

Bowls Scotland Board Meeting

Sunday 14th September 2025, 15:15

Stirling Court Hotel

Present: Gary Grant – Chair (GG), Gavin Smith (GS), Michael Cavanagh (MC), Nicola Wilson (NW), Henry Robertson (HR).

In Attendance: Malcolm Dingwall-Smith - CEO (MDS), Brogan Sinclair - Business Operations Manager (BS).

Apologies: Fiona Lilley – sportscotland partnership manager (FL), Kareena Cuthbert - High Performance Manager (KC).

1. Welcome

1.1. Chairs Opening Remarks: GG welcomed the board and thanked all for their efforts and travel to the first in person meeting of 2025. GG noted that Chris Holloway had recently stepped down from the Board due to other time commitments. The Board recorded their thanks to Chris for his contribution to Bowls Scotland.

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 24th July 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 presented the Executive Management Report, outlining a busy period of delivery including the successful National Championships, which received positive feedback but incurred a small projected deficit due to unbudgeted costs and sponsorship shortfalls. Staffing updates included the upcoming departure of Adam Martin after five years of service, with the Board noting their thanks for his contribution and supporting plans to recruit a replacement. The report covered a range of domestic competitions and squad activities, including youth events and international test matches. The Board supported Bowls Scotland's nomination of Bob Christie and Sue Beatt for second terms as Chairs of Bowls Europe and the Scottish Sports Association respectively.

3.1. Safeguarding (standing item):

MDS confirmed that all PVGs for Board Directors and Senior Management have been issued by Disclosure Scotland.

3.2. EDI (standing item):

MDS reported positive progress on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, including the first Disability Awareness Day at the National Championships, and staff represented at the Scottish Women in Sport conference and a Scottish-Welsh women in sport symposium. Strategic documents including the Moving to Inclusion Framework, Equality Action Plan, and

Disability Development Plan were reviewed to inform the 2025–27 business plan. Engagements with SAMH and sportscotland supported development in planning of mental health and data collection work. The external EDI Working Group will reconvene in September, chaired by Marella O'Neill.

3.3. Anti-doping (standing item):

The Board noted the latest anti-doping update.

4. Business Plan 2024-25 Q4 Update

The Board received the Q4 update on the 2024-25 Annual Business Plan. Of the 34 actions, 17 were completed and 17 were not delivered on target. While 50% of actions were RAG-rated red indicating the full target had not been reached, the report highlighted substantial progress across many of these actions and the wider strategic priorities. Notable achievements across the year included exceeding targets for Try Bowls Clubs (528), coaching qualifications (191), and medal success at the European Championships (8 medals from 10 events). Digital engagement saw strong growth, with Facebook reach doubling during the National Championships and live streaming expanded to eight days, achieving a 59% increase in average daily views. Strategic actions to be carried forward into the 2025-27 plan include governance actions, safeguarding compliance, accelerated BowlsMark uptake, and a full competitions review. The update also noted the need for a more nuanced reporting framework to better reflect strategic impact and inform future planning. The board asked for a further update on the progress of the Children 1st safeguarding health check to be circulated.

5. Finance 2024-25 Q4 Update

The Board received the Q4 finance update, noting a forecasted year-end surplus ahead of budget. This positive variance is primarily due to staffing vacancies, including the CEO role, which reduced expenditure. The approved budget had anticipated a deficit partially offset by a planned release from reserves, which will now not be required. Additionally, a planned release from the balance sheet (relating to a 2020 grant from South Ayrshire Council) will be deferred to 2026–27. Year-end accounts are being finalised with BDO, and the Board will be updated as this progresses.

6. 2025-27 Budget

The Board considered the draft budget for the transitional 19-month period from September 2025 to March 2027, aligned with the proposed shift to an April-March financial year. The budget projects a small surplus, achieved through a combination of cost containment and targeted income growth. Key cost pressures include inflation, the future of the National Centre, a new kit contract, and hosting the British Isles International Series in 2026.

The underlying financial position remains challenging. Inflation has continued to rise (3.8% as of July 2025), while income from sportscotland remains flat and affiliation income has declined due to static capitation fees and falling membership. Without intervention, the organisation would face a projected deficit of £154k over the 19-month period and £161k in 2027–28, particularly if the National Centre is retained. The Board acknowledged that the current level of free reserves (~£150k) is insufficient to absorb sustained losses of this scale.

A central component of the income strategy is a proposed increase to the capitation fee which would be proposed at the 2025 AGM to come into effect in October 2026. The Board noted that

the last fee increase was approved at the 2021 AGM, and that inflation since then would justify an increase of approximately £1.20. The anticipated additional costs associated with retaining the National Centre and other cost pressures further support the need for a minimum £2 increase

Following detailed discussion, the Board agreed that while a £2 increase would bring the projected budget to break even for the 2025–27 period this budget contained significant risk and uncertainty, and it would not address the projected deficit looking further ahead to 2027-28. Considering these broader uncertainties in the budget and the level of risk inherent to achieving income targets and cost controls - including commercial income, National Centre operating costs, and inflation - the Board concluded that a £3 increase would provide a more sustainable financial position and mitigate these other risks. It was also noted that if an increase is not passed at the AGM the Board would need to discuss a plan of radical cost cutting measures including re-considering the future of the National Centre.

The Board therefore agreed that both a £2 and £3 capitation fee increase proposal would be presented to the membership at the 2025 AGM. The Board emphasised the importance of clear and transparent communication, noting that if the £2 increase is approved, a further fee increase may be required in 2026, whereas a £3 increase may avoid the need for another review in the near term. Final AGM resolutions will be approved by the Board at its 20 October meeting.

The 2025-2027 budget was approved on this basis.

7. 2025-27 Business Plan

The Board reviewed and approved the 2025-2027 Business Plan, covering the transitional 19-month period aligned with the proposed shift to an April-March financial year. The plan is structured around Bowls Scotland's strategic objectives and includes performance indicators aligned with sportscotland investment requirements. A revised format separates targets from activity and introduces departmental-level planning to improve oversight and flexibility. Quarterly progress updates will be provided, and any material changes will be brought to the Board for approval. During discussion, GS queried whether the medal targets within the performance programme should be revised to reflect a more ambitious aspiration beyond the current commitments agreed with sportscotland. The proposed performance targets were approved on the basis that they provide the Board clarity on progress against sportscotland targets, but these do not reflect the limit of our ambition. The Board also discussed the importance of ensuring the Podium Pathway effectively identifies and engages top talent across Scotland and requested a follow-up update on this area.

8. Pre-AGM Engagement Plan

MDS presented a comprehensive pre-AGM engagement plan designed to support member understanding and participation ahead of the online AGM scheduled for 26 November 2025. The plan outlines a structured timeline of communications and engagement activities, including news articles, video messaging, in-person and online sessions, FAQs, and follow-up correspondence. The approach aims to ensure transparency and build trust, particularly in relation to key AGM proposals such as the capitation fee increase, financial year change, and governance amendments. The Board approved the pre-AGM engagement plan as presented.

9. AOCB

No items of other business were raised.

The meeting closed at 17:00