

**GET BERKSHIRE ACTIVE
BOARD EXTERNAL EVALUATION**
COMPILED BY ALI SHIPWAY
JUNE 2021

Context

- This evaluation is part of Get Berkshire Active's compliance with Tier 3 of the Code of Sports Governance ensuring they meet the highest standards of regulation for a public funded sports body.
- The previous evaluation took place in 2016 and is reviewed on a four cycle. This most recent four year period has seen a time of huge transformation for the Active Partnership and the network it belongs to, through its primary role, funded by Sport England, as they have evolved their thinking and practice to reach more audiences, scale up interventions, build new relationships, broaden their agendas and become key strategic players in their local system.
- This evaluation was completed within COVID conditions resulting in all team members working remotely from the office base and all Board meetings taking place virtually. Evidently this provides both positive outcomes (high levels of engagement and ease of having conversations) whilst also creating challenges such as difficulties in picking up on behaviours, individual styles and team dynamics in a virtual Board meeting setting.
- The Board complete an annual internally ran anonymised survey, last completed in late 2020. 7 members completed the survey with high satisfaction levels, generally above 80%. To reduce replication, this evaluation did therefore not carry out a separate survey but discussed the responses during 1-2-1 telephone calls with individuals to explore its findings and understand whether it matched their experience in practice.

Approach

- A maturity matrix (image 1) is used as a practical tool to help Boards reflect on their strengths and progress, have focused discussions, and identify which areas need more attention.
- The tool is a continuum scale recognising progress is not linear, nor fixed by an end point, and must be considered in context, alongside existing frameworks and be viewed as a proxy indicator of its current thinking and practice.
- The matrix replicates 4 areas of evaluation drawn from my Board Evaluation overview model (image 2) : governance, composition and culture, strategic oversight and impact.
- An indicator is used for each area, with an overall matrix providing a visual representation of the Board's current maturity of these areas in relation to each other.
- Alongside the maturity marker, notes provide details of key strengths and positive observations made from the evaluation process as well as learning and improvement recommendations. Direct anonymised quotes from individuals are used to provide context and views.

BOARD GOVERNANCE EVALUATION

Image 1

OVERALL MATURITY MATRIX AS @ [DATE]

