



Club Governance Handbook

*Standards, Structures & Best Practice
for Tug of War Clubs*

Issued November 2025

1. Introduction to Club Governance

Tug of War Ireland is committed to ensuring good governance across our sport and has put together this guide to provide guidance to clubs which we hope will be of assistance at club level.

At Government level, the National Sports Policy 2018–2027 (which among other targets) specifically requires the adoption by all funded sports bodies of The Governance Code which is the Code advocated by Sport Ireland to be adopted by all sport's National Governing bodies. At Board level we have confirmed our compliance with the Code to Sport Ireland.

We hope this guide can assist all clubs to embrace governance at club level and help clubs have a better understanding of how good governance can be implemented. Many clubs have already put good governance practices in place, and we encourage all clubs to continue to make improvements at all levels. Governance practices are there to protect you and your club and to have a clear set of principles and policies to follow when issues arise.

It is important that your club committee consider governance in how you operate and ideally have individual/s within the club that can help the club keep improving in this area. we suggest you could consider setting up a subcommittee to support the main committee with this work.

If you require any assistance, please do contact us at secretary@tugofwarireland.com

2. What does governance for our Clubs look like?

Governance effectively means setting out how your club is run, who is in control and what processes, policies and controls are in place to ensure the club is attractive for new members, financially stable and well run. Good governance means having good policies and procedures in place that allow clubs to run their affairs as autonomously as possible but to a standard expected as a member of Tug of War Ireland. It also means how we behave, lead and work within our club. It includes;

- Complying with all rules of affiliation
- Providing a safe and enjoyable environment for members
- Having a good club culture and ethos
- Ensuring high standards of safeguarding practices
- Operating your committee for the overall benefit of the clubs and your members
- Making good decisions and being transparent about those decisions
- Encouraging involvement across the membership
- Being open to new ideas and new people
- Working as a team, democratically and not for individual/ group interests
- Being open to new ideas
- Protecting the reputation of the club and our sport
- Following a clear strategy and plan to meet club goals
- Being resilience and sustainable into the future
- Ensuring your club is inclusive and meets any minimum standards of diversity and inclusivity
- Complying with any legislation or financial standards, codes or regulations
- Not letting politics get in the way
- Doing what is always the best for the Club as a whole
- Knowing when it's time to step away from a role

By having a good governance framework in place, you can:

- Build trust and confidence
- Set the culture, ethos and behaviour expected
- Encourage more members to participate and join
- Ensure everyone can enjoy our sport in a safe, fun, and healthy environment
- Protect and safeguard members but particularly children and vulnerable adults
- Set minimum standards of what we expect from our committee and volunteers
- Provide a clear process when complaints or issues are raised
- Make our club more attractive for funding
- Define everyone's role within the club and encourage teamwork
- Allow for club succession and rotation of roles
- Encourage more diversity and inclusiveness
- Protect the club from legal, financial and regulatory issues
- Build our clubs reputation

When good governance is not observed it can:

- Undermine good work of volunteers and membership
- Expose the club to complaints and concerns
- Lead to reputational damage
- Result in legal, financial or other investigations or cases
- Damage relationships between members and the wider community
- Impact funding and other applications
- Reduce membership applications and renewals
- Personally affect individuals' health and wellbeing

Common causes of poor governance include:

- Poor club culture
- Good intentions, but a lack of experience or knowledge
- A skills gap in key areas of finance, risk, safeguarding or legal matters
- Conflicts of interest and loyalty interfering with good decision making
- Lack of diversity, insular thinking including lack of gender balance
- Unfettered power by one or a small group of individuals
- Unwieldy board and committee sizes
- Poor dissemination of information to members and stakeholders
- Absence of term limits for the committee
- Lack of internal checks and challenges
- No agreed policies and procedures in place
- Lack of understanding of roles & responsibilities
- Poor meeting processes (papers, minutes etc.)
- Personal disagreements and personality clashes

3. Affiliation

The Club Committee should ensure that it is correctly affiliated to Tug of War Ireland. A club wishing to be affiliated to the Company, shall in accordance with Article 4 of the Tug of War Articles of Association:

