



EFL SUPPORTER ENGAGEMENT MEETING

Date: 24th May 2019, 12.30pm

Venue: EFL Commercial Office, 55 Blandford Street, London, W1U 7HW

ATTENDEES

EFL: Shaun Harvey (Chief Executive), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Mark Rowan (Communications Director), Andy Pomfret (Supporter Services Manager) & Nick Roberts (Public Affairs Manager)

FSA: Ashley Brown, Kevin Miles, Deborah Dilworth

Championship: Geoff Bielby (Hull City); Billy Grant (Brentford) and Roger Titford (Reading).

League One: Roger Ellis (Coventry City); Christine Seddon (Blackpool) and Martin O'Hara (Doncaster Rovers).

League Two: Neil Le Milliere (Exeter City), Kristine Green (Grimsby Town)

MINUTES

1. Apologies

1.1. Ally Simcock (Port Vale)

2. Matters Arising

2.1 Owners' Conduct Review – EFL asked for FSA's view on EFL Board policy on charging individuals. Agreed matter would be dealt with by way of separate meeting.

2.2 Lincoln City (Restricted Views) – Andy Pomfret (AP) provided an update of action taken by the club. Lincoln agreed to advertise any seats designated as 'restricted view' upon sale to away Clubs.

2.3 Terms of Reference – These have now been agreed by the EFL and FSA.

2.4 FSA Proposals on Governance – FSA met with FA and National League. EFL affirmed it's happy to have a meeting and waiting for FA approach to facilitate.

2.5 Supporter Engagement Review – Discussions took place relating to the supporter engagement requirements and Club activity. The EFL concluded that third parties shouldn't be a direct part of any evaluation of its Clubs based on regulatory requirements.

2.5.1 Deborah Dilworth (DD) asked whether FSA can have the questions the EFL ask of clubs.

2.5.2 Mark Rowan (MR) stated the EFL is happy to share questions with FSA in due course.

Actions

- i) AP/MR to send over Structured Dialogue Questions



3. FSF / SD – MERGER UPDATE

- 3.1 Kevin Miles (KM) confirmed that the merger was now complete and that a new name of the Football Supporters Association (FSA) had been ratified.
- 3.2 A new brand and logo to be announced with one team and one annual conference to be held. Relevant assets to be sent over to EFL in due course.

Action

- i) FSA to provide an introduction document which could be forwarded to clubs.

4. Club / Fixture Matters

4.1 Financial Stability

- 4.1.1 Ashley Brown (AB) stated that the FSA had general concerns about the financial stability of clubs citing a near £400million collective loss as reported in the media. Concerns are that clubs remain at risk when losses are at that level.
- 4.1.2 Financial imbalance is the core driver behind the FSA proposals to the football authorities and the FSA are urging action.
- 4.1.3 Billy Grant (BG) added that perceptions of the Owners & Directors Test, FFP rules including stadium sales by clubs and speculation around other clubs' approaches to spending, contributed to fan fears.
- 4.1.4 Shaun Harvey (SH) acknowledged that fans often have the greatest emotional attachment but have the least amount of influence on the management of clubs so sympathised with fan frustrations, but added that owners - whatever their background or motivations for owning a club - lose the most, financially, when a club is in difficulty.
- 4.1.5 SH discussed that the Championship needed to be viewed differently when analysing finances of the EFL as its financial protocols (Profit & Sustainability) are governed and measured differently to Leagues One and Two (SCMP). Yet stressed that not all ownership issues were about money or bills getting paid and should not be the only barometer for good or bad ownership.
- 4.1.6 Ultimately, not all club issues are the same and it will vary from club to club. In the EFL today, clubs currently under the greatest scrutiny all have wholly unique circumstances and reasons why fans are unhappy. As there is no stock issue, there is no single solution.
- 4.1.7 On Championship FFP, SH responded that the reason there is a rise in attention on this matter is because reporting dates have only just come round for clubs. He added that lots of clubs are looking at ways they can ensure compliance with the FFP regulations.
- 4.1.8 SH went on to say that the key issue was that the EFL's new Profit and Sustainability rules were adopted as part of the new solidarity deal to align with the Premier League's rules. Now that they are in place, the EFL has effectively been the first of the leagues to test those who have potentially breached the limits, meaning issues around enforcement are emerging for the first time.
- 4.1.9 BG asked whether rules could change to prohibit clubs selling stadiums. SH responded outlining challenges relating to the matter.
- 4.1.10 John Nagle (JN) confirmed that EFL rules and regulations were constantly under review and changed year on year.
- 4.1.11 Roger Titford (RT) asked whether there should be a way to prevent new club owners suffering from overspends of previous owners to stop a 'boom and bust' scenario.
- 4.1.12 JN contended that ensuring "the slate isn't simply wiped clean" at the start of every ownership is right and just. In the interest of fairness and competitive



balance, speculators shouldn't be given the opportunity to start again and remain unhindered by any previous poor financial management.

