

DRAFT MINUTES
NATIONAL COUNCIL, JUNE 29, 2024
MILTON KEYNES & ZOOM

Attendees

Attendees (In Milton Keynes): Neil Hurford (Chair of National Council); Joshua Reynolds (NC for Yorkshire); Alan Ransome (NC for Cleveland); Ritchie Venner (TTE Board Director & Chair of Competitions Committee); Susie Venner (Secretary of National Council, Deputy NC for Lancs; & VETTS Representative).

Attendees (via Zoom) – National Councillors or their Deputies: Reinhard Lindner (Dorset); Gareth Pearson (Northumberland); Clive Ellison (Avon); Estyn Williams (Warwickshire); John Stalker (Worcestershire); Karen Tonge (Cheshire); Neil le Milliere (Kent); Kevin Long, (Sussex); Sandra Deaton (Derbyshire); Steve Joel (Somerset); Andrew Walker (Hertfordshire); Sue Hayes (Buckinghamshire); Neil Brierley (Essex); Brian Freer (Cambridgeshire); Margot Fraser (Surrey); Malcolm Allsop (Nottinghamshire); Shirley Pickering (Leicestershire); Jonathan Hopson (Berkshire); Jonathan Stubbs (Hampshire); Tony Catt (Sussex);

Attendees (via Zoom) - TTE: Nick Donald (TTE Chairman); Adrian Christy (TTE CEO); Jos Kelly (TTE Board Director)

Attendees (via Zoom) – Other representatives: Mike Smith (BUCS)

Apologies for Absence: Phil Ashleigh (Essex), Tom Purcell (Lancashire), Alex Murdoch (Bedfordshire), Tony Dias (Middlesex), Tim Giles (Isle of Wight), David Edwards (Hertfordshire), John Andrews (Essex), Shaun Fitzpatrick (Avon), Martin Clark (Worcestershire), Ivor Jones (Northamptonshire), Don Parker (TTE Board Director).

Minutes Silence in Remembrance: Tony Clayton (Dorset), Sir Jack Petchey (Essex) and Ted Tydeman (Kent).

1 Introduction and Welcome by the Chair

Chair of National Council, Neil Hurford (NH) welcomed participants. He explained it was another step forward in the process of National Council (NC) becoming more autonomous.

a) Registration of any New Business Interests

No new business interests to be recorded.

b) Minute's Silence

A minute's silence in remembrance was held for Tony Clayton (Dorset), Ted Tydeman (Kent), and Sir Jack Petchey (Essex).

2 Approval of the Minutes of Meeting 13 April 2024

Proposed by Sue Hayes (SH); Seconded by Karen Tonge (KT). Carried unanimously as a complete and accurate record of the meeting.

3. Appointment of National Council Secretary

Neil Hurford (NH) informed the meeting that there had only been one nomination for the post of National Council Secretary, Susie Venner. A confirmatory vote was carried unanimously.

4. TTE Annual General Meeting - update Chair & Nick Donald (TTE Chairman)

(a) AGM Resolutions – Resolutions 10 & 11

TTE Chair, Nick Donald, (ND) presented to the meeting to outline the Board's position and ensure that National Council and the members were fully informed of the potential consequences and opportunities.

He focused on two resolutions, which would be coming to the AGM in July – Resolutions 10 & 11. Res 10 requires the Board to have the ability to filter applicants for the positions of Elected Directors according to the required skills and Res 11, which is conditional on Res 10 passing, brings a fifth Elected Director to the Board.

ND explained two issues really mattered to the Board.

- a) Wider representation of the table tennis community on the Board with a fifth Elected Director;
- b) The need to comply with the Sport England Code in order not to put table tennis's public funding at risk.

ND said there are two paths we can go down with different risks.

Path 1: Low risk, - to pass Resolution 10 and comply with Para 2.4 of the Code. And would clear the way for there to be an election for a fifth Elected Director. The Board had unanimously agreed this position

Path 2 – High risk – not to pass Resolution 10 would place the organisation and its public funding in 'jeopardy.', and there would not be the opportunity to elect a fifth Elected Director to the Board.

ND told National Council (NC) that we need to start somewhere and set aside any toxic history. He was asking for NC to trust in him – and he was trusting in NC and the members to present relevant candidates. He wanted NC to provide advice which took these risks into account and reiterated that the Board doesn't want to take risk to lose a penny of public funding.

ND had asked for Sport England to confirm its position and had received a letter from Phil Smith from Sport England on June 25.

He summarised the content of the letter:

1. To be clear about what not making the changes would mean;
2. Articles of Association are a matter for TTE and its members;

3. The letter provides Sport England's views so everyone can consider impact of decisions;
4. Compliance with the Code is mandatory and condition of funding;
5. Sport England supports the changes proposed in Resolution 10;
6. Sport England confirmed that without those changes it would 'threaten' compliance with the Code and therefore the funding;
7. Non-compliance is a material breach;
8. TTE and members must weigh up the risk of not receiving public funding.