- (a) have minimum of 5 Club Members who have discharged their Membership Fee in accordance with Clause 15 of the Articles of Association;
- (b) have participated in a minimum of 2 events sanctioned by the Company during the preceding calendar year;
- (c) be constituted to promote and develop the activity of Tug of War in Ireland,
- (d) have an Executive Committee consisting of a Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer;
- (e) have submitted to the Company, evidence of a validly adopted Constitution in a form prescribed by the Company and demonstrating common objects of the Company;
- (f) Have paid an annual Membership Fee as determined by the Company from time to time on or before 31 January every year.

For clarity, any Affiliated Club that has not paid their annual Membership Fee by 31 January shall not be considered affiliated and therefore shall not have any voting rights for that calendar year at any Company meeting.

Once a club is affiliated to Tug of War Ireland the club is bound to observe the constitution and all the rules, policies and procedures of Tug of War Ireland

All official communication with Clubs is made via the clubs Secretary.

Attendance and Voting at General Meetings

Every affiliated Club has the right to notice of, and to attend at, general meetings of the Company and the right to nominate a Delegate in accordance with the provisions of the Articles of Association and such delegates shall have the right to speak and the right to vote at general meetings.

4. Structure of your club

It is important to know if your club is structured as a volunteer committee structure with a club constitution and committee running its affairs or a company structure with a company constitution. If necessary, speak to your solicitor about that as having the right structure provides clarity on roles and responsibilities of the club.

Constitution

A Constitution sets out the basis upon which the club operates and must be in compliance with company law if you are a company structure. If you are not a company structure you must still have a constitution. For either structure the following should be clearly set out in the Constitution

- Membership and affiliation to Tug of War Ireland
- General rules regarding admission and members rights

- Objects of the club, its purpose etc
- Committee membership
- Terms of office
- Election procedures
- Powers and remit of the Committee
- Minimum number of times a year the Committee meet
- Procedures regarding meetings of the club
- What is the quorum and how is voting managed
- Role of the chair and high-level details on other key roles
- How sub committees may be set up and delegated tasks and duties
- Reference to any ancillary policies, codes and rules that must be complied with
- Accounts and governance provisions

Your club may also have additional club rules, policies, or other regulations included in the body of the constitution or these may sit separately in a club rules document which can also incorporate club policies and general club information

5. Club Committee and Sub Committees

The Committee

Clubs are managed and controlled by a committee which takes decisions on behalf of the members. Committees should provide leadership, direction, and guidance. The committee are ultimately responsible for ensuring good governance and financial oversight of the Club. The Committee take responsibility for ensuring member's interests are protected and decision-making works to achieve the clubs' objectives. Committees and members provide the necessary leadership to ensure the future viability of the club and sustainability into the future. Committees should not operate as private domains of any one set of individuals and should be open, accessible, and transparent. Clubs which are structured as a company are similarly run by a Board of Directors however, they may be commonly known as or referred to as a "committee" by the Club which is in order but should be aware that they are subject to additional legal and statutory obligations under the law.

The Committee is responsible for:

- Setting the overall strategy for the club
- Culture and leadership
- Governance and risk management
- Policy setting and implementation
- Compliance with law and regulations
- Appointing sub committees and their terms of reference
- Compliance with constitution
- Commercial decisions
- Membership policy
- Financial oversight and controls
- Employment/Services/Contractor engagement
- All legal and financial compliance

The committee will also have operational duties (the day to day running of the club) to manage. Such operational duties may be delegated to volunteers, contractors, staff or working groups and may include;

- Club administration
- Running events, programmes, training, competitions etc
- Membership administration
- Communications and social media
- Financial accounts
- Marketing and commercial work
- Volunteer management
- Safeguarding

Committee size

While there are no legal requirements advising what size the Committee should be we recommend no less than 6 and no more than 10 members in order to be effective however there is no specific requirement if a club is unable to meet these requirements.

