



## **EFL/FSA Supporter Engagement Meeting**

**Date:** 14 June 2022  
**Time:** 3:00 - 5:00 pm  
**Venue:** Via TEAMS Video Conference

### **ATTENDEES**

**EFL:** Trevor Birch (Chief Executive Officer), Mark Rowan, (Communications Director), Nick Craig (Governance and Legal Director), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Andy Pomfret (Head of Supporter Services), Stuart MacPhee (Head of Commercial Development), Paul Snellgrove (Competitions Manager), David McArdle (Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion)

**FSA:** Ashley Brown, Amanda Jacks, David Rose, Jane Hughes

**Championship:** Geoff Bielby (Hull City Supporters Trust), Tony Wilkinson (Blackpool Supporters Trust), Paula Martin (STAR - Supporters Trust at Reading)

**League One:** Ian Bridge (Bolton Wanderers Supporters Trust), Tony Hector (Wycombe Wanderers Supporters Trust)

**League Two:** Ally Simcock (Pint of Vale - Port Vale Supporters Group).

**Apologies:** Kevin Miles

### **1. Welcome & Introductions**

MR chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone, with introductions made by both the FSA & the EFL.

### **2. Matters arising from last meeting**

- The EFL report on attendance figures is still being compiled and will be shared when available.
- EFL protocols for postponing games was sent to the FSA.
- EFL & FSA will continue to work together on issues relating to the FLR.
- The EFL will discuss matters relating to the work of club foundations in tackling poor behaviour at games later in this meeting
- FSA fed back to the EFL on tackling anti-social behaviour campaign and the Supporters Survey 2022 content.
- The EFL will share top line Supporters Survey 2022 results as an agenda item in this meeting.
- The EFL shared content with FSA to promote the Women's weekend of games.

### **Action Points**

- EFL to share the report on 2021/22 attendance figures when available
- EFL & FSA to continue to work together to matters relating to the Fan Led Review

### **3. Fan Behaviour / Stadium Safety**

The EFL outlined their ongoing work in relation to Fan Behaviour / Stadium Safety, noting that the topic had been included as an agenda item at the recent EFL conference. This had been escalated as an EFL work stream after a series of incidents and pitch incursions at matches towards the end of the season, some of which resulted in attacks on players, included discriminatory behaviour, abuse, missile throwing and violence. There had also been a reported increase in the use of pyrotechnics. NC noted that all these factors played some part in damaging the EFL brand, negatively impacting on the family matchday experience and ultimately could lead to the implementation of SGSA sanctions and controls. Clubs have also acknowledged their role to work with their Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs) on a holistic approach that implements change and drives improvements.



NC also outlined ongoing work relating to the launch of a new stewards training package to improve standards and minimise police involvement at games – the delivery of the package had been delayed due to Covid but was starting to bear completion. The FSA welcomed this and offered support to address much needed change.

MR outlined the campaign work that has been ongoing throughout the 2021/22 season to encourage supporters to behave responsibly at matches. This has seen messaging developed across a range of Club-activated assets both on and offline, most recently with the launch of the 'For Football's Sake' Campaign, with the core messages reinforcing the potential repercussions of anti-social behaviour at matches, including Club bans and criminal convictions. The Campaign was delivered across all 72 EFL Clubs, and work remains ongoing to evolve the messaging heading into the 2022/23 season.

NC stated that there is insufficient data to assess the success of campaigns to address anti-social behaviour, so work is ongoing to establish further insight. Clubs will also allocate resources to identify and address incidents, in a timely and proactive manner, using education, rehabilitation and banning as appropriate. The EFL recognised that some Clubs are addressing issues well and thinks it will be important to ensure from the start of the 2022/23 season, that supporters understand the consequences of their actions.

It was noted that the EFL wants to inform and educate to protect the collective reputation and will continue to support centrally. A coordinated approach from the EFL, PL and the FA is underway. Clubs, players and fans have a proactive role to play in developing the message. Discussions have started with the EFL Trust to work with the League, its Clubs and its Club Community Organisations (CCOs).

The FSA stated its wholehearted support of messaging to both address poor behaviour, and promote positive behaviour, and will work with the EFL to amplify. The FSA suggested there are many proactive measures that everyone can take responsibility for that can make a difference.

