

An open letter

The undersigned members of the Board have taken the unusual step of publishing this open letter to the membership ahead of the EGM next Monday 25 January 2021.

The Board of Table Tennis England is made up of 12 individuals – the Chairman, three Elected Directors, seven Appointed Directors (a mixture of table tennis and independent people) and the Chief Executive Officer (ex officio). Tony Catt was elected to the Board in July 2019.

Tony Catt recently sought support from the membership to call an EGM to table three motions of no confidence and going further to instruct the Board to remove the named individuals from office. The first proposition is unusually seeking a vote of no confidence in himself, with the instruction to remove himself from office. The second proposition seeks to remove Sandra Deaton, Chairman, from office and the third seeks to remove Sara Sutcliffe MBE, Chief Executive Officer, effectively terminating her employment contract.

It is acknowledged that Tony has asked for the EGM to be cancelled but that cannot happen. This is due to the fact the EGM has been called at the request of over 5% of the voting membership, not only by Tony, and therefore it must continue in accordance with Company Law, which the directors have a duty to follow.

All of this has caused ongoing and considerable disruption amongst the Board and the Senior Leadership team. This disruption has caused an interruption in focus to deliver what is required as a Governing Body, to provide support to its various stakeholders in preparation to rebuild and get back playing the sport we all love, as quickly and safely as possible once lockdown restrictions ease.

The Board felt that we owed it to the membership to provide Tony with every opportunity to work together with the Board and Senior Leadership. With great disappointment, collectively we have not succeeded. The series of events that led to an independent investigation have been set out previously and are covered in the report by Mr Stockwell. It highlights several attempts were made to work with Tony to moderate his behaviours and these were either short-lived or unsuccessful. We urge you to read the report in full as it would not be appropriate to paraphrase it.

Tony's consistent mantra that he is not receiving answers to his questions is untrue. Extensive efforts have been made to correct his multiple misunderstandings, explain policies and discuss the talent and performance programme in particular. Often Tony has then thanked the staff and seemed to understand the explanations, even if perhaps he did not agree with them. Instead of working to influence his Board colleagues productively he has descended into being rude and destructive. The independent report concluded that his actions were bullying towards Sandra, Sara and Simon Mills.

Tony has repeatedly said that Table Tennis England does not listen to its membership enough. There are however many examples of where the Board and the Senior Leadership team have explicitly, proactively and openly worked with the wider membership to bring their expertise and opinions into the decision-making process. This includes through the Members' Advisory Group, membership consultations and volunteer focus groups. Since Don Parker's election to the Board last year, the performance team has included him in their meetings and processes, drawing on his experience to help shape strategy and be involved in key decisions. Other directors are also involved in areas which play to their strengths.

Of course, even within the membership there is not always going to be consensus and so decisions will be made that some people disagree with.

Tony's latest accusation that Table Tennis England is unaccountable is another sweeping unsubstantiated opinion. We are very accountable to numerous stakeholders – Sport England, UK Sport, ITTF and of course the membership as a whole. The Chief Executive and the Senior Leadership team are accountable to the Board and we hold them accountable.

As a Board we need to be able to operate with trust and respect. Differing views are welcome and, in fact, needed for constructive challenge. The independent report is clear that Tony has breached Board confidence and we find his persistent use of social media to discuss Board level business, as well as making statements that are reputationally damaging or contain personal information, to be wholly inappropriate for a Board director.

The undersigned directors offer Sandra and Sara their full support. In Sandra and Sara we have two highly professional, very competent, highly regarded, dedicated and committed individuals playing a key role in running this sport. If you have any doubt about how highly regarded, they are, please read the attached letters from [Sport England](#) and the [ITTF](#).

In the end, the priority has to be that we collectively move forward, rebuild stability and repair the damage that has been caused. It is not good for the sport or any of the individuals involved to have gone through the last few months in times that are already challenging both personally and professionally. It has caused hundreds of hours of distraction for both the Board, Senior Leadership team and staff, time that we would all rather be spending on ensuring that table tennis comes through the coronavirus crisis.

We are sorry that you, the membership, find yourselves needing to deal with this. We will of course as a Board learn from this, as we must. The governance changes of the last few years have caused some friction, we understand that, but none of that can in any way be used to excuse the behaviour of Tony Catt towards other volunteer directors and professional staff.

We are all honoured to serve on the Board of Table Tennis England. We urge you to put your trust in the existing leadership of Sandra and Sara and reject the motions from Tony Catt to remove them. For the good of table tennis, we need to stop this destructive approach and move forward now.

Yours in table tennis,

Simon Griew

Steve Kemish

Doug Livingstone

Dee Paterson

Tom Purcell

Mark Quartermaine

Priya Samuel