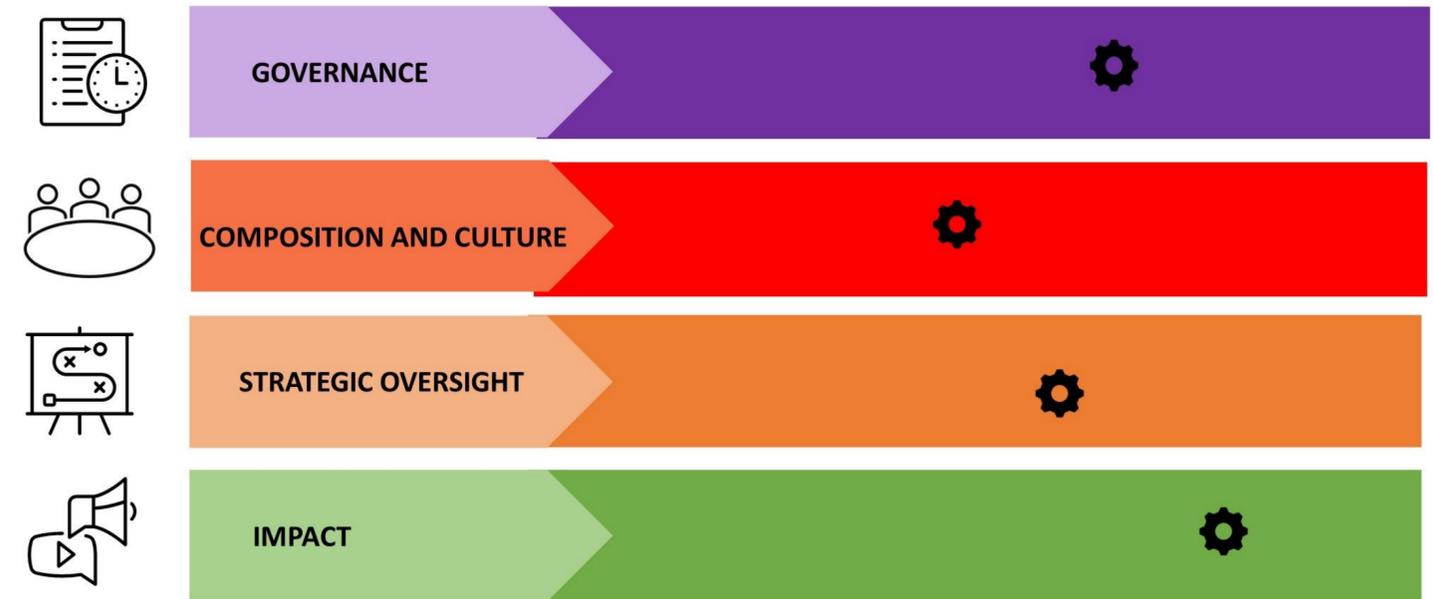


Image 2

Board Evaluation Overview



Methodology



Inception meeting with Brett Nicholls, CEO about purpose and approach and Richard Parker, Senior Independent Director and Lead for this evaluation.



Desk-top research of key governance and strategic documentation including Board member survey (completed in October 2020), Risk log, previous Board minutes, skills matrix, Board induction pack, Board terms of Office and balanced score card.



Attendance at virtual Board meeting in March 2021 to present approach and observe.



1-2-1s telephone conversations with 6 Board members : Jason Worthy (Board Chair), Richard Parker (SID), Avril Couper (F&G Chair), Carole Thelwell-Jones, Karen Ross, Tameena Hussain, and with CEO Brett Nicholls



Compilation of maturity matrix and report.



Feedback meeting with Richard Parker (SID) and sharing of report



Sharing report with all Board members and attendance at virtual Board meeting in June to explore findings and recommendations

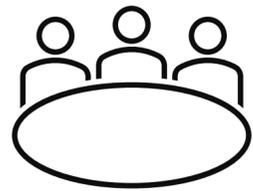
BOARD GOVERNANCE EVALUATION

Get Berkshire Active

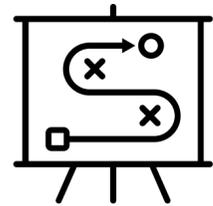
OVERALL MATURITY MATRIX AS @ JUNE 2021



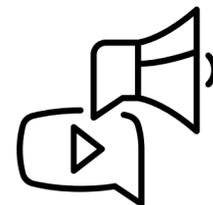
GOVERNANCE



COMPOSITION AND CULTURE

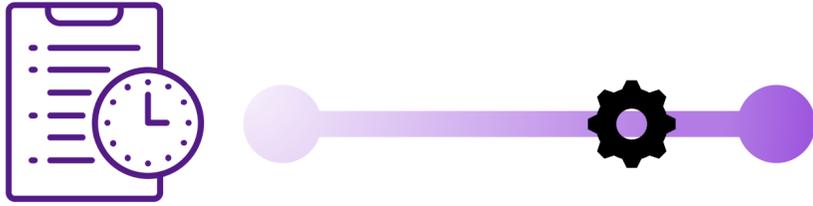


STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT



IMPACT





GOVERNANCE

Strengths and Observations

- There is a strong foundation of compliance with the current Code for Sports Governance.
- Governance documentation is up to date and well managed including terms of reference, declarations of interest, skills matrix etc.
- Information is managed by pre and post Board meeting papers and minutes (and 'live' actions checklist) which are well received, timely, comprehensive and accurate.
- Information reporting mechanisms are robust as programme and activities updates. Deeper analysis is available through further data available on request.
- A Sub-Committee structure is well established and works well with a frequently standing Finance and Governance committee and nominations committee constituted as required.
- Meetings transferred successfully to virtual meetings throughout COVID 19 conditions ensuring the Board were able to convene and support the organisation with high levels of attendance from all Board members.
- Communications are viewed as strong with social media highlighted as a useful tool to keep Board members up to date and engaged.
- Meetings are effectively Chaired with several members highlighting the strength of the recently appointed Chair who operates with a structured, inclusive, positive and confident approach.
- Members commented on the CEO's respect for their time as volunteers enabling them to check-in, catch up and contribute as required to suit their own commitments.
- Agendas are clear with members commenting on the ability to understand the meeting focus and 'carve out time' to discuss critical matters.