- 4.1.13** SH said that the majority of football clubs run on the benevolence of owners and that has been the game's basis of growth. Some have done so for the good of the club and some have done so for their own financial gain. Either way, the aim remains to have success.
- 4.1.14** JN added that the EFL gets lobbied as much by clubs who wish to be able to lose more as it does for those who think club loss limits should be lower.
- 4.1.15** AB concluded that the FSA and EFL do share a number of the same concerns and believes that a number of their proposed policy papers they have drafted could help the football authorities. JN reiterated that the EFL is willing to discuss these.
- 4.1.16** SH added that if he were starting "with a blank canvass", a different system could be drawn up but nobody gets that luxury.
- 4.1.17** BG asked if spending should be inhibited for the good of the game. SH stated that it may well help but that the EFL doesn't set the rules, the clubs do and the majority have to be persuaded. Added that a lot may come out of the forthcoming EFL governance review and first stage of reporting.
- 4.1.18** JN confirms that the EFL cannot act unilaterally and so with any new idea or proposal, it's always about persuading and convincing clubs to make changes.

4.2 Fixture Cancellations/Compensation

- 4.2.1** DD asked whether Brentford fans would be compensated for their losses for money lost on Bolton away fixture.
- 4.2.2** SH agreed that being unable to fulfil a fixture and take the decision for the game to be awarded to the away team was a dark day for the game, and up there with "the hardest decision" the Board had to make.
- 4.2.3** As with the abandoned Blackpool fixture of season's prior, the EFL's recommendation to the independent commission would be that Brentford fans should be compensated in some way, but ultimately it's at the discretion of the panel.

5. AGM Proposals

5.1 JN outlined a number of relevant AGM proposals that were due to be discussed at the EFL's Owners and Executives Annual Conference. List as follows:

- Method of determining league positions
- Giant screens
- Insurance of grounds
- Playing colours
- Managers' qualifications
- Cardiac screening
- Minority candidates
- Observing training activity
- Ground staff qualifications

5.2 DD asked whether a recruitment code regulation had been considered for female candidates in first team football. JN responded that it was not currently under consideration.

6. EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE & THE ECA

6.1 KM outlined that the FSA is very concerned about the threat of a European Super League. Reports stating that the CA and UEFA have started a new company as a



precursor to a new competition and there are real concerns about what that competition looks like including:

- Four groups of eight teams could impact domestic league
- Suggestion of games being played on weekends
- A closed co-efficient favouring past Euro records meaning a semi-closed league for top clubs with limited relegation

6.2 FSA believe the domestic impact could be huge including:

- Threat to FA Cup and EFL Cup as a competition
- Scrapping of replays
- Reduction in team numbers in top flight
- Redirection of solidarity payments away from domestic pyramid

6.3 There is concern around the lack of clarity on what is being proposed and understands that a decision is to be made in the next 12 months ahead of implementing new arrangements in the 2024 season.

6.4 FSA proposing to launch a public campaign against the creation of any new Euro league that would threaten the stability of the domestic league.

6.5 SH responded many of the major domestic leagues are concerned about the proposals while many of the smaller and medium sized leagues around Europe are open to change.

6.6 There is a belief by some of the smaller leagues that changes will see more funds distributed their way, yet what hasn't been realised is that the funds will disproportionately reach their bigger clubs which will seriously disrupt the competitive balance of each league.

6.7 Both the EFL and FSA are of a shared view that the threat of an extended and closed Euro Super League will have a deleterious impact on domestic football and should be opposed. The EFL is happy to work with FSA to shape views toward the proposals.

Action

- FSA to share a campaign plan and the EFL to feedback and assist in messaging. FSA will then shape a lobbying plan to take to relevant authorities involved.

7. SOCIOS.COM

7.1 Concern from the FSA about the emergence of socios.com, a new commercial fan engagement tool which claims to offer fans the opportunity to feed into club decisions for a fee. West Ham United have signed up to the platform and the FSA are concerned this sets a bad precedent as they believe all engagement with fans should be a basic principle that clubs are involved in.

7.2 MR responded that it was not on the EFL's radar at present but would be happy to engage further on the matter with the FSA.