ND said this was all about risk which he was asking NC to weigh up. He added we don't know the precise steps Sport England would take if we did not pass Resolution 10, but it would be a 'big statement' to go against Board's unanimous decision.

He said that the Board had talked through all alternatives and options before reaching this decision. The Code required that the Board was the ultimate decision-maker and that all appointments to the Board should be made on merit in line with the requirements of the Board. This change was necessary to comply with those requirements.

ND explained how it would work in practice – all candidates who meet the requirements of the role will be presented to members to vote on. The Board would clearly set out skills and diversity, having made assessments, they would recognise the candidates that meet these requirements; they would trust membership to put up suitable candidates. ND expected that anyone would only be removed in 'exceptional circumstances', the Board would consider them 'objectively', and that it would not 'be about the cut of their gib'. He committed that if for example, if six candidates who met the criteria came forward, then the Board would put the six names forward for election.

ND concluded by saying that he wanted us to work together, to take the 'low risk' strategy, which had a guaranteed outcome to deliver what matters - a wider Board representation of the table tennis community without putting our funding at risk.

Alan Ransome (Cleveland and Chair of the NC Select Committee on the Constitution) (AER) said that the Select Com had taken the matter seriously. It had significant concerns about the further loss of democracy – similar to 2017 when further compliance with the Code had necessitate a change to the composition of the Board. He also agreed it was a question trust – not in the current Chair or Board, but concerns for future Boards or previous Boards who may not have had that trust.

AER also explained that the Select Committee, on behalf of NC, had carefully examined the Code and the associated guidance and thought that there was ambiguity and possible alternatives, which had been shared with ND. To that extent, the letter from Sport England now brought some clarity.

AER confirmed that no-one from the Select Committee or NC wanted to lose funding and that we are now in a situation where we must accept the terms of the letter which Sport England had outlined. Although he still had concerns about losing democracy, he was prepared to put his trust in ND and the Board to act in the way

ND had outlined and therefore he we would accept the proposal albeit with some reluctance.

ND commended the scrutiny of the Select Committee and reinforced his personal desire and commitment to build an effective Board with a wider representation of the membership. He wanted to rebuild trust and put processes in place allows us to work together to continue this journey. He acknowledged that there was a need to improve.

National Councillors raised a number of points with ND:

Could a member of NC be on the Nominations Committee?

ND: Nom Coms is a Board Com. Could have someone objective or independent who sits in.

Can the Phil Smith letter be circulated?

ND confirmed he had requested the statement in a letter to him. He was reluctant to circulate it widely without Sport England's permission, but was happy to go through it 'word-by-word' with the Board and the Select Committee.

Had Sport England prior concerns?

ND: Sport England has previously raised concerns about our governance and it had 'jumped out' at ND as not being compliant as it was

Could there be a fifth Elected Director elected at a general meeting and be in line with the Code?

ND: It had been considered but he believed Sport England's letter had now made the position clear and that this was the way to be compliant with the Code.

Could there be a vote on Resolution 11 as a stand-alone?

ND: In company law one resolution can be conditional on another passing first. Resolution 10 needs to pass first in order to be compliant. Resolution 11 will only be voted on if Resolution 10 is passed.

(b) Arrangements for the AGM

On a separate point, Neil Hurford (Chair of National Council) (NH) asked for clarification about the arrangements for the AGM. NH also confirmed that he had submitted a section on behalf of NC for the Annual Review.

Adrian Christy (CEO, TTE) confirmed that it would be via Zoom; the AGM would be a formal meeting; there wouldn't be an Annual Review session, although there would be 'ample opportunity to ask questions'. It would not be a two-part meeting as had happened previously. The Review would be published in advance and questions could be asked before and during the meeting but they wouldn't go through it page by page. It was a 10am start, Mi-Voice will be used for voting and proxy voting. Company members are required to register in advance and follow instructions.

It was confirmed that there would be a way to recognise those receiving awards and presentations would be made in an appropriate manner.

At the conclusion of this item, Nick Donald and Adrian Christy left the meeting.

5 Actions and Matters Arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda). Chair & Various

NH updated on completed actions in line with the paper presented to NC.

Ongoing and additional Actions:

1. NCs to feedback to NH any comments on the new format of National Council meetings.
2. NH to ask for update on coaching courses and request they are reinstated asap.
3. NH to request a major update at next meeting on Table Tennis United.
4. NH and Dave Edwards (DE) to produce a narrative summary of responses to questionnaire.
5. All to pass on information to NH for Diane Webb about significant anniversaries, eg dates of founding of counties, where this was known.
6. NH and Susie Venner (SV) to produce a role description of the Chair and Secretary positions. The latter being seen more as a 'General Secretary' position.
7. Martin Clark had sent a paper to NH asking about specific issues pertaining to his concerns about WTT and ITTF funding and citing losses. NH would take them forward with TTE. Ritchie Venner (RV) confirmed that the Board was regularly updated about progress on ITTF and WTT funding matters, even though it was controlled through a different, joint venture company.