"Brett makes it very easy to contribute and always lets us know what he needs from us".

"we need to be clearer with agendas on what we are doing".

We've been able to adapt well in the last year given COVID and Brett's illness. Now we need to make sure we keep this ability to respond quickly ensuring our governance allows it".

"We're heavily reliant on Claire for our finances. And she's brilliant but need to ensure we also are future proofed".

Learning and Improvement Recommendations

- There is opportunity to explore appointing thematic advisors to the Board to link and respond to strategic needs and priority focus areas e.g. community voice. health, policing, climate change. Active environment, design etc This could enable a flex and adapt approach ensuring governance is purpose driven rather than bound by compliance,
- Several highlighted the need for agendas to make clear if items are for review/endorsement/action or discussion.
- A rolling programme of Board discussions in line with strategic intent document could ensure more clarity of focus for the Board meetings.
- The Finance and Governance Committee – ensuring future contingencies are in place to safeguard against losing critical key skills in the executive team
- Exploring how and when the Board comes together as the Exec team work with a more hybrid approach could be beneficial. It is likely that the F&R committee will remain virtual but there may be opportunities for the full Board meeting to reshape the time and length of their meetings to ensure the many can attend, engage, contribute and connect up effectively.
- Ensuring continuing compliance and alignment in approach with the imminent Code for Sports Governance updated version.



COMPOSITION AND CULTURE

Strengths and Observations

- A Board of committed, high calibre individuals who have a visibly strong collective desire to be as supportive as possible to CEO and wider team.
- There is a good mix of skills, background, experience, gender, ethnicity and styles which are highlighted through a 'live' skills matrix.
- There is a strong commitment from all and especially the current Chair to diversity and representation. A diversity champion is in place, two new Board members who joined in 2020 and 2021 reflect this and there is a good sense of the importance of the place and locality for Board members individually and collectively.
- There has been a lot of change over past two years with a new Chair, Senior Independent Director and five additional new members. There are strong signs of relationships being built despite difficult virtual working conditions and that many have not met in person as well as 'bridging the gap' between members who joined in 2016 and more recent members. An informal buddy relationship was used for a new Board member at the request of the Chair.
- There is good foundation of a Board HR framework including Board recruitment pack, induction pack, written job descriptions and code of conduct.
- Observations from the Board meeting showed a good level of challenge, support and trust. Questioning was used appropriately and there was positive tension on display where differing views existed.
- There were 'louder' and 'quieter' voices on the virtual Board meeting though many were encouraged and enabled to contribute via e.g. an actively used chat box or where specific expertise could add to the discussion.
- There are visibly good relationships with the CEO and wider team with senior members of the team joining the observed Board meeting and participating in an open and challenging discussion.

"I think I'm helping but not sure I'm really being 'used' as effectively as could be".

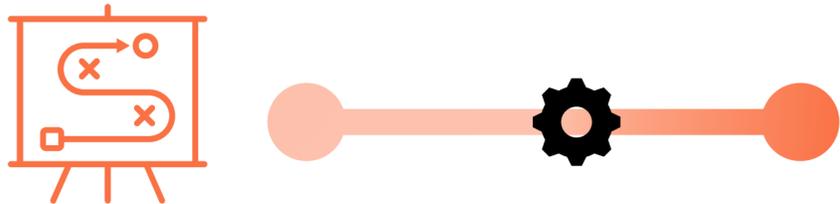
"I will speak up when I feel I can offer a different opinion rather than just echoing others".

I think its good that we have someone at the table like me representing the many and that the many feel they are represented".

"I miss some of the safe pairs of hands we had but excited by the new blood we have".

