

England Bowls Regional Delivery Hubs: Bringing Support Closer to Clubs, County Associations and Communities

Bowls has always been at its best when it brings people together: players, volunteers, clubs, county associations and communities all contributing to a sport that is welcoming, social and full of potential. As the bowls landscape evolves, we have an opportunity to strengthen that shared effort by making support simpler, more consistent and closer to where it is needed most.

That is the purpose behind the proposed introduction of England Bowls' Regional Delivery Hubs (RDHs), should the merger of indoor and outdoor flat green bowls be supported. The RDHs are designed to help the bowls ecosystem work more effectively by connecting national direction with local delivery. They would not replace clubs or county Associations. Instead, they would add capacity, provide practical support and help reduce the operational pressure that many volunteers currently carry.

Why change is needed

Across recent discussions, a consistent message has emerged: the current system is passionate and committed, but it can also feel complex and ineffective. Responsibilities sometimes overlap, important work can fall between gaps, and clubs and county associations are often being asked to do more with limited time, capacity and specialist expertise.

At the same time, the ambition for the sport is clear. Bowls needs a modern, sustainable operating model that supports participation, strengthens inclusion, develops volunteers, improves facilities, builds partnerships and gives clubs the confidence to thrive. National strategy can set the direction, but growth happens locally - on greens, in clubhouses, through volunteers and within communities. Bowls needs clearer support for membership growth, participation activation, and sharing of best practice, all of which is essential for our future.

What the Regional Delivery Hubs would do

Regional Delivery Hubs (RDHs) would act as a bridge between England Bowls HQ, clubs and county associations. HQ would lead on national strategy, policy, regulation and assurance. County Associations would retain their vital role in representation, competitions, liaison and escalation. Clubs would remain the heartbeat of day-to-day delivery, liaison and escalation.

The RDH would focus on the development activity that benefits from regional coordination and hands-on support. This includes helping clubs navigate facility issues, activate national participation and inclusion programmes, build local partnerships, support communications, coordinate workforce development, provide safeguarding signposting, gather local insight and bring clubs together to share ideas and good practice. They will coordinate regional disciplinary panels where independence is required and support a single coaching system.

The benefits for clubs, county associations and volunteers

- More practical support for clubs: the RDH would provide a clearer route to advice on facilities, operations, local authority relationships, funding opportunities, community partnerships and club development.

- Less duplication and greater clarity: By defining who leads, who delivers and who assures, the system can reduce overlap and make it easier for volunteers to know where to go for help.
- Stronger local delivery of national priorities: Participation, inclusion, workforce and partnership programmes can be adapted to regional needs while staying aligned to the national vision.
- Better use of local insight: the RDH would help gather and share information from clubs and county associations, ensuring national decisions are informed by what is happening on the ground.
- More connected communities: Building on Sport England's placed-based approach, our regional networks can help clubs learn from one another, celebrate success and build relationships with schools, colleges, community groups, health partners and local government.
- Reduced pressure on volunteers: By adding specialist capacity and coordination, the RDH can help volunteers focus more of their energy on the parts of the sport they enjoy most.
- Peer learning across counties: Identifying, sharing and celebrating best practice that is already happening in our clubs, communities and county associations.

What the RDHs would not do

It is important to be clear about the boundaries. The RDH would not replace the role of clubs and county associations or become another layer of bureaucracy and governance. They would not take over competitions or representative matches unless specifically asked to support. They would not design national policy, rules, programmes or standards. Their role would be to strengthen delivery, not centralise control.

A positive step towards a stronger bowls ecosystem

The introduction of the Regional Delivery Hubs is an opportunity to create a more joined-up, responsive and sustainable bowls system. It recognises the importance of national leadership, respects the role of counties, celebrates the central place of clubs and provides additional support where it can make the greatest difference.

For the model to succeed, it will need thoughtful discussion, honest feedback and careful transition planning. Questions around funding, location, number of hubs, and the different needs of indoor and outdoor bowls will all need to be worked through. But the direction is positive: clearer responsibilities, stronger support, better connections and more time focused on growing and enjoying the sport.

Ultimately, the RDH is about helping bowls do what it does best: bring people together, create great experiences and build vibrant clubs at the heart of local communities. By placing practical support closer to clubs and volunteers, the RDH could become an important part of a brighter, more confident future for bowls.

Next steps

There is more work to do on establishing the optimal number and size of the regions, as well as exploring how they would be resourced and funded. We are in discussion with the Bowls Development Alliance about how this model would complement the support that they provide to Bowls England and EIBA affiliated clubs, and how our sport might make a case for Sport England funding to support this model.

If you have any thoughts on this, please email ourfuture@bowlsengland.com or info@eiba.co.uk