Sandra Deaton (SD) said that she is the ITTF representative on the joint venture company and that although ITTF finances showed a considerable deficit, they have recently secured a £12m income deal with an organisation in China, which will help with the deficit. She said that ITTF is now filtering money through to the joint venture company which is being spent. The agreement shows liability lies with ITTF and UK Sport and that there is no liability to TTE.

6 A More Autonomous National Council and Further Governance Reform - Update Chair & Alan Ransome

NH and AER, who had been involved in the discussions with Nick Donald (Chair CEO) and Adrian Christy (CEO TTE), updated the meeting. The following points were made:

1. Next step would be to agree the final details of a Memorandum of Understanding.
2. There had been discussions about Nick Donald and Adrian Christy only attending two meetings, but other Board Directors can attend. NC's

preference was to have some continuity, possibly with an assigned Director acting as the Board liaison, in a similar way which had existed with MAG.

3. TTE had proposed that the cost of National Councillors attending NC meetings should be met by the counties. AER and NH had explained that the contribution that members pay to TTE for their membership has always been considered to ensure that they had a representative voice within the structure of TTE, so effectively NC was already being funded by the membership to represent them. Also, given the move away from quarterly face-to-face meetings, these were now 'modest costs'. NH said that he believed that TTE would continue to fund National Council expenses at the current levels.
4. TTE expressed their desire to communicate directly with members. This was welcomed but it did not mean that NC could be overlooked or excluded. It had a place in the company Articles and a right to be consulted in line with the democratic requirements placed on TTE by the Sport England Code.
5. It was also felt that NC was entitled to receive such information, eg financial papers, Board minutes, CEO and Chair reports, which permitted it to exercise its duties of being an advisory body.
6. TTE had complained that NCs don't report back to their counties. AER and NH thought that it does happen. But they reminded all Councillors that they should keep their counties and members informed of developments in NC.
7. TTE felt that NC was not sufficiently 'diverse'. AER reminded them that NC had proposed including Premier Clubs.
8. There was an agreement that NC's Standing Orders were out-dated and needed bringing in line with the Code. This was in progress. NH also felt that the terminology of 'Standing Orders' was unhelpful and perhaps it should be a combination of 'Terms of Reference' and 'Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings'.
9. There had been some concerns expressed at the lack of information which had recently been presented to NC, particularly the lack of a CEO and Chair report. Martin Clark had raised his concerns about the Board no longer submitting a Finance Report, and that Adrian Christy had previously expressed his reluctance to do so. He felt it compromised NC's ability to understand the priorities or offer relevant advice. MC referred to the requirement for transparency.

Estyn Williams (EW) supported this and reiterated that the Articles say the purpose of NC is to communicate. He was pleased that TTE communicate directly with the members but this doesn't mean that they don't communicate with NC. On finance, he suggested that we may not need details but we need enough to understand what they priorities are and TTE needs to hear from NC and the membership what they regard as the priority items for funding.

Sue Hayes (SH) suggested a Select Committee on Finance. **ACTION:** Follow up and discuss at next meeting.

Steve Joel (SJ) supported the idea of a Select Committee and felt that it was important NC was aware of the budget for year ahead. He said that sharing this information was part of developing the trust, which Nick Donald had spoken about.

Jos Kelly (TTE Board Director) who is on the Board's Finance Committee confirmed that it now has two highly qualified independent members, Lew Hodges and Paul Bishop, from the table tennis community.

10. NH said he and AER would continue the discussions on the MoU and would invite Susie Venner to join them

ACTION: NH, AER and SV to continue discussions regarding the MoU

ACTION; Follow up proposal for a Select Committee on Finance

7. Arrangements for Future National Council Meetings

After having had discussions with TTE, Josh Reynolds presented paper about the format for future NC meetings, considering the alternatives of hybrid (ie online and face-to-face); all online; and at least one just face-to-face. There was a desire to get more people involved and participating. Costs also had to be an issue.

Other suggestions put forward were:

1. Having a focus for topics discussed at meetings, perhaps as an annual rotation eg October – strategy; Feb – finance; June – agm etc
2. The three hybrid/online plus one face-to-face received support – but there was concerns to make sure that NC did not operate in a way which excluded anyone.
3. NC should have a standard template for submitting reports.
4. Consider holding on different day of the week, possibly Sunday.
5. A request for dates well in advance to assist with pre-planning.

