

## **Tennis Scotland Strategy Proposal**

### **Response from Tennis Tayside – April 2013**

The Board of Tennis Tayside welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals from Tennis Scotland outlined in the document of 14 March 2013. Board members in Tayside share the passion for our sport in Scotland and wish to ensure that developments and future proposals both develop and sustain the sport across all sectors, performance levels and geographic areas within Scotland.

Although the document from Tennis Scotland outlines a series of proposals in respect of governance and potential funding, there are a number of strategic and visioning issues within the document which are worthy of comment and further detailed response. It is somewhat disappointing that the proposals merely focus on the governance changes, primarily in respect of the Tennis Scotland Board and miss the opportunity to define, harmonise and prioritise the main vision, objectives, and targets for all areas of tennis in Scotland. It is therefore difficult to see how these proposals will change and more importantly improve the situation at club level.

There appears to be no overall strategic document for tennis in Scotland unlike other Scottish sports: Scottish Hockey - 2010-2014 Corporate Strategy, 'Business for the Future' or BADMINTONScotland's strategy for the period 2009-2015. The vision (or priorities) of Local Development Groups, working with local authorities, adult participation and the revised role for the Districts, appear relatively sensible but on closer examination they are merely individual initiatives with unclear scope, timescale or detail.

If the governance proposals in the document are to be accepted then members must be able to relate these priorities to the overall vision. It is evident from the other sports that their medium term strategy documents have been developed in conjunction and consultation with the membership of the sport. There is no evidence that this is the case with tennis in Scotland. If any strategic and/or operational documents do exist for tennis in Scotland, can these documents be distributed as soon as possible to District members.

There is also no evidence that the proposals will generate more hard-working and enthusiastic volunteers which we feel is the key to success. We would argue that it is the action and presence of people rather than processes that result in positive outcomes. Merely changing the Tennis Scotland board and governance arrangements is unlikely to affect members of the clubs. There are no proposals which appear to enhance or develop the links between Tennis Scotland and the clubs/places to play.

It was stated at an earlier meeting that some of the drivers for change arose from the outcomes and recommendations from the sportscotland audit of Tennis Scotland in 2012. It appears that there is some reluctance on behalf of the Board of Tennis Scotland to release this document. This is not easily understood as other sports in Scotland are content to openly publish their audit reports. Can this document be released to members without the need to source it from sportscotland through a FOI request.

One positive aspect of the proposals is in respect of funding – the transition to a four year funding arrangements is welcomed which will allow proper financial planning and across the various sectors, objectives and priorities.

For any document and its related proposals to be accepted, the fundamentals of democracy, transparent and accountability must be evident. It is disappointing to note that many of these important factors are missing in the proposals from Tennis Scotland. It is also surprising and somewhat worrying that the Board of Tennis Scotland view democracy merely as the domain of those organisations responsible for funding our sport.

There is also a presumption that the main funders of Tennis Scotland, the LTA and sportscotland, now require to be directly involved in the selection of Board members, the appointment of the independent Chair and the non-executive members. There is no evidence of this with other sports in Scotland. There is also the inference that continuing funding from these organisations is subject to the governance changes being successfully implemented. Although this point has been raised previously, for the avoidance of doubt can it be clarified from both the LTA and sportscotland what conditions they have stipulated for their ongoing financial support of tennis in Scotland.

Turning to the individual proposals.

**Proposal 1** The membership of Tennis Scotland will be expanded to include Places to Play as well as the Districts.

Response: In order to support an inclusive approach to our game in Scotland, this proposal is acceptable.

**Proposal 2** The powers of the General Meeting will be reduced.

Response: This proposal is unacceptable. Any organisation must be accountable and responsible to its membership. These important principles override the funding of an organisation and there must be ability of the membership to appoint and to call for the dismissal of Board directors. This latter point has been acknowledged in the proposals but it is essential that the members at a General Meeting have the democratic right to appoint Directors. The Board can undertake the necessary interviews but the final decision rests with the membership. Consideration should be given to the appointment of Board nominated and Member nominated Directors together with a proper balance between these individuals.

**Proposal 3** The Council of Tennis Scotland will be abolished.

Response: Representatives from the geographic and sectoral communities must be able to both hold the executive to account and to receive and relay information to and from the membership. We acknowledge that the current position of the traditional Council may be outdated but an alternative and effective arrangement must be agreed and implemented.

