

Bowls Scotland Board Meeting

Thursday 24th July 2025, 5.30pm

Teams Meeting

Present:

Gary Grant – Chair (GG), Gavin Smith (GS), Michael Cavanagh (MC), Chris Holloway (CH), Nicola Wilson (NW)

In Attendance:

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith – CEO (MDS), Kareena Cuthbert - High Performance Manager (KC), Brogan Sinclair - Business Operations Manager (BS), Fiona Lilley – sportscotland partnership manager (FL).

Apologies: Henry Robertson (HR)

1. Welcome

1.1. **Chairs Opening Remarks:** GG acknowledged staff efforts ahead of Nationals, thanked flexibility on meeting dates, and shared positive engagement with the Presidential group.

1.2. **Declarations of Interest:** No conflicts declared in relation to the agenda for this meeting.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes: Minutes from the meeting held on 28th April 2025 were approved.

2.1. **Matters arising:** No additional matters arising.

2.2. **Action Log:** Noted.

2.3. **Board Decision Log:** Noted.

3. Executive Management Report:

MDS highlighted the challenges in progressing longer-term strategic work during the season due to the high operational demands. The Executive Management Report included updates on staffing - now at full capacity - challenges in securing headline sponsorship for the National Championships due in part to the short lead time, progress on PVG applications for Board Directors, and concerns regarding the accuracy of junior membership data submitted by clubs. MDS also highlighted the recent success of the Scotland Para team who retained their British Isles title in Leamington Spa.

3.1. Safeguarding (standing item):

MDS confirmed that PVG checks are now being processed efficiently, with improvements noted since moving directly to Disclosure Scotland and removing the Volunteer Scotland intermediary. NW noted a one-month turnaround for her PVG application. MC raised concerns about the lack of confirmation when sharing PVG results via the new system. MDS committed to checking that all Board PVG results had been received and logged. FL confirmed that similar challenges are being reported across the sector.

3.2. EDI (standing item): Update noted.

3.3. Anti-doping (standing item):

Training updates noted. KC and MC completed anti-doping training. MC offered to share forum insights.

4. Business Plan 2024-25 Q3 Update

BS presented the Q3 update, noting that while several actions were flagged as off-track, many had already been identified for carryover into the next business cycle, including governance-related actions and membership data issues.

GS raised concerns about the lack of correlation between successful Try Bowls and Bowls Mark initiatives and overall membership growth. MDS acknowledged the issue and explained that while Try Bowls clubs showed membership increases, losses in other clubs offset these gains.

The Board discussed the need for improved data collection and analysis to better understand the impact of development programmes. MDS confirmed that future plans would include clearer tracking and support for clubs to retain new members.

5. Finance 2024-25 Q3 update

MDS provided a detailed update on the financial position, noting that the removal of forecasted headline sponsorship had impacted the budget. Additional unbudgeted costs included repairs to the National Centre car park and an economic impact assessment.

MDS outlined an issue with deferred income, which had not previously been reflected in internal budget reporting. MDS explained that while the accounts were accurate, the internal reports had not included this adjustment. The Board agreed on the need for improved financial controls and documentation. FL confirmed that sportscotland had no concerns with the submitted accounts. MDS and HR will work on aligning reporting practices and improving forecasting accuracy.

6. 2025-26 Business Planning

MDS introduced a discussion paper covering the main activities and changes that would form the basis for developing the 2025-26 business plan, covering a 19-month period to align with strategic planning and financial year changes. The plan uses a stop/start/continue model and includes early planning for 2027 initiatives.

The Board discussed key themes including support for clubs, facilities development, and targeted EDI work. NW and CH highlighted the importance of prioritising resources and avoiding over-extension.

MDS confirmed that underspend from sportscotland would be used to fund HR policy updates, articles of association review, and sports psychology support. KC and GG provided updates on podium programme refinements and coaching development.

The Board supported the direction of the plan.

7. National Centre

The Board held an in-depth discussion regarding the future of the National Centre at Northfield, prompted by the upcoming lease expiry in November and South Ayrshire Council's proposal for Bowls Scotland to take on the management and operation of the pavilion and stands through a long-term lease. The Council's view is that the organisation is underpaying for the value received.

Three options were presented: (1) remain at Northfield under revised terms, (2) relocate to an alternative venue, or (3) operate without a fixed national centre. The Board expressed strong reservations about the third option, citing reputational risk and logistical challenges.

Remaining at Northfield would require Bowls Scotland to assume responsibility for the building and stands, while continuing to pay for green access. Concerns were raised about the financial viability. The potential for income generation through commercial use of the building was discussed, with optimism from the events team balanced by caution from finance staff.

Alternative venues such as Glasgow's Kelvingrove and Queen's Park were considered but are likely to be impractical due to infrastructure limitations. The Board's initial view is that Northfield remains the most viable option and therefore the preferred option at this stage.

The Board approved further work to explore these options, including commissioning a condition survey, energy audit and feasibility study if necessary. MDS will lead on this work post-Nationals, including engagement with South Ayrshire Council. A further recommendation will be brought back to the Board for decision.

8. Financial Year

Board agreed in principle the change to financial year to 1st April to 31st March, subject to AGM approval. The Board agreed to propose the necessary changes to our Articles of Association at our AGM in November.

9. AGM Planning

The Board discussed the upcoming AGM and agreed to hold it on Wednesday 26th November 2025 online. This decision was informed by member feedback from the 2023 survey, which showed a preference for online AGMs, and by the significant cost savings compared to hybrid or in-person formats.

To support transparency and engagement, the Board approved a programme of pre-AGM engagement. This will include in-person sessions in different location, as well as one online session. These sessions will provide updates on Bowls Scotland's operations, future plans, and AGM proposals. Board members volunteered to attend these sessions, and travel arrangements will be coordinated. A pre-AGM FAQ document will also be circulated to support member understanding of key proposals.

The Board agreed to prepare special resolutions for the AGM to:

- Remove named Director roles from the Articles of Association.
- Reflect the proposed change to the financial year end from August to March.

It was agreed to form a short-life working group comprising GG, NW, and GS to conduct a skills audit and explore recruitment of new Directors. The group will identify gaps and potential candidates, with any appointments made in line with current Articles.

The Board also discussed a potential increase in the capitation fee, noting inflationary pressures, rising staff costs, the need to sustain operations, and the potential cost of securing the future of the National Centre. A formal proposal will be brought to the September meeting.

10. Tournament Licenses

Board approved removal of tournament license requirement from 2026 season.

11. Minimum Operating Requirements

Board approved termination of MOR project and agreed not to implement for clubs.

12. AOCB

MC discussed spotlight profiles and team mapping.

The meeting closed at 19:35