The FSA reported an increase in anecdotal reports of poor behaviour at non-league games, traditionally not seen, suggesting this reflects a change in society generally. DR stated that football has traditionally policed itself very well, and it is important this is re-established post-Covid. AJ pointed out that some individuals believe they are reinforcing their identity through anti-social actions. The role social media plays in driving these negative behaviours must be considered when seeking solutions. AJ noted that, while centralised messaging is positive, Clubs will only be able to have an impact on behaviour at a local level with their fans if they have a positive relationship in place. Collaborative work between fans and club at Blackpool, Hull and Sunderland were all outlined.

#### **Action**

- The EFL to set up a single-issue meeting with the FSA to discuss fan behaviour and stadium safety, with a view to taking outputs forward into ongoing research and campaign work.

#### **4. EFL AGM Update**

NC outlined some of the key amendment changes approved at the EFL's Summer Conference.

- Colour Blindness Kit Clash: Home teams are now permitted to change their kit to accommodate any colour blindness issues
- Substitutes: in EFL League Games and the Papa John's Trophy, five substitutes from seven will be permitted. In the Carabao Cup five substitutes from nine will be allowed.
- Owners' and Directors' Test:
  - Conviction for a hate crime is now a disqualifying factor in the ODAT.
  - The lawyers' charter has been removed and insolvency issues made clearer.
  - OADT has been amended for sporting sanction appeals.
  - Mandatory Articles: Clubs will now be required to include a mandatory article within their Articles of Association which states that the directors of the Club may refuse to register the transfer of any share.



- Club Financial Reporting Unit & Panel: Introduced and approved as part of a package of EFL measures to introduce independent decision making and assessment into matters concerning a Clubs' finances. The panel will be independent from the EFL Board.

## 5. EFL Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

DM provided an overview of the EFL's new Inclusion Strategy, outlining the EFL's Mission Statement which commits to establishing a best-in-class provision ensuring inclusive opportunities within the EFL environment through sustainable and effective change. The strategy will include coaches, communities, players, supporters, club staff & academies through the Community Charity Organisation (CCO).

DM went on to explain how the EFL and its Clubs are reflective and representative of the communities which they serve at all levels of the game. The EFL will offer support and guidance to Clubs to develop diverse fan groups within their community and help celebrate diversity by producing a cultural calendar for all clubs that will explain the significance of each cultural event.

Fan Forum events will be held to celebrate and discuss diversity in football and fan consultation will be important to help understand the lives lived by other fans. The EFL will support Clubs by producing experience best practice guides which will include advice on providing Halal friendly meals, introducing a sensory room and providing sanitary products.

To help raise awareness of the EFL's Code of Practice across the football fanbase, a Gold, Silver & Bronze Award for Clubs will be introduced.

The EFL's EDI strategy will be launched in July, but DM recognises that it is a journey that will never be completed as the EDI conversation will always be moving forward. DM offered to discuss EDI issues further at a separate meeting if required.

### Action

- DM to raise lack of consultation with disabled fans at Bolton Wanderers with Level Playing Field

## 6. FSA

### a. Ticket Pricing (Championship)

PM outlined how Reading has offered £20 tickets to away fans for several years but will now only offer this price in 2022/23 if a reciprocal agreement is in place offering the same price to their fans when they travel away.

PM noted that Reading fans are fully supportive of charging £20 for away fans but find it disappointing when they are charged more for the reverse game. PM asked if the EFL would be able to support away fans with this initiative.

MR noted that EFL attendances in the 2021/22 season were encouraging, only 2% down on previous seasons. Championship attendances were down 10%, but League One and Two attendances were up. In respect of the matter of a 'ticket cap' MR noted that Clubs are operating within challenging circumstances, in terms of financial sustainability, and while the EFL encourages Clubs to price sensibly, to attract a range of spectators, it has no plans to take the matter to Clubs at this time, primarily as ticketing income is a key revenue stream.

MR noted that, for example, for Championship Clubs, ticket income is a hugely important revenue stream whereas Clubs in the Premier League obtain significant income through their broadcasting revenue. Therefore, Clubs are able to determine a pricing model that best suits their individual circumstances.



