

Chairman's Report – Ipswich Sports Club

Ipswich Sports Club – the business

Stability, Collaboration and Focus

Ipswich Sports Club has passionate people who care deeply about its future – and they come from both members and staff.

Individuals who have gone above and beyond in the last year and deserve our thanks include

- **Alec Livingstone** – for holding the Board and staff together during a turbulent time. He is now spending hours project managing the transition of the Club system from the current PerfectGym to ManageOurClub. This will include elements of access control.
- **Mike Watling and Rob Marsh-Feilly** – for the hours of behind the scenes work on arranging tenders, planning permissions, plans, assessments. These essential elements have enabled ISC to be well on the way to delivering our new bespoke Padel facilities.
- **Jamie , Ian ,Euan and Kylie** - for the provision of an in-house menu of food featuring an increasing range of healthy options and chips.
- **The bar staff in general** – for their good natured generally happy vibe and for all the hidden work – opening and closing the club, reception duties.....
- **Members on all the sports committees and Council** – for keeping club sport running, attending the fixture meetings and all the other things needed to keep sport at the heart of what we do
- **The office staff** – for keeping the ship afloat in choppy seas
- **Steve Joint** – for his extraordinary calm leadership and growth of disabled tennis
- **All the other coaches** – for choosing the club and helping members with sport and wellbeing
- **Richard** – groundmen and odd job man for keeping things going, usually with a smile, and for his pro-active can do attitude.
- **Our Sponsors** – for your vital support.

Passion, challenge and debate are all important ingredients of a healthy organisation.

Amongst these good bits I feel we must also recognise the challenges. In recent years, the Club has experienced a level of turnover amongst directors and staff together with a degree of internal focus that has, at times, diverted attention from the priorities that matter most to our members. Too much energy can be consumed by governance issues, personality differences and competing viewpoints when that energy would be better invested in developing the Club, supporting our staff, strengthening our finances and improving the experience of our members.

As we look ahead, there is a clear opportunity for greater stability, continuity and collective purpose across the Board, Council and Senior Management Team. Constructive challenge will always have its place, but once decisions are made, we must unite behind them and work together to deliver successful outcomes.

The Club has achieved a great deal over the past year. Imagine what more we can achieve if the same commitment, energy and passion are channelled towards a common purpose and a shared vision for the future.

Looking to the Future – Governance and Leadership

As the Club continues to grow, it is important that we regularly review whether our governance structures remain fit for purpose.

Our Articles of Association and governance arrangements were set in a relatively simplistic way to protect our community-focused ethos and CASC status. They were designed to safeguard member ownership, ensure accountability and prevent undue concentration of power. These principles remain extremely important and should not be lightly changed.

However, the Club we operate today is significantly larger and more complex than the Club for which many of those arrangements were originally designed. They derive from single sport clubs. We now manage substantial facilities, employ a growing staff team, oversee multiple sports sections and operate in an increasingly demanding financial and regulatory environment. **To survive and flourish we need to become an excellent business as well as an excellent sports club.**

As directors, we have experienced first-hand how difficult it can be to recruit and retain volunteers willing to undertake the responsibilities associated with Board membership. The role requires significant time, commitment and resilience. Whilst challenge and debate are healthy, governance can at times be demanding, stressful and, unfortunately, occasionally unpleasant. Those who continue to serve the Club in these roles deserve our thanks and appreciation.

The current arrangements for electing directors also warrant consideration. Whilst member democracy remains essential, there is a legitimate question as to whether the Club has sufficient mechanisms to ensure prospective directors understand the scale, complexity and responsibilities of the role before they are appointed. Equally, any future process designed to strengthen director selection must be fair, transparent and open, and must never be perceived as a mechanism for existing directors to simply choose their successors.

The objective should not be to make it harder for members to become directors. Rather, it should be to ensure that we attract people with the skills, experience, commitment and collaborative approach required to help lead a modern and increasingly complex organisation. It may raise the question of whether volunteer members have the time or abilities to be good directors.

Alongside governance, we must also be realistic about the demands placed upon volunteers. If the Club is to continue growing and developing, we should be willing to invest appropriately in

professional management capability. **In particular, there is a strong argument that recruiting and retaining a high-calibre General Manager is one of the most important investments the Club can make. Strong executive leadership, supported by committed volunteers and effective governance, would allow the Board to focus more of its time on strategy, oversight and long-term development.**

These questions are not about changing who we are. It is more about understanding who and what we are and changing and evolving in that way. They are about ensuring that our governance, leadership and management arrangements evolve alongside the Club itself, enabling Ipswich Sports Club to remain successful, sustainable and true to its values for many years to come.

Ipswich Sports Club – the Group

This AGM is for Ipswich Sports Club 2020 Ltd – the parent of an increasingly large group of companies.

The Articles of Association apply to ISC 2020 Ltd.

ISC 2020 Ltd is the sole shareholder of ISC Services Ltd and ISC Padel Ltd. These companies are run by directors on behalf of ISC 2020 Ltd.

