

KENT COUNTY TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION (KCTTA)

Affiliated to Table Tennis England

President: Ted Tydeman



Open Letter to Table Tennis England

KCTTA Position Statement addressed to TTE's Board

WHO ARE WE?

KCTTA committee comprises 14 members who live in many different parts of a large County. We are striving to reinvigorate our sport in Kent and in the last couple of years have implemented our own initiatives including running Invicta junior events, resurrecting the Kent Closed Senior and Junior events before COVID stepped in. The KCTTA Committee sends invitations to the 13 Kent League representatives to make sure we are all aligned in our views. In this Position Statement we have documented the genuine concerns of the 2000 plus membership that we, the KCTTA Committee, represents.

BACKGROUND TO OUR POSITION STATEMENT

Many members have written open letters to Table Tennis England (TTE) and we were asked by a Kent player whether we were prepared to support his letter. KCTTA Committee has met on four separate occasions to discuss the ongoing TTE related issues. After discussion, it was felt that we should be writing our own position statement to ensure on all issues it clearly reflected our views and those of our members.

At one of these recent Committee meetings, one Kent League unprompted has advised that their committee has seriously discussed disaffiliation. They advise disaffiliation would result in a loss of around 10% of their players. Two other leagues also confirmed that their committees have had the same discussion with similar loss of players. This is the stark reality for TTE and Counties of local league dissatisfaction.

We recognise that TTE's primary role is to carry out Sport England agreed initiatives to ensure funding continues. Member perception is that TTE is too focussed on increasing mass participation and 'elite' players, rather than helping its membership to grow our sport. TTE also receives funding from our members each year, who complain that they see no TTE assistance in helping them to grow the game locally.

Whilst most will appreciate the focus on Sport England is necessary, there must be room to assist clubs and leagues to grow and flourish. TTE is a membership organisation in place to serve their members and run the national sport for the benefit of all. That means equitable treatment whether that member is a top player or someone playing in their local league. Currently it is felt that local table tennis is surviving despite TTE and not because of it.

In addition, some recent financial decisions, such as the non-rebating of the "Compete" annual membership fee when some were not able to play any competitive table tennis, seems to be totally short sighted as some members will never play again. This decision discriminates against members who set up auto renewal to ensure early assistance to help TTE's cashflow. Their loyalty has worked against them and such a cynical disregard to the "loyal supporter" seems commercially foolish and manifestly unfair. These issues are part of those causing a massive disconnect at general membership level towards TTE and its leadership.

Whilst KCTTA do receive updates from our National Councillor on TTE matters, we now concentrate on local issues and trying to develop the game within the County.

Our view is that TTE have determined not to invest their general development resources on local leagues but wants to instead focus its efforts on large multi table clubs - not that we have seen evidence of the latter. In

Kent, with the assistance of local league players the most successful centres have been locally self-funded, adding many teams to their local leagues. A blueprint for development of multi table venues has been prepared and issued to all Kent Leagues as there is a strong view this can be replicated.

TTE and Kent multi table initiatives do not mean there is no room for village halls and smaller venues in our local leagues and this is especially true in more rural areas. TTE should be making sure wherever table tennis is played, there are easy pathways for players to progress and continue to promote the adages **'Table Tennis is a game for life'** and **'Live long, play ping pong'**. This is particularly pertinent in the current pandemic where wellbeing and exercise for all players has never been more vital.

CONCLUSION

Significant organisational problems in our experience, are usually caused by weakness in high levels of governance. We therefore have reviewed both UK Sport/Sport England's A Code for Sports Governance and Badminton England's (BE's) governance structure (from their website) to enable us to make some comparisons with TTE to assist on the way forward.

