

NOTES ON MEETINGS WITH COUNTIES

Background

The meetings with counties and their leagues had been arranged as part of a wider engagement initiative to make the table tennis community aware of MAG – its role, who's on it, what it does and what it plans to do.

All 39 counties were given the opportunity to have an on-line discussion with MAG and to involve their leagues as well. As a result of this invite, seven meetings with counties were arranged. The format of the meetings was a short presentation on MAG followed by a wider discussion. Meetings lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes.

We were interested to hear the issues that mattered to Counties and to give them the opportunity to shape the future work programme of MAG. We also agree to pass on issues that were judged to be relevant for TTE to address.

Issues Discussed

Here are the main issues discussed during the meetings.

- Profile & Role of Counties & Leagues
- Role of MAG
- Regions
- League Development
- Schools
- Social, health and well-being
- Female participation
- Volunteers
- Covid-19 Issues
- TTE Communication & Engagement
- Profile of Table Tennis
- Facilities
- Performance
- BME participation

More details provided in Appendix A.

Issues to be Considered for MAG Future Work Programme

Based on the discussions, we have identified the following as issues that should be considered as part of the future MAG work programme.

- Improving the competitive structure
- Improving local league formats
- Improved engagement with Schools
- Better member retention in the 18 – 24 age range
- Addressing diversity and inclusion (including female participation)
- A better deal for volunteers
- Changing and raising the profile of table tennis
- How to encourage the development of specialist facilities for table tennis
- Alternative membership models
- Addressing performance issues for our cadet and junior players

At a future MAG meeting we will review each of these issues and consider how to include them in our future work programme. In line with our usual practice, we will appoint suitable project managers to produce project briefs. Will then assemble an appropriate project team drawing on expertise from across the table tennis community – volunteers, Board members and TTE staff.

Issues to be Considered by TTE

A common theme of the meetings was that TTE needed to improve communications and engagement. Two specific suggestions were made that we recommend are taken up by the Board

- As part of being affiliated to TTE, each league or county would be entitled to an on-line meeting with TTE Board Members or TTE Senior Staff to discuss any issues that were of concern to the county or league. This would be in addition to Board members attending league and county AGMs
- On-line discussions on an annual basis with leagues and counties in which the Board reported on progress on various initiatives

Other topics which we think should be considered by the Board are:

- How to provide more hands-on, proactive support to local leagues with development initiatives
- What can be done to encourage Sport England to restore grants for facilities to previous levels
- How TT Kidz operates in the north of England
- Review the role of Regions and whether they should continue

MAG would be happy to work with TTE on outputs from these meetings.

Members Advisory Group
November 2020

Appendix A – Issues Raised

Profile & Role of Counties & Leagues

- The profile of counties & leagues had declined – representing a county had a much lower cache than in previous years
- There were lots of tournaments and training camps at weekends for young players to play in – which reduced both the incentive and the availability to play in league and county competitions
- Coaches don't see county table tennis as part of the route map for the development of players
- It was unclear what level of commitment TTE has to the county championships
- Counties still had a role in recruiting umpires who often came through the county route

Role of MAG

- Greater clarity of the role of MAG was required.
- The MAG presentation should be made more widely available
- A regular update should be issued to National Council so that it could be kept informed of MAG's activities.
- It would be helpful if MAG and National Council were singing from the same hymn sheet.

Regions

- Since the demise of Regional Coaches, there had not been anything that brought the counties together on a regional basis.
- Not clear what the Regions are doing

League Development

- The format of local league competitions was a disincentive to participation by young players. Shorter formats were likely to be preferable for young players – but the economics of 2-player teams was a downside.
- Leagues operating at central venues were successful
- TTE offer a lot of support to clubs, less to leagues who need more help with grant applications. Not equitable between leagues and clubs. Some leagues operating as clubs
- Some funding should be ear-marked for leagues
- Alternative formats discussed eg T2 APAC – timed sets
- Could local leagues run competition that specified that certain types of rubbers were allowed or not allowed?
- Leagues feel unloved by TTE – the focus is on clubs

Retention of Players

- Very difficult to retain players in table tennis once they left school and moved to university.
- This could be something for MAG to address

Schools

- TTE need to provide more help for leagues to engage with schools – a package for secondary schools
- Basic coaching course for teachers would help with promoting TT in schools
- There is a need to generate more help for schools. TTKidz agencies only operate in the South and the Midlands. What about the North?

Social, health and well-being aspects of table tennis

- Female ambassadors were required. Women-only coaching sessions had been successful
- Where there was an element of socialising they were successful, particularly for sessions involving lady players
- The social, health and community aspects of table tennis were important and were a source of growth
- Links to U3A had been productive
- Every type of table tennis needed to be promoted

Volunteers

- Counties and leagues were highly dependent on a limited number of volunteers
- The model developed by “Park Run” of providing well-defined, limited roles had been successful and could be copied by table tennis.
- Success in Weymouth had been due to an amazing committee. Eight people who work together as a team
- More support for female coaches and coaches from a BME background
- Coaches like to coach. They often need someone else to do the organising. Team work is important to make sure appropriate skills are deployed.

Covid-19 Issues

- Covid-19 would have a serious impact on clubs and leagues
- Concern was expressed over vulnerable volunteers who may not want to come back. TTE should do more. MAG should do more on Covid19 issues with possibly 30% volunteers leaving. TTE should be talking with every league and county on issues relating to Covid19.
- TTE should be campaigning hard to ensure the maximum number of membership renewals. The assumption that only 30% of membership income would be lost was seen as unduly optimistic
- Premises could be made “Covid-secure” but extra nights might be required. Extra funding might be required to cover this.
- The larger clubs had a track and trace system in place. Bat and Chat sessions had started again with a small rise in charges.
- TTE should be thinking outside the box to make tournaments happen. Communication is an issue.

TTE Communication & Engagement and Profile of Table Tennis

- More proactive contact from TTE would be appreciated.
- Had a visit from TTE Chair at the time of the TT365 problem – too reactive
- TTE should offer the chance for counties and leagues to meet (on-line) with Board Member and or senior member of TTE staff once a year
- Perhaps TTE could take a more proactive approach – hold on-line regional meetings with counties and leagues in a particular region. Perhaps do this mid-way through the season.
- Raising the profile of the sport – particularly through TV
- Greater visibility of top English players in England would be beneficial
- Managing the transition from junior to senior ranks remained a challenge
- As players moved to university, they were lost to the sport
- More competitions for U21 and U25

Facilities

- There was a lot less facilitation grant funding from Sport England for premises. Are TTE asking for more funding from Sport England for clubs?
- Sport England should provide more grants for clubs. There is a lack of specialist table tennis clubs (open many days a week with multiple tables available)

TTE Membership

- Div One players playing in multiple local leagues got significant benefits from their TTE memberships – particularly if they also played in the county championships.
- Is there a way to structure TTE membership fees so that Div One players paid more than lower division players? Alternatively, a fee structure that depended on the number of leagues played in might be appropriate

Performance

- A major issue was the standard of junior play at English level with no team in the top 16 at European junior level. The lack of investment being provided was questioned.