ISC 2020 Ltd is the CASC registered company.

The other companies are the trading arms. They donate excess profit to ISC 2020 Ltd.

To improve and flourish the Group may need to grow.

As a group we must get better at cost management and improving our productivity.

The Board needs to improve reporting mechanisms showing things such as profit ratios and staff costs. All areas need to have agreed budgets and to manage and report against these.

The way forward

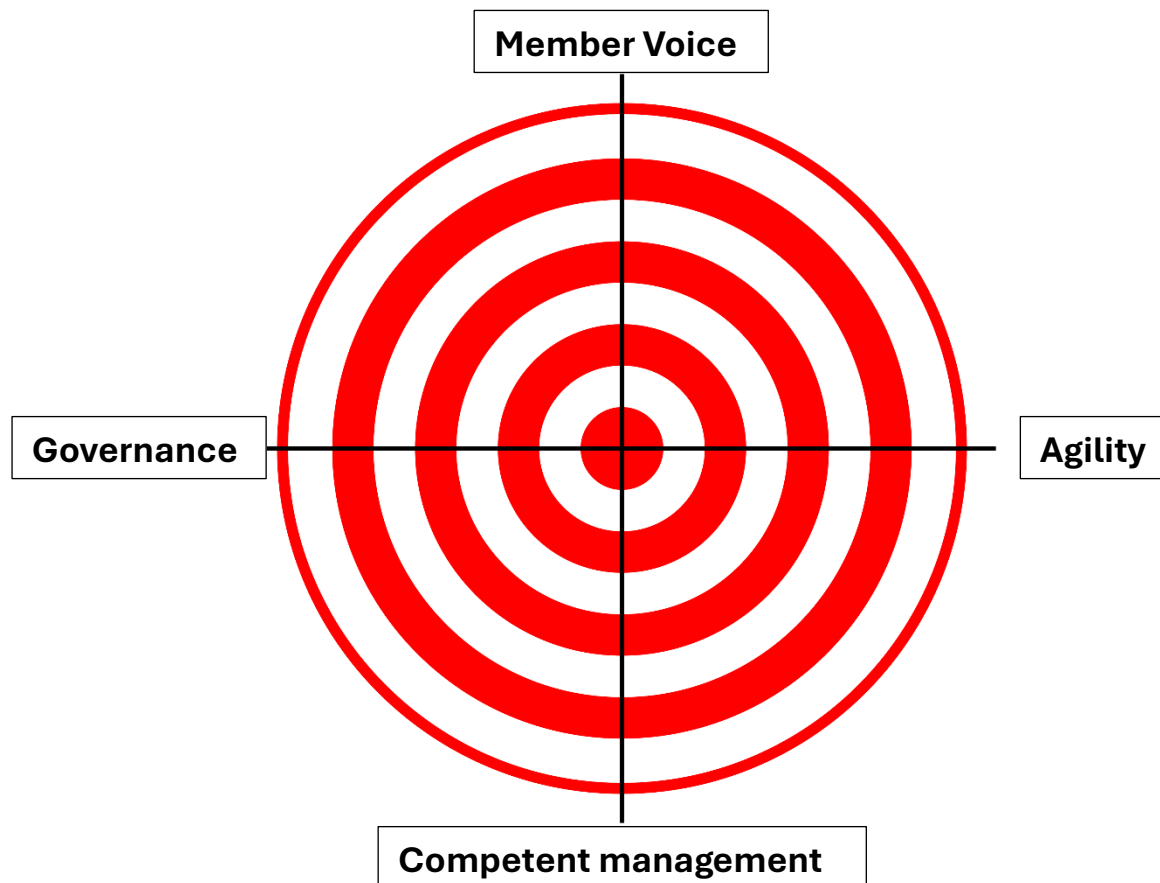
As a member-owned club, ISC rightly places great importance on consultation, transparency and democratic accountability. These are important strengths and have helped preserve the character and values of the Club over many years.

However, all organisations face a balance between consultation and agility. As the Club has grown in scale and complexity, decision-making processes designed for a smaller organisation can sometimes make it difficult to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities.

Looking ahead, we should be prepared to review our governance arrangements, management structure and leadership processes to ensure they continue to serve the Club effectively. This is not about reducing member involvement; it is about ensuring that the right decisions can be made by the right people at the right time whilst maintaining accountability to members.

In particular, there is a growing need to strengthen professional management capacity and ensure that volunteers are supported by experienced senior staff. **Investment in strong leadership and management should be viewed not as a cost, but as an investment in the Club's long-term sustainability and success.**

ISC Governance Balance



Too much emphasis on one area can create unintended consequences:

- Excessive consultation can delay necessary change.
- Excessive executive control can weaken member ownership.
- Excessive governance can create bureaucracy.
- Insufficient governance can increase risk and reduce accountability.

Goal: Maintain strong member engagement while enabling timely decisions, effective management and sustainable club development

The question going forward is

where is the balance point for ISC?

**Dr Jon Tuppen
Acting Chair, Ipswich Sports Club
Annual Report – 2025/26**