TTE's February 2021 board statements do not address the fundamental flaw in its governance. We are confident that TTE excels in certain areas of its role but this position statement and its Appendix focusses on its apparent weaker areas. Hence it cannot be expected to give a balanced view of TTE. KCTTA strongly recommends that the following points should be considered going forward, there is further detail in the Findings and Recommendations Appendix section:

- Badminton England (BE) high level governance model should be considered as an alternative. There is no formal TTE delegated board/committee to oversee Performance, a key business area. BE below its board has as their second and third most important committees "*England Performance Board*" and "*Player Development Board*". Directors with 'elite' player and player development backgrounds should be considered for roles in these key committees. Currently, we would argue that TTE directors without a Performance related delegated committee of the board, are unable to adequately discharge their responsibilities over TTE's Performance activities.
- Performance is an area poorly managed with no satisfactory explanation given for its lack of key measurable performance despite now historic requests to address this. The Performance report recently submitted to National Council was abysmal.
- Re-appoint a TTE staff member with the remit to develop and provide assistance to local leagues.
- There needs to be a change of culture at the top of TTE to address member perception of poor transparency and erring on the side of secrecy.
- The only explanation for the 12 October 2020 meeting debacle is Senior Leadership Team (SLT)'s lack of soft skills sometimes called "people skills" or "emotional intelligence" to understand the invidious position all directors were put in at this meeting.
- If independence, integrity and/or ethical values are breached they are hard to retrieve.
- No organisation gets it right all the time. The membership is mature, in age at least, TTE should communicate bad news together with plans to do better going forward and move on.
- Asking for help from the membership reflects a strong confident organisation but at the same time we don't expect to be leading its direction. The membership has real experts across a plethora of fields, many of whom may be willing to give some time to assist TTE on its journey. The membership wants TTE and the sport to succeed.

In the following Appendix we provide detailed findings and recommendations that KCTTA believe need to be implemented. We request TTE's responses together with target dates for implementation. Those in bold by 05 March 2021 and the remaining by 24 March 2021.

APPENDIX

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Code for Sports Governance

The Code was primarily brought in to ensure integrity particularly around income and expenditure in sporting governing bodies. The Code for Sports Governance has at its heart, five Principles of good governance. They are:

1. Structure
2. People
3. Communication
4. Standards of Conduct
5. Policies and Processes

From the Codes principles of governance as well as a review of Badminton England (BE) governance structure we have raised Findings and made Recommendations, those in **bold** require more urgent attention.

1. Structure

A Code for Sports Governance states: *“The Organisations shall have a clear and appropriate governance structure, led by a Board which is collectively responsible for the long-term success of the organisation and exclusively vested with the power to lead it. The Board shall be properly constituted, and shall operate effectively.”*

1.1 TTE is our sports governing body and we want it to succeed as this is in the best interests of our sport. We believe TTE’s structure is not clear and appropriate to collectively lead our sport. Below TTE’s board it has the following committees, Finance and Audit, Governance and Risk, Nomination and Remuneration.

If we take BE as an example of good structure, BE below their board have the following advisory boards and committees: Finance and Risk Board, England Performance Board, Player Development Board, Governance Board, Disciplinary Committee, Human Resources Committee and Nominations Committee.

Performance is an area poorly managed with no satisfactory explanation given for its lack of key measurable performance indicators particularly when members have significant concerns around cadet and junior elite development. There is no board delegated committee to oversee this critical business area. Add to this that despite previous concerns being raised around its reporting, the recent Performance report submitted to National Council was abysmal in that it again failed to provide factual data on elite performance and development.

Whereas, BE rank after the Finance and Risk board, their second and third most important sub boards as England Performance and Player Development. Sub Board terms of reference state *“The England Performance Board will be composed of those who have relevant expertise from current or recent involvement in elite performance.”* The Player Development Board will be composed of those who *“have knowledge of the pathways and structures within their sport to include but not limited to, participation, coach education learning, coaching development and competition”*

Specifically, BE’s England Performance and Player Development sub-board terms of reference include the following sections: Purpose, Scope of Responsibilities, Delegated Authority, Schedule of Meetings, Composition of Board and Board procedures. Adopting this model, TTE’s England Performance and Player Development Boards would appoint directors with relevant elite performance and player development

experience, one would be chair. From their backgrounds Don Parker, Dee Paterson could be considered for one or both of these boards and Priya Samuel, the Player Development board.

