clubs so that we can guide their members towards joining TTE?

These are not the only ways of driving up membership, but they do give an idea of what might be done. Whatever approaches we choose should be covered in general terms in the strategy.

We want to succeed on the international stage. We will promote and support the talent and performance pathway to be fully inclusive and accessible, adapting to the evolving global demands to create and provide the opportunities for England players to succeed.

Agree as far as it goes. But we need to say how we aim to achieve that with the very limited funding currently available.

Appendix – The Strategy Development Plan submitted by the Board to National Council in September 2021

This overview is being provided to enable National Council, MAG and Regional Forum to consult with their constituent groups and committees and provided any feedback on the development of the evolved strategy. Feedback can be sent to either Sandra or Sara by the end of October and will be collated and shared back within the sub-group and Board.

Sandra.deaton@tabletennisengland.co.uk and sara.sutcliffe@tabletennisengland.co.uk **Process:**

A review of the 10 year Mission 2025 strategic plan has been in the pipeline for 2 years. Work started on a review in late 2019 but was put on hold once the covid-19 pandemic arrived. The Board has agreed that the time is right to recommence this important piece of work.

The Board held an in-person Strategy Day on 25 August 2021. It was facilitated by Dr Sarah Rowell. The whole Board attended and worked in small groups as well as the full group throughout the day.

This has been followed by a further debate at the Board meeting on 9 September and a Senior Leadership team meeting on 10th September. A sub-group comprising Board and SLT has been set up to work on the next level of detail and the consultation process with MAG, National Council and staff. The members of the sub group are Sandra Deaton, Sara Sutcliffe, Susie Venner, Emma Vickers, Greg Yarnall and Hannah Holland.

Principles for strategy development:

The following principles were broadly agreed which shapes the next stage of the development:

- A strategy needs to have purpose, outcome and be sustainable.
- It is a strategy for table tennis in England (wider) not just a strategy for Table Tennis England (narrower).
- Measurable outcomes need to reflect the fact that Table Tennis England can influence but not directly control the wider environment. The strategy needs to reflect that we must work in partnerships both internally (e.g. clubs, leagues, counties etc) and externally (e.g. Active Partnerships, other strategic partners e.g. Jack Petchey Foundation)
- Mission 2025 remains relevant, this is an evolution of M2025. M2025 is currently 'all things to all people' and overly ambitious in some of its targets. Whilst we will inevitably move away from aspects of M2025 (and will explain why) much remains relevant.
- The strategy needs to identify a small number (probably 3-4) 'big picture' strategic priorities that drive change rather than be a descriptor of what we do. Business as usual can be covered through a general commitment to delivering the role of an NGB efficiently and with excellence. This needs to be clearly articulated and communicated as most of what we do will be covered by 'business as usual'. The strategic objectives/priorities are about driving substantive change in specific areas of focus.
- The written strategy needs to be short, focused and digestible. Detail sits in the Operational Plan.
- The world has changed around us and we need to adapt and be flexible.

The Board and SLT separately broke down the current structure of M2025 and generally concluded as follows:

- The 4 Ps (People, Places, Participation and Performance) remain good 'pillars' that describe what is required for sports development and form the foundation of what Table Tennis England does. There was discussion about a 5th P of Profile which currently sits as an underpinning objective. It was agreed that promotion and profile should run through everything. The Ps are not strategic objectives themselves but provide a way to frame solutions to an identified strategic objective e.g. to increase women and girls participation what do we need to do in each of the Ps to drive change.
- Vision – it was felt that 'Everyone Talking About Table Tennis' doesn't work anymore and work is needed to encapsulate a new bold vision.
- Mission/Purpose – it was agreed that the work done late 2019 to evolve the mission/purpose was good and relevant to describing the multi-faceted purpose of a modern NGB :

'WHY'(our purpose) Table Tennis England [is all about people and] will support, enable and assist people to have more meaningful and positive experiences in table tennis throughout their:

- SPORTING LIFE; Excellence and personal development: Competing, achieving and playing table tennis;
- ACTIVE LIFE; Healthier, both physically and mentally, through table tennis;
- COMMUNITY & SOCIAL LIFE; Enjoyment and belonging: fun competing and playing table tennis and belonging to the table tennis community.

Length of the strategy:

The general sense of direction is:

- 10 years – long term vision
- 5 year focussed strategic objectives
- 2 year review coupled with a 1-2 year stated focus on covid 'recovery'

Board would review annually at the December Board meeting and there should be an annual progress report published.

Guiding Principles:

1. Diversifying the sport to be representative of the England population will be placed at the heart of everything we do. ALTERNATIVE Ensuring the sport is accessible and inclusive to all will be placed at the heart of everything we do.
2. We will listen, respond and engage to enable us to support the table tennis community.
3. We will be brave and innovative to raise the profile and develop the image of the sport
4. We will recognise that people want to consume and engage with the sport in different ways and be willing and able to adapt

Draft Strategic Priorities:

1. We want to support **recovery and growth** of our sport. We will support the table tennis community, our clubs, leagues and members, our coaches and volunteers to recover from the effects of the pandemic and drive future growth, capitalising on the opportunity to reinvent, reposition and re-energise table tennis.
2. We want to see gender parity in table tennis. We will challenge and evolve the image and profile, create future aspirations and a more appealing and engaging offer for **women and girls**.
3. We want to succeed on the international stage. We will promote and support the **talent and performance pathway** to be fully inclusive and accessible, adapting to the evolving global demands to create and provide the opportunities for England players to succeed.
4. We want to **inspire the next generation**. We will [shift/evolve/challenge] the perception and showcase table tennis through hosting major events, adapting to the ever-changing environment, and making table tennis exciting and engaging for everyone, whilst attracting new audiences.

What does success look like and how will this be measured:

The setting of success measures/KPIs will come in the next phase of the strategy development. At this stage the focus is on the where we are going not how we get there.

Timeframe and consultation:

The aim is to 'go live' in April 2022. In order to achieve that the follow timeframe is set out:
September – Board and SLT strategy days

September – present draft strategic priorities to National Council, MAG and Regional Forum and seek feedback by end of October.

October/November – during October the combined Board/SLT sub group will continue to refine the strategic priorities, the detail that sits below and the success measures and will consider the feedback from National Council and MAG. Staff consultation.

December – feedback to National Council, MAG and Regional Forum. Board meeting – discussion and debate of draft strategy

January – Board and SLT continue to refine and finalise.

February/March – publication and communication plan explaining the evolution from M2025. April 2022 – go live.