**Proposal 4** New Positions for Directors with Portfolio will be created.

Response: The proposal for additional Directors with portfolio appears sensible and in line with the future priorities for tennis in Scotland. However the collective role and responsibilities of the Board must be supplemented with proper understanding, communications and realistic knowledge of the tennis environment across

Scotland. This will prevent any future criticism that the Board of Tennis Scotland is seen as distant and insular.

**Proposal 5** Appointments of portfolio holders and the CEO will be by interview after advertisement; the interviewing panel will comprise the Chair of the Tennis Scotland Board and one further nominee from the Board, a representative from the LTA (or their nominee) and a representative from sportscotland (or their nominee).

**Response:** Open advertisement and transparent interviews should be a fundamental principle of any Board appointments. Although this proposal is supported, we do not accept that representatives from the LTA or sportscotland should be on the interview panel. This is not a requirement of other NGB Board appointments in Scotland, or indeed LTA counties in England. We would wish to see evidence of an independent influence on appointments, through the independent (non-executive) Chair, non-executive Board member, and/or representative(s) of the members on the interview panel. As highlighted in the response to proposal 2, all Board appointments must be ratified by members at a General Meeting.

**Proposal 6** The Chair will be independent and appointed after interview.

**Response:** The audit of Tennis Scotland in 2007 by sportscotland recommended the appointment of a independent Chair and it is disappointing to note that five years later the current Board of Tennis Scotland have still failed to implement this recommendation. This proposal is supported, but as this is an independent appointment, it is recommended that the existing Board members take no majority role in the selection of the independent chair.

**Proposal 7** Transitional Arrangements (to move from the current to the new governance).

**Response:** This transition will require proper and detailed planning, it must deal with outstanding legacy issues, but also should move swiftly to its new form or function to continue the support from the membership and to address the key issues outlined in the document. In general the proposal is acceptable although it is essential that the appointment of the independent Chair, new portfolio Directors and non-executive Director(s) is not delayed if this proposal is agreed.

**Proposal 8** There will continue to be provision for a Non-Executive Director - subject to a fixed term provision.

**Response:** It is disappointing to note that the Board did not engage the services of an independent non-executive Director over the last few years. The role of non-executive Directors together with an independent Chair provides the required challenge and accountability within a voluntary Board. This proposal is acceptable but it is recommended that a minimum of two non-executive Directors are appointed to provide the necessary support to the independent Chair.

**Proposal 9** A central fund controlled by Tennis Scotland will be established for the purpose of funding sustainable tennis activity driven by the local development groups;

the funding will come in part from reserves released by the Districts and in part from reserves released by Tennis Scotland. It is envisaged that LDG activities will also be funded, from time to time, by funding from specific initiatives of the LTA, sportscotland and Local Authorities.

**Response:** This proposal is supported although will be subject to further discussion and detailed negotiation between the respective parties. It is essential that the funding of sustainable tennis activities is in line with the agreed strategic and operational priorities of Tennis Scotland and their partners.

Although some of the proposals are linked, there should be an opportunity for Districts to vote on the individual proposals rather than simply as a collective group of proposals.

In respect of tennis at a local level and the proposed funding, there are a number of specific questions that require to be raised at this stage:

- a. What are Tennis Scotland's strategic and operational priorities for tennis in the Tayside area?
- b. How will the Local Development Groups operate locally?
- c. What assurances will be given to ensure that 'our funds' will be spent within Tayside?
- d. Glasgow received £1.3M of foundation funding last year – what is the position with Dundee?
- e. Will Tennis Scotland seek to collect Tennis Tayside court fees from clubs?
- f. It appears that former East and West District employees will be transferred to Tennis Scotland at no cost to these Districts – what is the compensating incentive for Tayside?
- g. Will Tennis Scotland agree not to “aegonise” the highly popular Tennis Tayside leagues?
- h. What is the Tennis Scotland's position with clubs that do not support the Tennis Scotland KPIs as opposed to developing the sport in all its dimensions?
- i. Will Tennis Scotland provide a clear assurance on their support for North County in order that appropriate planning and decision making can be undertaken?

Tennis Tayside have given careful consideration to the Tennis Scotland strategy document and the proposals contained within the document. Before the Board makes any final decision on the proposals, it requires clarification, expansion and assurances to the points raised in this response document, and copies of the relevant documents from Tennis Scotland. The Board acknowledges that changes may be required but the fundamental principles of openness, transparency and accountability must be adhered to through the decision making, transition and implementation phases.

Members of the Board are acutely aware of the likely and significant changes resulting from the proposals but are also mindful of their own responsibilities both for tennis locally and their on-going contribution to tennis across Scotland.

**Tennis Tayside**  
**12 April 2013**