Committee Members and Skill set

While everyone should be encouraged to step forward at all levels it is important that the committee has a combined unit has the necessary skills to effectively manage and operate the club. An appropriate mix of skills, experience and knowledge should exist on each committee. Each committee member should have clear roles and responsibilities and be able to work together as a team. Equally it is important when members offer their assistance that clubs find an appropriate role as we all know volunteers are not easy to come by.

One way of ensuring skills sets is to provide guidance to members on the type of roles and skills that the committee need on an annual basis. This can also issue to members in advance of elections. Proactively identifying volunteers who are interested in running for election with specific skill sets is also a useful way to help strengthen committees but should be approved by the membership as part of the election procedures. Clubs can also include provisions in their constitution to allow committees to co-opt/appoint a specific number of individuals if some specific skill sets are needed.

The club should consider;

- What skills are needed?
- Have we considered gender balance?
- Are we diverse enough?
- What leadership or other attributes do we need?
- What commitment do members need to give?

Committee Elections/ Appointments

Committee members should be elected, appointed, or co-opted in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. Finding skills sets purely via an election process can be difficult but it is a matter for the club to determine what may work best. A mix of elections and co-options/appointments can be helpful to ensure a fair transparency process. Every club should assess the needs for their club committee and decide on how best to populate these roles. Prior to elections it can be useful to set

up a Nominations Sub Committee. This committee can help identify the skill sets needed and potentially encourage members to step up.

6. Committee Roles

Tug of War Ireland recommends the following positions to be filled in the Committee:

Chair / President

Some clubs may have decided to combine this role together however clubs may decide to split these due to the skills that may be required to undertake each role. The role of the President is to represent the club and act as an ambassador for the club and they may or may not be a member of the committee.

The role of the chair is to manage the committee and provide good leadership. A chair should ultimately be responsible for bringing people together to work as a team for the betterment of the club and its members. Alongside this leadership role the chair is responsible to ensure the committee functions correctly and to conduct all meetings. This person should have leadership expertise and experience in chairing meetings and understand good governance practices. If at any meeting the chair is not present, clubs should have a clause within their constitution to appoint a temporary chair for that meeting.

Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for the financial management of the club and should have a skill set and experience in finance and ensure financial planning and rigorous controls are in place. This individual should liaise with external advisors and auditors on all financial matters when required.

Secretary

The Secretary undertakes much of the club's administrative work. If the club is incorporated, then by law a Company Secretary must be appointed - this may be the Club Secretary (if they have the relevant experience). All official communications is conducted via the registered Secretary.

Other Committee Members

These additional members should be elected, appointed/co-opted in accordance with the constitution of each club and generally at the AGM and should as a minimum include a;

- Safeguarding Designated Liaison Officer
- Safety Advisor

Directors

If a club is structured as a company, then the club will have a board which acts as the committee and each member of the committee including the roles outlined above will also be a legal director under company law.

Trustees

Some clubs may have trustees appointed to specifically hold assets on behalf of the club. Where a club has trustees, the club should seek legal advice on their role and their powers within the club.

Gender balance requirements for club committees

Research shows that having more diversity adds value by offering different perspectives and a broader range of opinions, which ultimately helps improve our decision making. Tug of War Ireland has a minimum gender balance requirement of 40% of either gender at national Level and strongly advocates that clubs also adopt the gender balance principle.

Terms of Office

Although not a legal requirement it is good governance practice, that those who hold positions in the club should step aside once they meet a maximum term of office. While volunteers can be hard to find, it is best practice to ensure good rotation of people in key roles within the club. This ensures diverse thinking and transparency of succession. It is also important for clubs to encourage new members to put themselves forward. It is important when bringing in terms of office to also acknowledge the service of those that have served. Former committee members can still be involved on working groups or sub committees once term limits expire. Clubs should also consider how rotation will work as it is not good practice for all members to step away at the same time.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees may also be established to manage operational matters such as competitions, membership, or for more regulatory matters like audit and risk, governance, and finances. Each subcommittee should report to the main committee. Subcommittee members should have the necessary skills in the area involved and external experts may be brought in to assist on such committees. Clubs should ensure each subcommittee:

- Is properly approved and set up in accordance with the club constitution
- Has a term of reference listing its function and remit
- Has members with relevant expertise/skill sets
- Reports to the main committee
- Has support when as required (e.g.; financial, audit)
- Keeps to an agreed meeting schedule
- Keeps a record/minutes of its meetings

Club Strategy/ Club Operations Plan

While many members and committees have great ideas about how their club can develop, many do not have a plan that is written down. Planning is essential to ensure everyone is working in the right direction and everyone understands the core purpose and priorities of the club. Without a written plan clubs run the risk of being over dependent on specific individuals taking responsibility for matters on an ad hoc basis rather than being led by a plan of action and clear set of objectives. Having a solid plan can:

- Ensure the club is going in the right direction
- Help a club grow and embed itself into the community
- Communicate to its membership, the wider community, to media and potential funders
- Acknowledge and celebrate its achievements
- Provide a clear pathway and succession plan for new committees
- Ensure less dependency on ideas of individuals by embracing broader input

- Gives confidence to membership and provides transparency and accountability
- Avoids ad hoc projects and ensures committees stick to the plan
- Form part of good governance practices

What should be included in a Strategic Plan?

- Club Vision: What do we want for the future or where do we want to be?
- Club Mission: What is our current purpose and role?
- Club Values: What is our culture and what principles do we embrace?
- Stakeholder Map: Who is important to our overall strategy?
- Core objectives/goals: What do we want to achieve over the next 2, 3, 4 or 5 years?
- Actions/ Initiatives: How do we achieve this and what overall actions are needed?
- Timeline and evaluation of overall objectives/goals
- Budget/ funding requirements

What should be included in the yearly operation part of the plan?

- How to implement the strategic plan on a more detailed monthly/yearly basis •
Breaking down the actions into clear deliverable tasks
- Who is responsible for each action?
- What is our annual budget for these actions
- Setting out a detailed timeline to complete the actions
- Evaluation of the actions at year end

Club Policies

What are policies and why do clubs need them?

Not all operational and administrative matters can be outlined within a club constitution so it is good practice to have a suite of policies which sit alongside the club constitution, and which provide guidance and procedures which the club follow and which the members should comply with. A club can have a number of policies in place dealing with a range of matters. Policies provide additional information on how the club deals with certain issues like its safeguarding practices, its data protection compliance, its complaints procedures, how it communicates and how it manages club funds. A club should try and ensure policies are implementable, easy to understand and are available for all members. It is good practice to have the majority of these available on the club website.

Below is an example of recommended policies the club should put in place. Clubs may decide to implement other policies for specific purposes, and we encourage all clubs to do so if they feel a policy is needed to cover another area the club may be involved in.

Financial Controls Policy

The club should have a clear policy in place to set out how funds are managed, bank accounts held, signatories required, accounting and audit procedures and borrowing or other financial controls or powers the club may have.

Risk Assessment and Register

As part of good governance, the club should conduct a risk assessment and keep a risk register

Insurance

Clubs should take advice to ensure they have the correct insurance policies in place. It is important to consult with your broker/insurance company and understand what cover is in place, what is the level of cover and where there may be gaps. Indemnity cover is important for directors, trustees and committee members.

Codes of Conduct

A code of conduct details what is expected from individuals in terms of their commitment, loyalty, confidentiality, and behaviour. The code sets out the culture and environment under which the club operates and summarises expectations of those that serve the club. Clubs may also wish to have a member's code in place which clearly sets out the club's expectations of behaviour from its members

Matters Reserved for the Committee V the Membership

It is good practice to have a schedule or list of items that are exclusively reserved for the committee to deal with or to make a decision on. This will help the club avoid unnecessary conflict and for members to understand what matters must be put before an AGM / EGM or what the committee can determine itself. For example, agreeing what bank to use or the signatories for accounts can be decided upon by the committee whereas borrowing or lending money should be put to the membership.