8. EFL FAN ENGAGEMENT

8.1 SUPPORTERS SURVEY UPDATE

8.1.1 AP provided an update on the EFL's Supporters Survey and delivered a selection of key findings, ultimately concluding with confirmation that a final EFL publication report and individual reports for clubs are in development. The survey attained nearly 28,000 responses from supporters.

8.1.2 Christine Seddon (CS) asked whether clubs would be required by the EFL to publish their survey results to which the EFL responded that would be an individual decision for clubs.

8.1.3 AB questioned whether this was the right approach and CS added that the success of the exercise would be compromised if the findings aren't shared with fans.



- 8.1.4** MR responded to confirm that the full publication will reveal the overall results from all respondents and ultimately the intention of the survey is to use the information to provide a collective view from across all 72 Clubs, to assist both Clubs and inform EFL decision making and planning. However MR agreed it is important to share findings and will encourage clubs to publicise the key results but states the EFL and clubs have the right to use the research as they feel appropriate.
- 8.1.5** SH added that a balance needs to be found. As clubs paid for the market research it is ultimately up to them how they use it to improve their operation for fans, but clubs will be encouraged to share info at their respective fan engagement meetings.

Action

- i) EFL to encourage clubs to share results of club surveys as appropriate be it at fan meetings or other channels.

8.2 ENJOY THE MATCH CAMPAIGN

- 8.2.1** An update from AP was provided on the Enjoy the Match campaign, its current status and potential plans for its development.
- 8.2.2** KM responded by saying that the FSA would be supportive of some EFL suggestions and would also like to engage and work with the EFL on its Fans For Diversity (FFD) work led by Anwar Uddin and Maria Horner.
- 8.2.3** BG stated that it was important that FFD work remained grass roots and not corporate to ensure that fan engagement remained high.
- 8.2.4** CS seconded that getting people into grounds should remain a core part of any campaign such as Enjoy the Match.

Action

- i) EFL to share further information relating to future developments of the Enjoy the match campaign with the FSA, to enable further opportunity for feedback and discussion.

8.3 FAN FORUMS

- 8.3.1** MR and AP outlined that the EFL had run various forums for fans over the last few years with varying degrees of success and, in line with further plans being developed, invited feedback from the FSA.
- 8.3.2** Roger Ellis (RE) suggested that the EFL could liaise with FSA networks directly as opposed to clubs and to put more than one topic on the agenda to garner interest.
- 8.3.3** DD asked whether the EFL could look at the mechanisms where fans have to be accepted or approved to attend.
- 8.3.4** AP and MR stated that many different approaches have been used, including Club to fan and EFL to fan promotion, and similarly various approaches to agenda and format have been tested across multiple forums. The approach to any upcoming forums is therefore under-review and the EFL also stated it would look to provide some further post-forum coverage going forward, to provide clarity on what is discussed at each event.

9. AOB

- 9.1** RT asked for an update on iFollow. SH replied that the feedback had been positive on the first year of domestic streaming with statistics showing that most people watching were living more than 25 miles away.
- 9.2** Early figures had shown that the service had generated roughly £1.5m in additional revenue for clubs. Comparative early season attendances had shown a small decrease where matches were streamed but overall attendances had grown with 18.3 million through the turnstiles in total.



- 9.3** Neil Le Milliere (NLM) questioned the fairness of home clubs losing out on away revenue with the majority of funds going to the club that sells the match pass. Argued that this had an unfair impact on clubs further afield than the majority, like Exeter City.
- 9.4** NLM also asked for clarification around alternate kits and questioned whether the EFL rules were prohibiting away teams from wearing their home kits in away fixtures.
- 9.5** SH said that the EFL rules state that clubs are only obligated to ensure that kits do not clash. Any use of an away kit where the home doesn't clash would likely be down to commercial agreements with sponsors.
- 9.6** Geoff Bielby (GB) mentioned the debate around concessionary ticket pricing at Hull City. He stated that the Club's recent proposed changes had led to further questions from some fans, questioning whether the Club were applying the rules around concessions fairly. He asked that the EFL look at the plans and where possible urged action to be taken.
- 9.7** KM closed the meeting by thanking Shaun Harvey for his efforts and work during his tenure at the EFL, ahead of his final day on 31 May. KM praised SH's willingness to engage with the FSA and felt the relationship was now in a good place citing the first ever joint fan/authority campaign in 'Stand up for Choice' as a notable first for the game. 'Good luck for the future from the FSA', added for the record.