

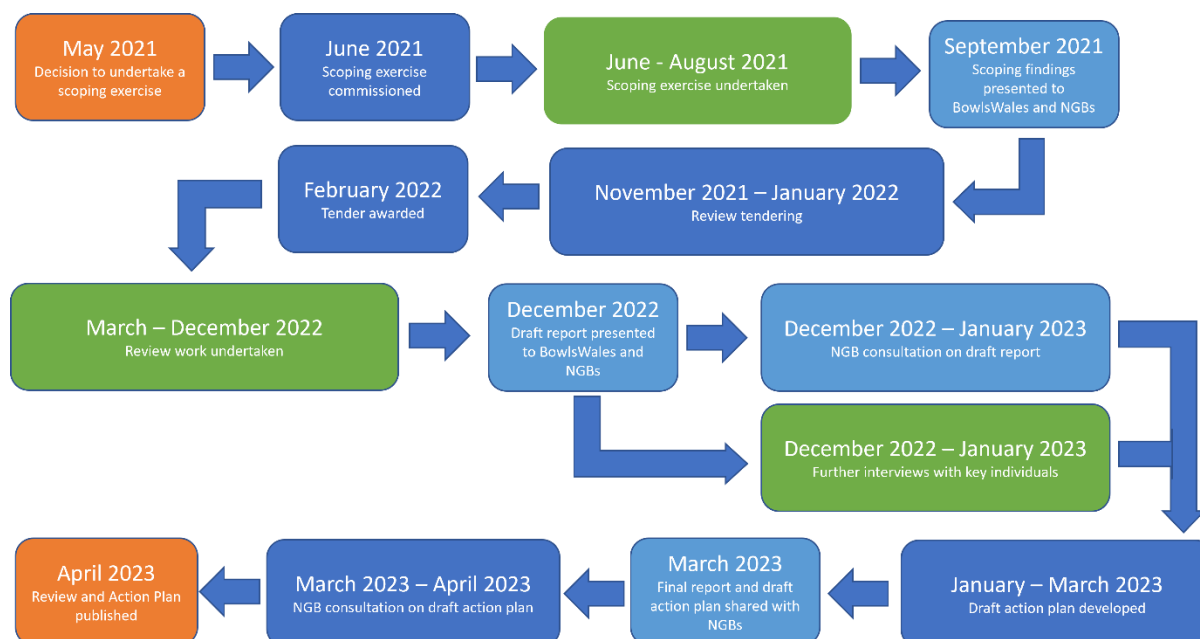


High Level Action Plan for Bowls

The independent review of the sport of Bowls in Wales has now been completed. Our thanks go to Counsel Ltd who undertook the review and to all who gave their time and energy to take part in the review.

Review process

Work to establish the review commenced in May 2021. Whilst the review has taken almost 2 years to complete, it has been important to secure the involvement of people across the sport and to ensure that the review fully represents their views.



Throughout the process BowlsWales has worked closely with its Members – we thank them for their continued engagement and support.

Conclusions and actions

The review concluded that *“Bowls in Wales is in a challenging position with a number of issues across the sport”*. It made a number of recommendations in order to address the issues identified (full details in the Final Report from the review). Here, we’ve set out an initial, high level action plan which seeks to identify how practically these recommendations can be taken forward. It is clear that there is a significant amount of work ahead.

There are some identifiable, practical steps that BowlsWales can take with the agreement of the NGBs, whilst other recommendations will require wider discussion and may need support from outside the bowls community. What is clear is that if we are to be successful, we will need to ensure buy in from a range of stakeholders at all levels within the sport – BowlsWales, the NGBs, County organisations, Clubs and bowlers.

This action plan has been developed collaboratively by BowlsWales and the National Governing Bodies for Indoor, Outdoor, Short Mat and Crown Green bowls in Wales, the Coaching Association and the Umpires Association. We (the above) agreed when the review was commissioned to



consider its recommendations and take the actions necessary to underpin and safeguard the future of our sport. This action plan sets out some of the high level actions that we propose to take.

There are a number of overarching recommendations within the review report. This action plan considers these in the order presented within the report.

Structural Reform

The review found that *“the current structure is excessively complex and convoluted and presents barriers to progress. However, there are significant legacy, reputational and emotional ties and investments related to the current structure”*. It also found that roles and responsibilities are unclear, and there remains a lack of clarity around the role of BowlsWales.

ACTION 1: BowlsWales will establish a working group to consider ways of streamlining the governance structure of the sport (i.e. the relationships, roles and responsibilities of the various organisations). It will need to ensure these are understood and well communicated. The group will have membership from all stakeholders.

We will want to ensure that the role of BowlsWales as the coordinating body for the sport is understood, and that the fear that BowlsWales is somehow attempting to ‘take over’ is finally eradicated.

Governance

The review found that *“The formal governance of BowlsWales as an organisation appears to be strong in terms of its adherence to corporate governance, legal and Sport Wales requirements. There is potential to do significantly more to increase the levels of engagement and buy-in”*. It did, however, note that *“there are ongoing concerns around how ‘representative’ the BowlsWales Board is of those in the sport and of NGBs. There have been issues of high turnover and of vacancies on the BowlsWales Board”*.

ACTION 2: BowlsWales will review the makeup of its Board to ensure that it is more representative of those in the sport. We will work with our Members to ensure that available positions on the Board are filled appropriately.

The Board are proposing the addition of representatives from each of our Member organisations to serve as co-opted advisors to the Board, thus ensuring that their voice is present at all Board meetings. This approach avoids a return to the Federation structure and ensures that individuals who act as advisors are not compromised in their roles within their respective organisations.