Data Protection Policy/GDPR

Clubs need to have a robust Data Protection Policy/ GDPR (the EU's General Data Protection Regulation) in place. This will require the club to undertake a data mapping exercise which will establish a list of exactly what data the club holds or collects, for what reason and for what length. Data can be as simple as holding an email address or phone number of a member or more complex such as bank account details or medical information. The Data Protection Policy may be different for each club depending on what activities they undertake and what data is collected from individuals.

Business Continuity Policy/ Disaster recovery

As occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, many clubs closed, and business had to stop. A business continuity policy will set out what happens in such circumstances. When business is interrupted this can be very helpful particularly in cases of crisis and emergency including injury or death, an accident, loss of data, cyber-attack etc.

Equality Policy

To comply with equality legislation the club needs to have an equality policy to ensure there is no discrimination against any individual or group. Clubs are legally bound by the Equal Status Acts in Ireland. It is important that clubs understand their anti-discrimination obligations. Clubs should ensure matters relating to its equality policy are examined and any concerns or issues around equality in the club are immediately advised to the committee for review and action.

Bullying, harassment and victimisation Policy

Allegations around matters such as bullying and harassment can be very damaging for a club and can undermine confidence and trust at all levels. What is important for the club is to set out a clear and fair process for how issues will be reported, managed and ideally resolved.

Safety Statement and Health and Safety Policy

Clubs are required to have a safety statement which is visible to members. The Health & Safety policy sits along with this and sets out the health and safety protocols and procedures a club will follow in relation to all its activities. An individual should be identified as responsible for health and safety and first aid within the policy. Someone with experience in health and safety should be asked to conduct a visit and assessment and assist with the policy.

Volunteer Policy

Given the number of volunteers clubs engage with it is good practice to have a clear policy in place when an individual becomes engaged with the club for the first time. This policy can act as a signal for volunteers as to what is expected from them and the various policies that apply to them as volunteers for the club.

Social Media Policy

Social media use is now commonplace and a policy can be a helpful tool to provide guidance and advice to our committee members. While clubs cannot police and control what the general public may say with regard to the club on social media, they can set guidance for members and committee members.

Communications Policy

A good communications policy can make it clear who is the spokesperson for the club, how media queries will be dealt with, how announcements are made and who should engage on behalf of the club. It can help to lay out the process of how committees will be updated and who is ultimately responsible for the clubs messaging.

Internet and Email Policy

It may be the case that your club has provided volunteers access to servers and email addresses. If this is the case, then a club should have a policy with regard to data ownership and how data is shared and kept confidential.

Gifts Policy

In good governance a high standard of ethics is now expected across all areas. In sport it can be commonplace for gifts to be exchanged. A policy can set out the level of monetary value that gifts should not exceed before having to be reported.

Safeguarding/ Child Welfare Policy

The policy will outline the clubs process with regard to vetting procedures and the overall position with regard to safeguarding. It should also cover vulnerable adults. The policy should also clearly state how matters will be handled, by whom and the responsibilities for reporting in line with current legislation. It should also set out how stand down order and suspensions are handled and the Clubs policy on Safeguarding training and vetting. Sport Ireland's Safeguarding Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport (2019) which follows Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) sets out requirements on recruiting and working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Every club must have a policy in that regard and committee members should be familiar with their obligations. Clubs should have a Children's Officer and a Designated Liaison Person who is separate to the children's officer (if possible) to ensure the required reporting procedures are followed and to report any suspected cases of child neglect or abuse to the duty social worker in the Child and Family Agency/Tusla or an Garda Síochána.

Disciplinary and Grievance Policy

It is important that Clubs also have a Disciplinary and Grievance policy in place for its members and volunteers separate to any staff policy. This will set out how complaints and disputes or breaches of policies will be handled.

Lobbying Policy

If the club is undertaking in any lobbying activity (i.e. lobbying a 'designated public official' about purchase of land, policy changes, legal changes, grants etc) you may be required to register as an organisation that partakes in lobbying and file a quarterly return. The sipo.ie website provides guidance on whether you should register or not and what constitutes lobbying activity.

