

NATIONAL COUNCIL – DRAFT MINUTES by Susie Venner,

ZOOM MEETING

SEPTEMBER 28, 2024

Attendees: Neil Hurford (Chair, National Council);

National Councillors or Deputy National Councillors: Reinhard Lindner (Dorset), Alan Ransome (Cleveland); Martin Clark (Worcestershire), Clive Ellison (Avon), Estyn Williams (Warwickshire), Harry Jutle (Herefordshire), Allan Thompson (Durham), Brian Whitehead (Buckinghamshire), Tom Purcell (Lancashire), Clive Hollingsbee (Kent), Steve Joel (Somerset), Jonathan Hopson (Berkshire), Dale Aitkenhead (Northumberland), David Brown (Lincolnshire), Karen Tonge (Cheshire), Andrew Walker (Hertfordshire), Alex Murdoch (Bedfordshire), Tony Catt (Sussex); Margot Fraser (Surrey); Brian Freer (Cambridgeshire); John Andrews (Essex), Sandra Deaton, (Derbyshire), Gary Whyman (Dept. NC Cleveland).

National Council Secretary and VETTS Representative: Susie Venner,

TTE Board members: Nick Donald (TTE Chair); Adrian Christy (CEO) Ritchie Venner (Elected Director), Jos Kelly (Elected Director)

Apologies from TTE Board Members: Don Parker (Elected Director)

Absence and apologies: Joshua Reynolds (Yorks), Noel Sewell (Wiltshire), Dave Adamson (Gloucestershire), Shirley Pickering (Leicestershire), Shaun Parsley (Norfolk), Jim Kenny (S. Yorks), Jonathan Stubbs (Hampshire) and the following members represented by their Deputies:

- Sue Hayes (Bucks - represented by Brian Whitehead)
- Dave Edwards (Herts - represented by Andrew Walker)
- Neil Le Milliere (Kent - represented by Clive Hollingsbee)
- Shaun Fitzpatrick (Avon - represented by Clive Ellison)
- Jon Bayliss (Derbyshire - represented by Sandra Deaton)

1. Introduction and Welcome by the Chair

The Chair of National Council Neil Hurford (NH) welcomed new members. He explained the progress of the new dedicated website and the organisation's move towards greater autonomy.

1a) Registration of Any New Business Interests

There were no new business interests to declare.

1b) Minute's Silence

A minute's silence in remembrance was held for Jean Winn, former international player; Judy Williams, former international player; Arthur Morgan, umpire, Derbyshire; and Diana Jermyn, umpire, TTE Vice-President, National Councillor for Cornwall. Tributes can be found on the Table Tennis England website.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the June 2024 meeting were approved, proposed by Tony Catt (TC) and seconded by Alex Murdoch (AM) and Reinhard Lindner (RH)

Minutes of the June 2024 meeting here:

<https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/02%20Minutes%20of%20National%20Council%20Meeting%2029%20June.pdf>

3. Matters Arising

- TC raised concerns about the AGM and NH agreed to address this under the Constitution.
- In response to a request from TC Susie Venner (SV) will provide more details on the action list. On-going action to produce role description
- Nick Donald's (ND) responses to Martin Clark (MC) relating to his specific queries, are included in these minutes as Appendix A.