Learning and Improvement Recommendations

- Individually Board members could benefit from exploring and sharing collectively their unique role on the Board. Several expressed a lack of clarity around e.g. 'specifically what do I bring to the Board? How can I best support? How am I making a difference? Sharing what everyone brings to the table and understanding self development goals via a formal annual review process with the Chair and subsequent Board discussion could support this.
- The Board champions role could be extended beyond Safeguarding and Diversity and Equalities to align with the organisation's strategic intent focus areas enabling Board members' skills to be best utilised at the right time and in the right place.
- The role of the SID could be further explored to understand it's unique role and focus to continually champion effectiveness and meaningful governance.
- Further exploring inequalities, diversity and inclusion as a way of working as well as a strategic intent could deepen further the Boards and teams understanding of e.g. what does GBA's racial statement individually and collectively means to us?
- The skills matrix could be reviewed and bought in line with the strategic plans e.g. local knowledge, community roots, Active travel, health etc.
- Continuing to explore how to 'bring in everyone's voices' could provide opportunities for engagement and connection in different ways e.g mentoring and working directly with team members, holding thematic learning sessions.
- Introducing a formalised buddy process for new Board members as part of the induction programme could support them to 'hit the ground running'.
- Ensuring a clear succession plan is in place for the large numbers who will come to the end of their Board terms at the same time.
- Ensuring compliance and alignment of sentiment with the imminent Code of Sports Governance revised diversity targets.



STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT

Strengths and Observations

- There is a clear support for the Get Berkshire Active's overall ambitions and desire to make a positive contribution to the people of Berkshire's lives.
- There is a clear organisational strategic intent which is supported by their main funder, Sport England.
- A Balanced score card is shared at each Board meeting to update on headline KPIs and progress on impact measures, Finance and Governance committee measures, external stakeholder survey NPS and internal People Staff Survey.
- The Exec team has had a challenging year with COVID conditions to work in, continually changing priorities for partners and new local system needs as a result of the impact of the pandemic. Consequently, the Board have consciously adopted first a crisis management approach and then support role to ensure the team are supported, with their wellbeing and good operating conditions as their priority.
- There is a strong commitment from the Board Chair to be clear on the parameters of the Board and the Executive team and set boundaries for what and how will drive strategic conversations. Whilst this evidently hasn't yet been fully addressed given the context of the virtual working and new members, at several points in the observed Board Meeting this tension was positively challenged by various questions such as "are we on point here?", "do we need to be discussing this at this level? And "is this our role to agree this?".
- Risk is a standing agenda item of the Finance and Governance Committee with a tight control on spending.
- There is a good check and challenge way of working demonstrated by a consistent critically questioning style and robust decision making when required by the Chair.

"we work well as a legitimate critical friend".

"we feel very reliant still on Sport England".

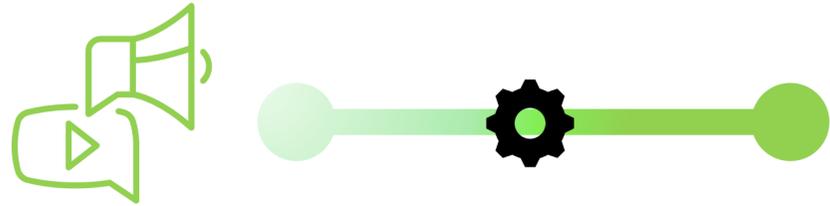
"the input of the Board can sometimes feel secondary to the CEO and team".

"We seem very risk adverse – too much so?"

"I'm think I'm rightly near but not too near... and far but not too far".

Learning and Improvement Recommendations

- There is wide scope to review the approach of discussions and reporting mechanism to Board. Currently, in general, reporting is based on project progress and activities but does not always enable the Board to challenge if they are asking themselves the right questions that really matter at the right time to support the strategic intent. Expectation could be on Board members to make the connections and 'join the dots' back to the strategic intent rather than providing this in a more deliberate and connected way. Shifting the focus further onto the 'how' as well as the 'what' in agendas and meeting discussions could support this. E.g.:
 - structuring agendas according to key strategic themes (i.e. young people rather than reporting on activities such as school games)
 - discussing long term sustainable progress through the lens of behaviours and values (i.e. how are we building trust and relationships)
 - reviewing strategic goals and markers of success in each meeting.
- Several members expressed a wish to "see GBA in action" through the 'real work' rather than e.g. only in annual events such as awards night/school games etc.
- Delivering the planned reserves strategy could support a more purposeful driven financial approach aligned to your strategic intent.
- The flexibility of funding reflects the changing relationship with Sport England and their desire for APs to take the lead on understanding and articulating the local needs of their place and driving ways of working and initiatives which support the work needed to be done. The Board and Exec team could benefit from exploring further how this emerging way of working contributes to their strategic approach and relationship with SE.