Recommendations

Will TTE's Board agree to:

1.1.1 Review its Performance governance arrangements against BE's and report back to the members on its findings?

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.1.1 Provide a detailed paper on how TTE's board adequately discharges its independent oversight responsibility over TTE's Performance activities.

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.2 BE have a 39 page Governance document on their website which includes roles and powers of the board, reserved powers of the board, authority of the board and delegation to the Chief Executive, limits on the board, executive action and delegation etc.

Recommendation

1.2.1 Will TTE's Board agree to review this document and where applicable use it to improve its own governance structure?

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.3 One of the code requirements is *"1.19 At least 25% of the Board shall be independent non-executive directors."* With the current board of 12 this requires at least three independent non-executive directors. TTE has six independent non-executive directors which is what one might expect at a medium or large sized business. For information, Badminton, a larger sport has 10 directors. This is not meant to point fingers at any independent non-executive director(s).

Recommendation

1.3.1 Why does TTE, a relatively small sport governing body, have the current level of independent non-executives. We wish to understand TTE's rationale and business justification for this?

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.4 Board Conduct under the code *"1.21 Boards shall adopt policies and practices that:
(A) foster openness and debate amongst directors: and
(B) set out clear expectations with respect to the running of Board meetings and director behaviour."*

TTE had no procedure or code of conduct in place to deal with disputes of Board members.

Recommendation

1.4.1 Given that this was a mandatory requirement of the Code for Sports Governance was this an oversight or was this a considered decision taken that the required procedure and code of conduct were unnecessary?

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.5 In the Findings below there are a number of instances where the Code for Sports Governance mandatory requirements have not been met. Some shortcomings in adherence could be levelled at BE as well, however to an extent this is offset by the transparency of their organisation, their website has detailed governance structure, detailed annual report and there are documented policies and procedures for almost everything. They have a customer charter as well.

Recommendation

1.5.1 Why has TTE ignored mandated Code for Sports Governance requirements in some areas?

Board Response:

Target Date:

1.6 Despite the lack of procedures and code of conduct the Tony Catt behavioural matter could have been dealt with through more skill and tact? Did TTE have no individual internally/externally with the expertise to manage a material staff/director issue properly? It is usual for a senior member of the management team not involved in the matter, to meet all parties confidentially, write up minutes of these meetings signed by those attending and write a report with findings and recommendations. Chris Bartram's letter of 3 February 2021 comment on SLT is well made, *"The lack of leadership, empathy and or emotional intelligence to determine how best to address the issues surrounding Tony Catt (TC) has and still is damaging our sport"*. In BE's model there is a sub Committee for Human Resources.

Recommendation

1.6.1 Why did SLT not follow a usual process when a complaint was made?

Management response:

Target Date:

1.7 The code *"1.21 The Board shall maintain an audit committee"*. Having a combined Finance and Audit Committee brings confusion relating to the Audit Committee scope and its committee composition.

Recommendation

1.7.1 Why is there no separate Audit Committee?

Board response:

Target Date:

1.8 The Finance and Audit Committee composition is Doug Livingstone (chair), Sandra Deaton, Dee Paterson, Tom Purcell and Sara Sutcliff. Best practice on Audit Committees as detailed by Sport England requires that the Board chair should not ordinarily be a member whereas the *Financial Reporting Council UK Corporate Governance Code 2018* mandates they should not be a member.

Recommendation

1.8.1 Why is the TTE Chair a member of Audit Committee?

Board response:

Target Date:

1.9 Audit Committee composition is not included in the Code for Sport Governance but is covered by the *Financial Reporting Council UK Corporate Governance Code* which states:
"Code Provisions

C.3.1. The board should establish an audit committee of at least three, or in the case of smaller companies two, independent non-executive directors.”

