

Minutes of the 96th Board Meeting of the English Chess Federation
Monday 20th July 2015 at the British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London, starting at
1.30pm

Present: Phil Ehr (Chief Executive) (PE)
David Eustace (Director of Finance) (DE)
Alex Holowczak (Director of Home Chess) (AH)
David Openshaw (Director of International Chess) (DO)
Julian Clissold (Non-Executive Director) (JC)
Bob Kane (Commercial Director) (BK)
John Foley (Non-Executive Director) (JF)
David Thomas (Director of Membership) (DT)
Traci Whitfield (Director of Junior Chess and Education) (TW) (by Skype from
item 7)

Also in attendance:

John Philpott (Company Secretary) (JP)
Gary Willson (minutes) (GW)
Chris Fegan (Strategic Advisor) (CF)
Chris Majer (Chair of the Governance Committee) (CM)

Apologies: Dominic Lawson (President)
Malcolm Pein (FIDE Delegate)
Mike Truran (Chair, Finance Committee)

- 1 To approve the Agenda

Some adjustments to the published agenda were agreed.

- 2 Approval of minutes of the Board Meeting 95.

The draft minutes were discussed and a number of changes agreed, including wording concerning moves towards a formal committee structure. The final version (including any redactions) was approved by the Board with one director (BK) opposed.

- 3 Appointments

JP has discussed the role of Data Protection Officer with the office manager, and has formally handed the role over.

- 4 Outstanding Action Points

93/11: Stewart Reuben was expecting to receive £10K but so far had received £5K. Thanks were expressed to Stewart and to the donor for his donation to English chess. DO and DE will review the donations process.

95/19: PE will consider with JP and email a version that does not require major changes.

95/21: Cleared

95/22: It was agreed that the website needs to be aimed at our primary audience (club players, tournament players, internet players) but also to act as a window to the outside world.

It was agreed that BK (with help from DT and the webmaster) would lead on the development of the website, with extra training if necessary.

5 (DO) That the Board instructs the Chief Executive to adopt a more conciliatory attitude and better management practices in his dealings with Board members who have been in post during his period as CEO.

It was agreed that JC would be in the chair for this item.

DO stated that this was not a vote of no confidence in PE. It was agreed at the strategy meeting that it is very important to have good working relationships within the Board and the chess community. DO is concerned that PE has an aggressive style towards some directors, and gave some specific examples. He is also concerned that PE is pushing issues that DO does not want to push whilst addressing other important issues. DO is unhappy and being unable to resolve the issues informally felt it was necessary for it to be aired at Board level.

CM was concerned about the damage to the reputation of the Federation. We had a troubled time a couple of years ago, and this may be seen as the Board infighting "again" whilst being inactive. In his view it is a vote of no confidence and a resignable issue, especially given the timing with regard to elections.

PE asked if there was a seconder to the motion.

AH stated that he would second the motion so that the debate could be heard, as he believed it was in PE's best interests.

PE stated it was a vote of no confidence. He went through the individual examples raised by DO (IRO, former directors, strategy document), and stated that in his view the Board is being side tracked again which is unhelpful and not forward looking.

JF stated that he had spent some time informally working with both DO and PE through these issues in detail, and in his view PE is a strategic thinker and DO is a practical thinker.

JC invited other contributions. BK stated that he had overcome different opinions in the past by trying to be accommodating and that perhaps this is the way forward.

DE believes something is clearly wrong. There was an issue with a former director. PE issued a note about the FIDE elections that the Board had not agreed to, and in DE's view we should be building bridges with FIDE. A current director nearly resigned recently, and

another senior person within the Federation similarly. The Chief Executive should be outward looking and the leader of the team, but the issue needs to be fixed. He believes the issue is not just between DO and PE.

JC stated that in his view, the motion is now a motion of no confidence, given the number of issues that have been referred to, and would like to take some advice.

CM stated that if the vote were successful, the Board would be one director short. He felt it was adversarial: either the Board is happy or not, and if not, they could replace the Chief Executive. However, in his view the “rumblings” would carry on. For once we have the public on our side and we are in danger of blowing it if the Board is not willing to back PE.

CF stated that he believes it is nothing but a no confidence issue, and referred to a recent email from MP. He believes PE is doing what a Chief Executive should do (for instance with the IRO role, if there is a minor disagreement his will should prevail). He further stated the motion was ill conceived, but that we should try to resolve the matter.