ACTION: JR/NH/SV to take forward and explore options with National Councillors.

8 Reports of Select Committees

a) Constitution – Alan Ransome

AER submitted a detailed report. Many of points already covered. Main points taken in future of NC and AGM. Nothing further to add, other than to thank members of Select Committee

b) Competitions – Alan Ransome.

AER submitted a detailed report. He complimented the progress in the U13, U12, U11 and U10 competitions. He also highlighted his concerns on a few specific points.

He felt that the competition landscape was becoming fragmented as TTE lost control of the competition structure. It was recognised that several individuals and organisations were now planning to organise independent events and this could lead to calendar congestion and clashes, and marginalise TTE's importance as a central body for the sport.

There were an increasing number of events outside the control of TTE – and therefore the counties – rather than comply with the restrictions and costs being placed on them by TTE. He felt this was detrimental to the sport.

He was disappointed that the status of non-affiliated organisations being 'In Good Standing' had been cancelled and this was a contributory factor to organisations breaking away from TTE, at a time when the table tennis community should be coming together. Several people expressed concern about this and felt it should be reconsidered and reintroduced as a matter of urgency.

Susie Venner (SV) as the VETTS representative was asked to explain the VETTS position. She confirmed that the VETTS had not been consulted prior to the change being implemented. 'In Good Standing' had been a status for organisations which did not wish to affiliate to (originally ETТА) TTE, and TTE agreed with that position. However, both organisations had wished to maintain a relationship of co-operation and collaboration. It had been a mutually beneficial arrangements and one of mutual respect. And worked successfully for the VETTS and ETТА, then TTE, for many years. In the 1960s/70s there were more than 40 organisations 'In Good Standing' with the ETТА.

SV explained that the requirement now had completely changed and it required that organisations had to affiliate to TTE. The VETTS valued their independence, and affiliation would mean relinquishing full control of their events and there was also a cost associated with this. SV felt that the VETTS operated well and that its members valued their independence. As a result, a proposal is being put to the VETTS AGM in July to remove 'In Good Standing' from its own constitution, rather than affiliate to TTE. The possibility of a MoU remains a point for discussion.

ACTION: NH to follow up with TTE concerns about the loss of the Good Standing status for non-affiliated bodies.

AER also expressed concern that Grand Prix were being dropped – and there was not a substantive programme to replace these events, which had frequently been over-subscribed.

Some National Councillors expressed the view that TTE is losing touch with the competition landscape and the delivery mechanisms for it.

Ritchie Venner (TTE Board Director and Chair of the Competition Committee) agreed to use the paper as a discussion item at the next Comp Com meeting. Discussions on some items were already underway, eg expanding National Championships to more players; he recognised the disappointment that some of the bigger competitions are going outside TTE's control and there are break-away' bodies; felt that the loss of these organisations through the redefining of Good Standing was a backward step; shared the desire for more money going into the actual competition programme; work was underway on the JBL/Cadets programme; further initiatives to align competitions and talent & performance

c) Disability - Karen Tonge

KT gave an update on the ongoing work of the Disability Select Committee, including contacting other organisations who have an interest in table tennis for people with a range of disabilities, British Para is just pathway and elite.

9 Feedback on Yorkshire Centenary celebrations - Joshua Reynolds (JR)

JR gave a brief presentation on the successful celebratory evening to mark Yorkshire's centenary. They have also reintroduced the Yorkshire Club League.

10 Articles & Regulations Index Summary Chair

Clive Ellison gave an update on the research he has been doing into stake-holder communication by other NGBs, including badminton and squash. He felt that stake holder engagement strategy should be reviewed annually and that there was still room for improvement by TTE.

NH referred Councillors to the paper from TTE with the recent updates and changes to regulations.

ACTION: Ongoing, CE and NH to report back.

ACTION: NH to ask Jo Keay-Blyth to continue producing updates, with explanations from NH and EW when required at National Council meetings.

11 Dates of Next Meetings

The following dates were agreed for meetings in 2024/25.

Sept 28, 2024 (hybrid meeting)

Jan 11, 2025 (wholly on-line)

Mar 29, 2025 (TBC) (hybrid meeting)

A further meeting would be arranged for June 2025, ahead of the AGM. This was expected to be a hybrid meeting.

12 Any Other Business

NH gave a brief update on County Championships following the recent Annual Conference.

AER asked for an NC-only time, and Board Directors Ritchie Venner and Jos Kelly left the meeting. AER was upset that for the first time in 50 years, there were no reports from the Chair, CEO, Board Minutes or Finance documentation. While others shared his concerns, it was felt that Nick Donald had paved the way for a new and more productive relationship and NC were keen to progress that in a collaborative manner.

ACTION; NH to pursue with ND and AC.

13 Meeting Closed at 13.45