4. TTE Chair's Update - 'Engagement, Structure, and Growth'

- Nick Donald (Chair TTE) (ND) presented his vision for TTE's future, emphasizing the need for cultural and structural change. He highlighted issues of governance and the need for improved collaboration and member engagement. He outlined his vision for change in order for TTE to better fulfil its role. He emphasised that this had not yet been discussed with the Board, and at this stage this was very much an outline of his own observations, but he wanted to test attitudes. He welcomed observations and stressed that it would need to be reviewed with the new CEO.
- His vision challenged how the role of the association could promote, grow and maintain the integrity of the game. He proffered the need to facilitate partnerships, recognising the role of the members as key stakeholders, while wanting to attract additional funders with a demonstration of purposeful governance and effective engagement.
- He recognised that there was a need to change – and that the current culture can be improved. Presently, it is not fostering a collaborative arrangement nor one which produces meaningful 'checking and challenging'. While the organisation is member-based, it also owes a duty to others. The current culture within the governance structure had been described as negative, dysfunctional and displaying a lack of trust. This needed to change.
- There was also a need to be mindful of the range of activities TTE was tasked to provide and address how these could be better managed. For example:
 - The 'formal' table tennis landscape, eg competitions – should this have less TTE intervention?
 - The more community-based, 'recreational' aspect of the sport – how is this grown outside the formal aspect?

- The elite performance dimension – what resources are needed?
- There was also the question of what advisory body is needed to help the organisation move forward. Is National Council in its present form the right body? The Board needs an Advisory body, and that Advisory body should be able to give well-rounded advice, not just take ‘positions’. There was also the question of how this body would work along-side the Tier 1 Advisory Committee structure and how should other bodies, like ‘Task & Finish Groups’, the Select Committees, the former concept of MAG fit in – if at all. He recognised the importance of transparency, but it was also important that TTE could see the views from the broader membership and community, acknowledging the diversity in age, gender, ethnicity and all aspects and levels of the sport. By way of example, should this include a type of Membership Forum which included the Elected Directors?
- The new CEO will have an important part to play in the organisational changes.
- In conclusion, ND stressed again that these were his observations, and that the new CEO would have an important part to play in any organisational changes. There would be further consultations, taking the view of the community, focus groups etc – and he would welcome informal thoughts and comments at this stage. **ACTION: NH offered to circulate a paper produced by MAG that made recommendations on how transparency, accountability and engagement could be improved.**

Responses from National Councillors (NCs):

- There was general agreement about the importance of a cultural change within TTE in order to create a more productive working relationship with the membership. NCs emphasised the need for greater transparency, responsiveness and collaboration. It was acknowledged that a new CEO would be crucial for driving these changes.
- It was agreed that we all needed to move forward. There was a welcome for the concept of focus groups and advisory projects.
- There was a call for the standard of integrity of the organisation to be driven from the top.
- Several NCs offered their help and support if there was a genuine desire within TTE to work with the membership.
- National Council cautioned that this must be actions rather than words, and the actions are driven by people. So any change to the structure must be hand-in-hand with a change – driven from the top – of the culture, recognising that culture is created by the attitude and actions of people.
- The general conclusion to the presentation by ND was positive and welcoming that there had been engagement with National Council at an early stage. The offers of collaboration and assistance are on the table.

5. TT United Update by TTE CEO Adrian Christy (AC)

- AC presented a Power Point presentation on the strategy reset and structural changes aimed at achieving growth, including objectives to increase participation, enhance coaching, and invest in digital outreach.
- Challenges around the competition structure and financial constraints were acknowledged. AC stated that more would be shared on the World Table Tennis events once plans were finalized.
- He emphasised the need to manage expectations within financial reality. He outlined the progress against the four pledges:
 1. More people playing table tennis and removing barriers. He listed a range of local projects, the work of the LOGs, the plans to increase diversity and inclusivity, the creation of a localised calendar, and the success of 'Ping'. The Competition Review and the Review of the Competition Review will be dealt with elsewhere.
 2. Talent and Performance successes. The relocation to Sheffield, the establishment of a talent ID framework, a focus on a new coaching structure but the coach qualifications won't start until April, 156 players in the talent pathway, PDCs in place.
 3. Connecting across the table tennis community. The possibilities of more WTT events; in conversations with broadcasters; the need to invest in digital.
 4. High performing organisation - focused around the Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan. Want to invest in people. Sustainability work has been put on hold.

AC's summary of the impact of the Table Tennis United strategy was that it was 'making really exciting progress'. He recognised the challenges around the competition structure and promised that TTE would 'get it right'. He said that he was incredibly proud of how far we've come and proud of collaboration.