IMPACT

Strengths and Observations

- There is a clear commitment to continuous improvement and strong practice across the whole organisation with a desire to be an “outstanding and leading Active Partnership”.
- Several Board members expressed how much they enjoy learning about GBA’s activities and feel they are developing their own knowledge and expertise as a result.
- There is a use of key skills of Board members e.g. finance, project skills, marketing etc which are used to support the teams work and events.
- There is a strong commitment to ‘wanting to make a difference’ and ‘stamping a mark” as a collective Board ensuring that the organisation meets its obligation, continues to evolve and can move forward in a positive and dynamic way.
- Observations from the Board meeting support an outcomes focused way of thinking for members e.g. questions such as “what did we not do?”, are we thinking enough about the outcome here? “ what outcome are we trying to achieve here?” all positively reinforce this.

“Jason and Richard especially have opened up networks we didn’t previously have access to”

“I’m not sure I would describe us as particularly purpose driven”.

“I’m not really connected in with what’s going on across the AP network”.

“I’m enjoying learning about areas I don’t connect with in my day job”.

“how do we go forward together to ensure we are making a difference?”

Learning and Improvement Recommendations

- There is scope to come together to define collectively what is the Board identity e.g. exploring and defining what matters most to us and how do we know we are being effective? Setting clear goals, milestones and having markers of success for the Board could support this.
- This could enable the Board to feel that they have an influential role as agents of change and are as effective as possible as the Active Partnership’s role and agendas continues to evolve and grow.
- Placing learning at the heart of discussions by e.g. setting learning goals, tabling conversations focused on what have we learned that has worked, and what hasn’t over this last period could support this and enable GBA as a whole organisation to innovate at pace.
- There is scope through members networks to explore their advocacy role and ‘use’ their channels out to amplify GBA’s voice and message.
- Examples across the Active partnership network to enable Board members to ‘stay in tune’ with trends etc could be adopted such as e.g. learning drop in sessions.
- Board members and the Chair could explore further links to the Active Partnership network such as engagement events, national convention, national development group playbacks, etc.
- The imminent revised Code for Sports Governance which will focus greater on Board culture and effectiveness could be a good ongoing learning and improvement resource.

Summary

- Get Berkshire Active has a strong foundation of governance which ensures it meets the assurance obligations required by Sport England and high standards of the Tier 3 Code for Sports Governance.
- The Board is comprised of high calibre individuals who are committed to and focused on ensuring Get Berkshire Active is a high performing effective organisation. They have been refreshed over the previous year with new strong leadership and additional members who bring diverse experience and voices alongside existing experienced members, and enjoy good relationships with the executive team.
- The 'framework' of the Board is well structured and managed with an active sub committee process which ensured the Board were able to continue to effectively operate during the challenging times of COVID conditions and the CEO's recent short illness.
- Given the recent year there has been limited opportunities to come together as a whole new team and focus on their own identity, culture, skills, aims and ways of working as a collective Board ; there is a commitment to do this and a recommendation that regular space is made to reflect on their progress and direction of travel over the forthcoming evaluation period.
- Improvement and development for the Board focuses on the need now to build on their strong compliance and operating framework and deliberately drive the shift further to being purpose driven. Having a clear understanding of what matters most to them individually and as a collective and how they can best use their skills, experience and passion to drive GBA as agents of change by e.g. carving time in agendas aligned to the strategic intent approach, shifting reporting mechanisms to focus on strategic outcomes rather than purely programme outputs and placing learning at the heart of their approach.
- Individual Board members could benefit from further 1-2-1 time with the Board Chair to understand how their skills, experience, expertise, interest, style etc can best contribute whether in the formal Board meeting setting or via projects, mentoring, champion role, facilitating learning sessions, masterclasses etc and any potential aspirations for their role on the Board from a succession planning perspective. Sharing and exploring this in an open discussion could support deepening relationships and building clarity of purpose and direction.