If executives are on the Audit Committee then its independence is deemed to be compromised. Nevertheless, Audit Committee chair often invites executives to meetings due to their extensive knowledge of the business. A properly constituted Audit Committee ensures there is an independent body within the organisation to arrange for independent reviews whenever significant concerns arise.

Recommendation

1.9.1 Why are TTE’s CEO and Tom Purcell a member of Audit Committee?

Board response:

Target Date:

1.10 See *“1.25 A majority of the members of the nomination committee shall be independent non-executive directors”*. The composition is Sandra Deaton (Chair), Mark Quartermaine, Dee Paterson, Susie Venner and Tony Catt.

Recommendation

1.10.1 Why does the Nominations Committee have a minority of independent non-executive directors when it is a mandatory requirement of Sport England to have a majority?

Board response:

Target Date:

2. People

2.1 It is mandatory requirement *“2.7 The Board shall have succession plans for orderly appointments to the Board and to key positions within senior management”*.

Recommendation

2.1.1 Can TTE confirm that there are succession plans for all senior staff and board positions?

Board response:

Target Date:

2.2 It is mandatory requirement *“Induction of new Directors 2.11 On appointment, each director shall be given a written statement of their responsibilities. 2.12 Each organisation shall ensure that new directors receive a full, formal and tailored induction on joining the board.”*

Recommendation

Can TTE confirm that director induction met the mandated requirements?

Board response:

Target Date:

3. Communication

The Code for Sports Governance states *“Organisations shall be transparent and accountable, engaging effectively with stakeholders and nurturing internal democracy. REQUIREMENTS 3.1 Each organisation shall publicly disclose information on its governance, structure, strategy, activities and financial position to enable stakeholders to have a good understanding of them.”*

3.1 There are no measurable KPIs for the Performance team which is contrary to the Code of Sports Governance. There has been a failure of the SLT and the Board to make the Performance team accountable. We hesitated when using the word board as we know at least one or more board member(s) have been trying to address this issue.

Recommendations

3.1.1 Why were no measurable KPIs for the Performance team put in place when it is a critical development area for the sport?

Board Response:

Target Date:

3.1.2 Can TTE provide a list of England cadet and junior European and World rankings around the beginning of 2020 and for the four previous years?

Management Response:

Target Date:

3.2 There are 128 paid up "Compete Plus" members who have been offered refunds whereas paid up "Compete" members have not received or been offered any refunds of their fee. This is particularly galling when senior club members in the best interest of table tennis have been encouraging all members to pay TTE by recurring direct debits. Whilst the actual amount of £16 to many is immaterial, it is the principle that some members may be struggling financially, have played no table tennis yet paid in good faith but their funds have been withheld by TTE on the pretext of still offering them some value. Other sports have been more generous, giving members the option of requesting return of fees but also asked members to help out their sport in these difficult times where they can.

If members have not played in local leagues or competed in national events at 1 star level, then by TTE's Membership Categories they are only required to have "Club" membership this season which is free. This should mean they are entitled to a full refund of the "Compete" fee of £16.

TTE do not seem to understand the impact of alienating some members to this degree. Many local league players are integral to running of leagues, local clubs and tournaments all on a voluntary basis and without these people generously giving their time many clubs would simply not exist. The feeling of disrespect and ill will that this type of decision on fees has created in Kent is immeasurable.

To restate, "Compete" members that have not played are "Club" members which by TTE's own criteria is free.

Recommendation

3.2.1 Why have 128 paid up "Compete Plus" members been offered refunds whereas paid up "Compete" members have not received or been offered any refunds of their fee?