AC said that the PowerPoint presentation he had used would be published following a forthcoming on-line engagement session with Company Members in November.

Reactions from National Councillors (NCs):

Neil Hurford - described TTU as 'mind-blowing' when he first heard about it and thought it was a fantastic legacy not only with strategy but also the implementation.

Tony Catt (NC, Sussex) (TC) - Thanked AC for creating a plan where previously there wasn't one, as he had not inherited anything. But felt that his plan had been let down by many people, and that more effective people in positions could have helped. He applauded the Area Officers for doing a great job. But concluded that he felt that AC was 'defending the indefensible'.

AC responded by first stating this was TC's opinion. AC continued to commend the capability of the whole staff team, without whom we would not be able to present the progress of our strategy as he had been able to do.

Sandra Deaton (Deputy NC, Derbyshire (SD)) thought the collaboration and focus of the Area Development teams is superb. She welcomed any collaboration of external partners and stressed that there should be more publicity of local successes on the website.

Alan Ransome (NC, Cleveland) (AER) – Generally positive but would have welcomed this report earlier. Feedback from the North-East was positive. But there was a need for the coaching programme to be in place sooner rather than later as it had left a vacuum. Reminded AC that there had not yet been any significant information about the Worlds in 2026.

In response, AC recognised that they could promote success better; he defended the decision to pause coach training. He had wanted to give an update on the Worlds but details were not ready yet. He did say that there would be 128 teams, divided into two sets of 64, as Wembley can't accommodate the size of the event, so it was likely to be two London venue - one is Copperbox and the other at Wembley Arena.

5. CEO Update.

AC referenced a paper he had presented to National Council.

<https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/04%20CEO%20Update%205th%20Edition%202024.pdf>

6. Select Committee Reports

(The Select Committee Reports were moved higher up the agenda in order for the TTE Chair and CEO to be present)

a) Constitution

Alan Ransome (AER) presented a report from the Select Committee on the Constitution. The main points were:

- A poor AGM with a disconnect and disregard for the membership. Examples such as the membership being 'blacked out' on Zoom with just the TTE staff and 'top table' visible; little opportunity to discuss the Annual Review; lack of two-way communication; the absence of a Standing Orders Committee.
- The removal of 'In Good Standing', without consultation, from respected organisations such as the VETTS and BUCS had fragmented the sport, at a time when TTE should be looking to collaborate with the table tennis community. *(To be discussed later in the agenda)*
- Welcomed the creation of a Board position for a fifth Elected Director, although regretted the price was to give the Board the right of 'veto' over potential applicants.
- Felt that there had been progress on the Memorandum of Understanding between National Council and TTE at meetings in June but was concerned that progress had now stalled.

Full report available here:

<https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/06%20Select%20Committee%20report%20to%20Constitution%20670524.pdf>

- Nick Donald (Chair, TTE) (ND) acknowledged the need for improvements in some aspects of the AGM. He agreed to review the presentation of the Annual Report, to discuss concerns with the Board, and shared the dissatisfaction that the members were ‘blacked out’ during the meeting promising that it would not happen again. The MoU discussions would be taken forward with the new CEO.

b. Competitions

Alan Ransome (AER) presented the Select Committee Report on Competitions. This continued the increasing concerns about the on-going damage to the competition eco-structure at many levels, which is leading to increasing fragmentation of the competition programme. The creation of a ‘Task and Finish Group’, led by Elected Director, Ritchie Venner, to review the impact of the Competition Review and make recommendations to improve the competition landscape, was welcomed.

The confusing and contradictory nature of a recent set of TTE Regulations were also discussed and there was a welcome that they had now been withdrawn and the process whereby it was claimed that the changes had Board approval, would be investigated.

AER and others raised issues about the impact of competition changes on members and regional bodies. Considerable concerns were voiced over event management and communication issues. It was hoped by raising them in National Council, they would be brought to the attention of the Tier 1 Competition Advisory Committee and the staff members.