Inclusion/ Disability Policy

This Policy sets out the Clubs commitment to all people with disabilities and outlines how our Club will facilitate the inclusion of those with disabilities in developing and offering activities. The policy should also include any Club training providing, details of who is responsible for enquires and our general access policy in respect of our facility and equipment.

Running Effective Meetings

Role of Chair

The role of the Chair is to agree and set the agenda with input from the secretary (or managing staff if any) or taking into account matters which may need to be addressed or which have been raised by members. The Chair sets the tone for the meeting, the agenda and the timings. It is good practice to ensure a set amount of time is divided as appropriate to each agenda item to ensure all matters receive adequate attention. The key to a well-run meeting is a strong chair and a well-planned agenda. The chair should:

- Insist papers have been read in advance so time is not wasted reading through material
- Control how the meeting is run and the speaking time for member's present avoiding too many discussions running over or any monopoly in conversations
- Encourage an open transparent meeting, seek out questions on topics and ensure each member feels they can contribute to the discussion.
- Encourage individual contributions and avoid group thinking. Ultimately the decision will be made by the majority if that is what the Constitution stipulates but a robust discussion in a constructive rather than disruptive manner should take place.
- Call out poor behaviour when necessary and resolve conflicts where possible.

Meeting Schedule

It is good practice to try agree a meeting schedule for the year ahead or at least for the next 6 months and ensure the dates are secured in peoples diaries. Meetings should be held for the minimum number of times set out in the constitution, but good practice would be at least every 4-6 weeks depending on the nature of the committee. In smaller Clubs it may meet more regularly as it may be more operationally involved.

Agenda

An agenda might include:

- The minutes of the last meeting
- Matters arising from minutes
- Outstanding action points
- Update on Club activities
- Strategic issues
- Financial updates
- Governance updates
- Risk Register update
- Membership/Stakeholder issues
- Project work

Notice of Meetings, Papers and Attendance

Clubs should ensure adequate notice is provided for its meetings and how it has been agreed notice should issue e.g. via email. The secretary should take note of attendance. Members should ensure they give apologies if they are unable to attend but the chair should raise any repeated failure to attend with the relevant member. Papers should be issued a number of days in advance if possible and ideally each agenda item should have a memo or paper attached outlining what the discussion is about.

Minutes

The secretary should take minutes in an agreed standard format which outline key discussions and decisions of the committee and any follow up actions necessary. Minutes do not need to be verbatim what was said at the meeting but an overall indication of what was discussed under each agenda item and the outcome or decisions relating to same. The chair should review the minutes and may offer guidance on what detail should be recorded. Key matters especially around financial decisions must be properly recorded. There is no need to attribute comments to particular individuals however members may wish individual concerns are recorded. The final decision of the committee however is collective even if not everyone agreed. Minutes are normally approved at the next meeting and signed by the chair.

General Meetings AGM/EGM

Clubs must hold general meetings of all members in accordance with their constitution. The key to running a good meeting is proper planning, timing and communication with members. It is important the meeting is set up correctly, chaired in a professional manner and there are no surprises for members which could generate a bad outcome. If there are key decisions to be made at such meetings (e.g. changes to the Constitution or an important club policy) consideration should be given to advance consultation with members before springing matters on them at a general meeting. An AGM should include:

- Overview of financial statements
- Clubs activities report
- Appointment of the auditors and setting fees where relevant
- Elections

An EGM is generally held in accordance with the Club Constitution for urgent matters.

Where do we start ?

Start by setting up a governance committee

The committee should agree who in the club should sit on a governance committee. This can be made up of members of the main committee or include other members who may have skills or expertise or an interest in this area. This governance committee should:

- Agree a terms of reference for the work the committee will undertake
- Consult with the members in relation to governance and any changes that may impact them
- Review the existing club governance and understand where the club is currently positioned
- Identify a list of gaps that the club may need to work on
- Make recommendations to the main committee on changes to be adopted
- Create an action plan and timeline to implement change
- Divide up the workload and agree who is responsible for which elements
- Bring forward any constitutional changes to your EGM/ AGM