

The Catt's Eye View

National Council – How to fit in

February 2025

Executive Summary

I am setting out a few ideas to increase the effectiveness of communication within Table Tennis England (TTE) and the community of the membership. I understand that:

- The new CEO, Sally Lockyer is keen to communicate with the membership and to embrace the National Council.
- The membership would like to see transparency and openness in the Governance and running of TTE in accordance with the Code for Sport Governance.
- There is a lot of experience and skill within the membership that is not utilised in the running of our sport.
- The current Governance structure does not have effective lines of communication between the management of TTE and the membership.

Background and Ideas

Since the Portas Report in 2017 and the implementation of the Board of TTE, there has been consideration of how the National Council fits into the Governance structure of TTE. There was an Independent Review Panel in 2019 that suggested that National Council be replaced by the Members' Advisory Group (MAG).

The MAG was designed to contain many aspects of the membership – clubs, coaching, officials etc. and therefore to provide a diversity of thought to advise and guide the management of TTE. Where the MAG feel down was that many or all of its recommendations were ignored by the management of TTE. Therefore, it usefulness run its course.

The National Council has continued throughout. Since it often found itself questioning the running of TTE, it almost became the unofficial opposition of the Board. Due to the voting power of National Councillors, it has remained in place.

The movement to remote meetings has weakened the National Council as physical meetings are excellent networking opportunities. Indeed, I think that TTE should consider the costs of the meetings as an investment as they are a chance for members to meet the staff and leads to greater understanding through friendship.

Most recently, the management of TTE has tried to sideline it by limiting the attendance of staff members and the Chair and CEO. No information or papers have been provided to National Council since the last AGM. **The last AGM was a disgrace with a remote meeting held without cameras.** There have been meetings with Company Members and members. But these have simply been updates without any background papers and very little opportunity to actually discuss anything. Transmission mode only with no intention to listen.

There was a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Council that started off almost zeroising the National Council, it was then watered down for public consumption and then subject to some negotiation. The negotiation came to stop when the CEO announced that he was leaving and the Chair then advised that we should wait for the new CEO. Then the Chair resigned. Can kicked so far down the road that it has not landed yet.

Our recent National Council meetings have had some pointless discussions about the future of the National Council and we have struggled even to set dates.

The most recent meeting was rather more encouraging with the new CEO, Sally Lockyer expressing a keenness to work with National Council and the membership.

We need to work out how National Council can integrate into the Governance Structure of TTE.

The Catt's Eye View

The current structure would appear to be:

Board	-	Tier 1 Committees –	Advisory Committees	Finance & Audit
				Talent & Performance
				Development
				Governance & Risk
				Competition
			Standing Committees	Nominations
				People
				Disciplinary
				Honours

I am not aware of how effective these meetings were. I understand that they met quarterly and produced notes. But what actually happened as a result of the meetings? I notice that the Chair and CEO were on all of the Advisory Committees and cannot help feeling that this would actually have reduced the influence of the committees.

The National Council has set up “Select Committees” to look at Governance and Competitions. These have met in preparation of the National Council meetings to prepare detailed papers considering issues in detail. These have proved to be effective.

So on the basis that the select committees have been effective, I would suggest that we have a select committee to mirror each of the advisory committees on the Board. This would enable a two-way communication on these issues between the Board and the National Council.

It could be made more robust by a board committee member attending the select committees and a member of the select committee attending the advisory committee.

In order for the National Council to represent the membership better, I would look to widen the membership of National Council to include the Deputy National Councillor for each county and the Company Members to represent the Leagues and also to have representation from the Premier Clubs.

The opposition to this idea is that the meetings would have too many people in attendance. Since we only had 37 people at the AGM, I am not sure that this idea holds much water. And of that number, 12 were staff!!!

The point of having the wide membership is that there would be greater expertise in various areas of the sport – clubs, leagues, officials, coaches, development people etc. Then we could have separate select committees on all of those aspects to feed into one or more of the select and advisory committees depending on the issue under consideration.

This idea of the separate expertise groups builds on the idea of the MAG, but within the Governance Structure involving the Board, SLT, Advisory Groups and National Council with groups rather than individuals.

Thus information being provided by TTE will not just be to satisfy curiosity of certain members, but to encourage true two-way communication lines between the Management of TTE and the Membership. The transmission and receipt of knowledge should enable better decision-making at all levels of the sport. It will increase the knowledge levels of everybody able to vote at the AGM and increase the quality of any discussions.

As ever, these ideas may need some tuning to make them effective, but I hope that this will trigger a discussion that will lead to better decision-making in the future.

We all want Table Tennis England to be able to provide the best possible products for the membership. My ambition would be that people start referring to Table Tennis England as “we”, “us”, “our organisation” rather than “they” and “them”.

Tony Catt

National Councillor, Sussex

The Catt's Eye View

07899 847338