Full report available here:

[https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/07%20Select%20Committee%20on%20Competition%20report%20to%20NC%20\(670542%20\).pdf](https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/07%20Select%20Committee%20on%20Competition%20report%20to%20NC%20(670542%20).pdf)

The main points and discussion of the Select Committee Report on Competitions were:

- In Good Standing. The general feeling of the meeting was that TTE had scored ‘an own goal’ through its poor communications and lack of consultation over the redefinition of ‘In Good Standing’ which had led to some of the most respected table tennis organisations, such as the VETTS and BUCS, having their status and connection with TTE, terminated by TTE.

Adrian Christy (CEO) admitted that he didn’t understand the significance or relevance of ‘In Good Standing’ and thought it should be for members rather than non-members. As a result, it would only be for those bodies which chose to ‘affiliate’ to TTE. AC pointed out that there was a possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding with other groups.

Susie Venner (SV) Chair of the VETTS explained the significance and relevance of 'In Good Standing' to the VETTS who had enjoyed a 40 year mutually-beneficial relationship with TTE prior to this decision. However, as a result of TTE's action, at its last AGM the VETTS membership unanimously voted to retain their independence rather than affiliate to TTE and come under TTE's rules, regulations and control. She confirmed that the VETTS would be willing to co-operate with TTE on areas which would benefit all players and volunteers but would not be regulated or controlled by TTE.

Alex Murdoch, a former Chair of the VETTS, and other National Councillors also explained the relevance and pointed out that most of the VETTS would be members of TTE anyway, and a fair number would be Compete Plus members, and the volunteers who did the coaching, ran tournaments, ran Clubs, leagues, counties and provided the grass roots volunteer workforce on which TTE depended. It was generally felt that this was a bad decision by TTE to distance itself from the wider table tennis community and they were urged to rethink.

Several members of the VETTS, who are also National Councillors, described TTE's 'change management' as non-existent and pointed out that the reputational damage to TTE has been significant. They urged TTE to put this on-hold, take a step back and look at all the issues. A failure to manage change inevitably leads to getting it wrong and scoring own goals. In Good Standing was seen as a 'badge of honour' which had been taken away without consultation or thought. TTE was told that this was a time when they should be looking to strengthen links with the table tennis community rather than dismantle them.

- Regulation Change:
There was further controversy over a set of Regulations which had been included in the TTE Competition Regulations, although it was unclear who had approved them or how they had appeared on the website as having been approved by the Board.

The new regulations referred to TTE having the right to regulate tournaments which had players from more than one county, but this contradicted another regulation which defined 'Closed' tournaments. As a result, AER explained how some of his Ormesby officials had erroneously been threatened with disciplinary measures by a member of TTE staff even though they were behaving correctly, and the upset this had caused.

Estyn Williams (EW) and Neil Hurford (NH) who were on the Articles and Regulations Committee confirmed that their task was one of a 'wordsmith' – just to write Regulations which were required of them by staff members, rather than 'check and challenge'. EW and NH assumed that the approval and 'check and challenge' would come from elsewhere.

National Council welcomed the move that these Regulations had been withdrawn and that there would be an investigation. There was general agreement that Regulations should not stifle the growth of the game nor bring undue burdens on volunteers, and certainly not be used as a device to threaten volunteers. TTE was urged to develop a more productive working relationship with volunteers.

There was also discussion about the lack of senior events to replace the popular Grand Prix. This was because the regulations placed on potential organisers by TTE were too burdensome and made their participation and contribution financially non-viable.

Adrian Christy, CEO of TTE, (AC), confirmed that Regulations should not be counter-productive to providing a good competition structure. He said that the announcement of two senior 4*s was imminent.

Despite a forceful discussion with points robustly discussed and a general feeling that TTE had made errors of judgement, National Council was reassured that the Regulations had been rescinded pending investigation and welcomed the commitment that the regulations would be reviewed. Members of National Council offered to assist in anyway going forward.