DT stated that he did not believe the motion was one of no confidence, but if PE felt it was necessary to resign, then de-facto it would be. We are 8 months through the election cycle, and it would be disastrous to lose a director at this stage. He believed the best thing to do is withdraw the motion and consider again when nominations are due.

AH stated that some of the issues referred to have been troubling, and he felt that trust may have been undermined, for example when asking individuals to stand for election against an incumbent.

JC invited PE to respond to the matters that have been raised.

PE stated that he was always on the lookout for volunteers, and thinks he would extend everyone the courtesy of talking to any incumbent first. He agreed there have been problems with leadership, but that involves also being followed. PE stated there has been a problem with a senior person within the Federation recently, indicating a strategic difference. He believes there is a major strategic difference between himself and DO: no mention has been made of schools and he (PE) believes we have a duty to look at the integrity of the game at the grass roots level. He believes he was robust in his statement about the FIDE elections, but it was a statement made in good faith based on an un-minuted Skype call.

PE stated that if others are concerned about interference, then it is because he wishes to understand better. As far as he is concerned the IRO issue was resolved some time ago (Andrew Walker is the IRO, supported by Sean Hewitt and now GW).

DO stated it should have been resolved but hasn't, and that he has been happy to discuss things.

PE agreed that the IRO should then be on the next Board Agenda.

CM stated that the use of the word “instructs” would lead to a conclusion of no confidence. DO offered to change the word to “requests”.

PE stated that he believed the issue should never have come to the Board. He further stated he would not step back, or accept that he needs to take a more conciliatory attitude when, for example, he sees what he believes to be inappropriate behaviour. CF agreed that a Chief Executive could not stay in post and accept any motion like this, however it is packaged.

The Chair stated that in his view there is not a form of words that could be drawn up that would mean PE would not consider his position. However, issues raised could be taken forward nevertheless.

The Chair adjourned the meeting to talk to PE and DO individually. As a result the motion was withdrawn pending a further meeting between PE and DO to reflect on the discussion that had taken place and a report back to the board.

PE stated that he recognised this had been raised at the Board. He would work to resolve specific issues with the individuals concerned and take them forward.

The Chair was returned to PE.

6 EBU & Sport England

Our witness statement was gratefully accepted by the EBU, and they have asked us again if we wish to participate in the legal case more fully.

At the last Board meeting it was agreed (based on our legal advice) that we would not add anything to their case. However, they have proposed we join them: they would help us find a pro-bono advocate, and we would not be subjected to costs if there is not a no-costs order if the claim fails. Our only costs would be for an instructing solicitor (around £2000). We are also asking Stephen Coles to review the situation. However, the Board believes this is an issue that Chess has been fighting for a number of years (recognition for non-physical recreation), and the opportunity is the best it has ever been.

The Board agreed to support the actions taken to date (by JF and PE in particular), and for them to continue in principal to join the EBU as a party in the case, with a spending limit of £2500. The final decision to be taken by PE and JF working closely with David Anderton, Stephen Coles and Melville Rodriguez.

7a (TW by Skype) Restructuring of Junior Directorate

TW explained that she wished to adjust the structure of her directorate in line with her paper. The timing is right now as there is a need to advertise the Business Manager post, which needs to be split because of the impending launch of the Academy and Jim Wadsworth's wish to stand down.

All proposals (including the go ahead for publishing the adverts) were agreed as per the paper with no votes against, subject to confirmation of the financial arrangements.

7b (TW Skype) Restructuring of the National Schools Chess Championships

As all of the Board Members had not seen the papers, it was agreed to clear this by email after the meeting.

7c (TW Skype) Financial Implications of the WYCC in Greece

Whilst we are committed to sending a delegation, the financial and political upheaval in Greece is causing some concerns. In particular, we can not get insurance cover for the delegation should the hotel withdraw for any reason (failure of supplier). The Board agreed to the communication strategy taken thus far, and authorised the payment of the FIDE fees.

7d (TW Skype) Academy Launch

The Board was informed that all plans were in place for the formal launch of the Academy at the British Championships the following week.

8 (DO) Progress on obtaining Donations for the England Team for the European Championships

DO felt we were not doing enough as a Board to raise funds for the England teams, despite previous commitments.

DO suggested individual directors ask for donations as his contacts were drying up. DE stated that we either raise the money or the funds would need to come from our contingency.

It was agreed to put the item on the next Agenda.

9 AOB

The Board agreed to present David Anderton with a long service award at the British Championships. The suggestion of a Tantalus was warmly accepted.

Next meeting: Birmingham 18/9