Board Response:

Target Date:

3.3 TTE is disconnected from the grassroots players, Kent Leagues and KCTTA and this has been the case for many years. Our members view is that TTE take membership fees and entrance fees to their competitions and provide grassroots, Kent Leagues and KCTTA membership with liability insurance, job done. When organising table tennis in Kent, TTE our sports governing body adds no value. Although, one reading TTE's Annual Review, that reports there are multiple initiatives being run throughout the country, it may be that

we are not aware of any, due to communication issues. KCTTA may be being parochial here but wants to better understand the many good TTE initiatives in Kent.

Recommendations

3.3.1 Can TTE advise in detail which of their initiatives reported in the Annual Review for 2019/20 have happened in Kent and where? If 2019/20 is not a representative period, can we ask that you provide the same information for 2018/19.

Management Response:

Target Date:

3.3.2 TTE should appoint a TTE staff member with a remit to develop and assist local league table tennis.

Management Response:

Target Date:

3.4 To enable member stakeholders to have a good understanding of where and how their annual fees are used requires TTE to provide more detailed financial information. Member concerns have been raised about the following:

- Why are junior players being asked to pay for their elite training including accommodation?
- Why do junior players in the England squad have to pay for their own expenses?
- Why was a TTE employed coach sent to China with Liam Pitchford at great cost when he was playing in an invitation event and not representing England?
- There is a member perception that table tennis is no longer a meritocracy and the less well off young players are disadvantaged.

A good example is on BE's website of how this information can be usefully communicated. 39% of BE income is spent on grassroots badminton (defined as schools, participation, clubs, coaches, competition). Can TTE advise of the comparable percentage for table tennis?

Recommendations

3.4.1 Will TTE provide more detailed information on how the member funds are spent?

Management Response:

Target Date:

3.4.2 How do the practices mentioned above fit in with TTE's diversity push and ethical values?

Management Response:

Target Date:

3.4.3 Can TTE advise of the comparable income percentage between badminton and table tennis?

Management Response:

Target Date:

4. Standards of Conduct

The Code of Sports Governance states: *"Organisations shall uphold high standards of integrity, and engage in regular and effective evaluation to drive continued improvement. REQUIREMENTS integrity 4.4 Each organisation shall adopt a mandatory directors' code that, amongst other things, requires all directors to act*

at all times, with integrity, in a forthright and ethical manner and in accordance with their organisation's conflicts policy.

4.1 The effective disciplinary meeting on 12 October 2020 put directors in an invidious position and made it almost impossible for directors to act with integrity and in an ethical manner.

Recommendation

4.1.1 Who made the decision and why was it decided to hold this meeting with all Board directors present?

Management Response:

Target Date:

4.2 Most of KCTTA committee attended the EGM on 25 January 2021 and were all disappointed with the tone and demeanour of several of the TTE directors who spoke FOR no confidence in TC such that some were guilty themselves of aggressive and bullying behaviour. Many of us have listened to the disciplinary meeting of 12 October 2020. The credibility of several directors' present has been indelibly damaged.

Recommendation

4.2.1 In view of the mandatory requirement for Directors to always act with integrity, in a forthright and ethical manner what action is being taken to address shortcomings of some directors in these meetings?

Board Response:

Target Date:

4.3 Quoting Chris Bartram's open letter of 03 February 2021 as it says it well "*Important to us as well is that none of us condone the poor judgement exercised in Mr. Catt's communications towards various senior members of TTE and his lack of confidentiality he owed to the board*". Nonetheless, the SLT should still have treated Tony Catt equitably and fairly in the processes that followed these behaviour issues. Whereas TTE put road blocks in place for him leading up to the EGM whilst other board members were able to use the full TTE communications network. The EGM process has raised some serious integrity and ethical issues in respect of those in TTE senior management.

Recommendation

4.3.1 Who was making decisions relating to the use of TTE's resources as one would expect the SLT to be conflicted?

Management Response:

Target Date:

5. Policies and Processes

No issues to raise.

Authors: Phil Cox – Chairman of KCTTA

Mark Romano – Secretary of KCTTA

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