NC noted that the EFL has introduced regulations to prevent away fans being charged more than home fans, but further regulation would require the agreement of clubs and at the current time would be unlikely to gain sufficient support.

AP then referenced the EFL's previous 'Away Fan Experience' campaign which had been a positive area of work whereby fans assessed the away matchday experience across the League. The best practice and guidance that emerged from those initial seasons of work had been encouraging and there may be scope to consider this area again with Clubs moving forward.

DR suggested that overall ticket pricing across the EFL is broadly acceptable to fans, but a number of Clubs charge over £30. Fans are mindful of category A games that cost significantly more than the average.

#### **b. NFTs**

TH provided opinion on NFTs, expressing the view that fans are concerned with their use. While acknowledging that this topic has predominantly been raised in relation to Premier League Clubs, TH stated his belief that there were increasing reports involving EFL Clubs. TH also stated that the Advertising Standards Agency are releasing statements to address false claims by NFTs. Considering the increasing financial risk fans may potentially face, the EFL was asked for its position.

On behalf of the EFL, SM outlined current observations in respect of a range of opportunities in this space. There are various potential commercial partnership opportunities, and these are being evaluated, looking at their short-term value and long-term sustainability.

TH then asked if external groups would be able to use cryptocurrency to buy a stake in a Club. NC clarified that ultimately owners of an EFL Club must demonstrate that they have the required source and sufficiency of funds, and any form of cryptocurrency would not be accepted under those terms.

AB noted that this topic would be discussed at the FSA AGM, adding that for many supporters, any attempt to monetise engagement between supporters and Clubs would be seen as unacceptable, and it is the FSA's view that fans should not have to pay to engage with their Clubs or put at any financial risk.

#### **Action**

- **FSA to feedback back outcome of discussions at the forthcoming AGM at the next meeting.**

#### **c. World Cup - Fixture Impact**

The FSA asked for clarification on the impact of the winter World Cup in Qatar on EFL fixtures. PS clarified that there are a number of considerations this season - along with the World Cup, the EFL has been asked to accommodate the Women's Euros, the Commonwealth Games and the Rugby league World Cup (October / November 2022), which will be hosted at EFL grounds.

Qatar 2022 means an early start to 2022/23 season and a record number of Saturday fixtures. There are differing start and finish dates for the season and blank periods for the Premier League and Championship that must reverse at some point. The World Cup period has been as sparsely populated as possible, with midweek fixtures being concentrated into opening three months of the season. There has been a challenging home/away sequencing pattern with a record number of 'clash' dates. The EFL has seen some exceedingly difficult home and away clash patterns between paired clubs, which will require fixture changes to Friday nights and Sundays. International friendlies for non-World Cup teams could also lead to more postponements of EFL fixtures.



## 7. EFL Supporters Survey 2022

AP provided a short summary of the EFL's Supporters Survey 2022 findings. The survey had attracted over 32,000 responses, and results are almost ready to share with stakeholders. Some key findings include.

- Supporters are highly committed and keen to attend live matches across the EFL
- Increased numbers of fans (compared to 2019 survey) who see benefits of Cup progress and show interest in attending Carabao and Papa John's Trophy matches.
- Increased awareness of Club Community activity amongst fans
- Increased social media consumption by fans
- Reduced tolerance to foul and abusive language / and fewer fans reporting having witnessed abusive behaviour
- Increased Supporter Liaison Officer recognition
- Fans positive about the development of local Academy players
- Supporters concerned at financial sustainability across EFL and would welcome measures to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth (Fan Led Review) in line with the potential introduction of an Independent Regulator.

### Action

- EFL to send out a comprehensive summary of the Supporters Survey 2022

## 8. AOB

AJ noted that the FSA is aware of the debate on modifications to the 3pm (Saturday broadcast) blackout and are keen to be involved in any discussions on changes to broadcast / streaming regulations. AJ stated that it is important that local discussions are held as each fanbase will have differing views and circumstances that must be considered.

The EFL noted the FSA's wish to be involved in these discussions.

The EFL placed on record its thanks to Tom Greatrex, FSA Vice Chair, & Anwar Uddin, the FSA's Fans for Diversity Campaign Manager, for participating in panel discussions at the EFL AGM.

### Action

- EFL & FSA to agree next season's fan engagement meetings before the start of the 2022/23 season