It went on to say that *“Governance at individual NGB level can best be described as patchy. There are some examples of good practice and many committed, engaged volunteers. However, there are many challenges and a lack of understanding of modern governance practices. Examples of this include a lack of term limits, very limited examples of skills based and/or independent appointments, limited acknowledgement of the importance of diversity in recruitment and several examples of a lack of understanding of legal governance responsibilities”*.

ACTION 3: We will establish an agreed set of minimum governance standards for the sport of Bowls in Wales and ensure that organisations have access to a range of appropriate support and training around governance issues. Achievement of these minimum standards will be a consideration when allocating future funding.



BowlsWales will support our Members to work towards compliance with the Governance & Leadership Framework in Wales, providing training and support as necessary.

Communication and marketing

Effective communication is essential. The review identified that *“communication is an area of concern within the sport”* and that *“...communication is often convoluted, with multiple layers in communication chains”*.

ACTION 4: BowlsWales will work with its Members to streamline the communication process so that information can be rapidly shared across the sport appropriately. We will consider the role of email, social media and websites within the overall communication approach.

The review also concluded that *“Marketing of bowls is limited. There are good examples, but these are patchy. A lack of consistency in promoting the sport to attract new audiences was repeatedly highlighted as a problem”*.

ACTION 5: We will commission support to develop and implement a marketing strategy for Bowls in Wales. The strategy will cover all codes and will seek to develop and promote a new single, recognisable ‘brand’ for the sport whilst retaining the identity of individual codes. The strategy will also consider how to increase the visibility of the sport in online and broadcast media.

Sustainability

The review concluded that *“There are significant concerns around the sustainability of the sport”*. These were specifically around the reliance on volunteers and the challenges of attracting and retaining players.

Volunteers play a crucial part in running and developing the sport across Wales, often with little recognition or reward. Without them, many of the leagues, events and competitions would not be possible. It is, therefore, essential that we ensure volunteers within our sport are offered appropriate support and development opportunities, and that we consider how we attract and retain volunteers for the future.

ACTION 6: We will commission support to develop and implement an effective volunteering strategy for Bowls in Wales. The strategy will consider how the sport can actively support volunteers to fill the various roles appropriately.

Attracting new players into the sport is vital – particularly during a period of decline. Bowls has, historically, suffered from a perception that it is a sport for older people. Ironically, those involved in the sport know that is a sport for all generations – with people of all ages actively engaging in the sport. We need to change this perception, and market the sport to people of all ages. We may also need to consider how formats and schedules within the sport impact on people’s ability to participate e.g. the length and timing of matches, the etiquette and the complex rules etc. and how these can be modernised.

ACTION 7: We will convene a working group to consider modernising the sport – including a review of the format, schedules of play etc. within the sport to ensure that they are appealing to players of all ages and abilities. The work will need to consider the needs of elite sport and those of new and potentially new bowlers.



ACTION 8: We will ensure that the marketing strategy considers how to target people of all ages (including school children and those potentially leaving other sports aged 30-45).

The review also found “*widespread support for mixed bowls – in terms of gender, ability/experience, age and greater inclusion of those with disabilities into the sport*”.

We recognise that this will be challenging, however we **must** see the end of separate gender-based organisations within our sport and support the work to bring about full unification across all codes.

ACTION 9: BowlsWales will issue a clear statement of intent around the move to mixed bowls and make true unification a requirement for future funding.

The opportunity exists to further integrate disability sport.

ACTION 10: BowlsWales will establish an Equality and Inclusion group to investigate opportunity to further develop integrated approaches to the sport in Wales. We will seek involvement from a range of relevant organisations including Disability Sport Wales, the Welsh Association of Visually Impaired Bowlers, the Wales Deaf Bowling Association, the Learning Disability Indoor Bowls Association.

Safeguarding and welfare

Whilst the review did not identify any areas of concern in relation to specific safeguarding incidents, it did identify “*a widespread lack of knowledge of modern safeguarding practice. This was particularly prevalent in relation to adult safeguarding*”. Clearly this is a concern, and we must ensure that issues around safeguarding and the way in which they should be handled are universally understood.

ACTION 11: BowlsWales will develop a safeguarding framework for Bowls in Wales. The framework will include centrally produced safeguarding policies; clear guidelines for safeguarding requirements at all levels within the sport; safeguarding awareness materials for use in clubs; safeguarding training for all designated officers and a clear safeguarding escalation path where concerns are not being addressed.

Clearly, much of this work will require investment – both in resource and cost terms – from within the bowls community in Wales.

ACTION 12: We will look to others outside Wales to build on their best practice and adopt their approaches where these are appropriate to our needs.

ACTION 13: BowlsWales will look for commercial opportunities to bring much needed additional funding into the sport.

Whilst the actions above represent significant challenges for the sport, we are committed to moving them forward as effectively and as quickly as possible.

Quick wins

In the meantime, there are a number of ‘quick wins’ which BowlsWales plan to address immediately with the support of its Members across all codes of the sport (some of this work is already underway):



Welsh Women's
Bowling Association

Welsh Bowling Association



- Re-developing the BowsWales website as an effective hub for bowls information in Wales, signposting to individual NGB websites as appropriate.
- Developing a directory of clubs.
- Developing a calendar of all open competitions.
- Providing open (free) safeguarding training for club safeguarding officers.
- Further developing our Blazing Bowls offering for schools.
- Running more sessions with the Stroke Association to (re)introduce stroke survivors to the game.
- Making more use of our 'live streaming' technology to bring the sport to a wider audience.