- Ritchie Venner (RV), Elected Board Director and Chair of the Tier 1 Competition Committee, expanded on the review his Committee had been asked to undertake. He acknowledged the constraints being placed on potential organisers, particularly with regard to the financial risks they were being asked to run – and he resolved to have further discussions on this – maybe with a view to taking more events back ‘in-house’. RV agreed there should be a ‘lighter regulatory touch’ by TTE to make these events easier and cheaper to run.
- RV also recognised the concerns that parents and coaches had raised about the multi-venue National Series. While the event itself was welcomed, the logistics of playing this on different venues over different weekends had caused considerable logistical problems, which had failed to factor in the reality of coaches and parents needing to attend several venues at the same time in order to support their young players.
- Jon Bayliss had submitted a paper on this subject:
[https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/08%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Competition%20report%20to%20NC%20\(670542%20\).pdf](https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/08%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Competition%20report%20to%20NC%20(670542%20).pdf)
- Andy Wilesmith, SLT Head of Development/Competitions, had summarised his thoughts in a document which is now made available with these minutes.

<https://ttleagues-api.azurewebsites.net/download/national-council-tte/10%20Select%20Committee%20on%20Competitions%20paper%20-%20comments%20from%20Andrew%20Wilesmith%20-%202023%20Sept%202024.pdf>

c) Disability Select Committee

No report was presented.

7. County Associations Challenges

- NH and others discussed issues affecting county associations, such as the impact of leagues who disaffiliate on the counties and the difficulties in finding accommodating bank accounts banking issues. Actions were assigned to address these concerns.
- **ACTION:** NH to report back
RV to raise in Competition Committee

8. Towards a More Autonomous NC

- NH reported that the new MoU between National Council and TTE would be discussed and progressed with the new CEO.
- NH outlined progress on the new National Council website and invited feedback. Clive Ellison (CE) suggested a 'road map' to explain the transfer to the new site.
- In response to a question, NH confirmed deputy National Councillors would be welcome at NC meetings.
- Steve Joel (SJ) raised the question of the composition of NC and the issue of diversity

ACTION POINTS LISTED

9. Future NC Meetings

- Members supported themed-based meetings, with finance being a suggested topic. NH will follow up on themes for upcoming meetings.

ACTION POINTS LISTED

10. Financial Information/Select Committee on Finance

- There was some discussion about the nature of information which should be provided to National Council and the benefits of this being done through a Select Committee on Finance.
- A Task and Finish Group was proposed, consisting of Tony Catt, Martin Clark, Alan Ransome, Steve Joel, and possibly others to scope and address the information exchange for finance-related issues. **ACTION.**

11. Articles & Regulations Index Summary

- The Articles & Regulations Index Summary was criticised as being significantly out-of-date. NH explained that it was produced for earlier meetings of the Governance & Risk Committee. But National Council felt there was little point in receiving documentation which was so far out-of-date as to be incorrect and misleading.
- There was also some discussion as to the role of the Articles & Regulations Committee as being predominantly 'wordsmiths' rather than experts in the area of rules and regulations, as it had been previously.
- There was repeated dissatisfaction that there seemed to be little or no checking mechanism on members of the SLT and staff who were putting forward amendments to the Rules and Regulations without attention to any due process.
- It was noted that this is under investigation and that several sets of amendments had subsequently been withdrawn after appearing on the website and being attributed as having been approved by the Board.

12. Any other Business

- Concerns over the state of welfare officer training and complaints about ineffective communication practices were raised, prompting a discussion on how to address these deficiencies. Suggestions of an online course. **ACTION.** NH to raise welfare officer training requirements.
- Clive Ellison also expressed his frustration at the lack of information coming from various TTE Committees, whose Terms of Reference state that they should make their minutes available. **ACTION: NH**

Next Meeting:

The date will be confirmed, with a tentative date scheduled for January 25.