



EFL Supporter Engagement Meeting

Date: Thursday 20 August 2020

Attendees:

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

FSA: Malcolm Clarke, Kevin Miles, Ashley Brown, Deborah Dilworth, Nicola Cave

Championship

Bini Joshi Barr (Huddersfield Town), Billy Grant (Brentford), Elliott Stanley (Nottingham Forest)

League One

Christine Seddon (Blackpool), Geoff Bielby (Hull City), Heather Alderson (Charlton Athletic)

League Two

Kristine Green (Grimsby Town), Dave Beesley (Cheltenham Town), Manny Dominguez (Bradford City)

AGENDA

1. Welcome & David Baldwin Introduction

EFL Chief Executive David Baldwin (DB) welcomed all FSA representatives and provided an introduction with some background on his career to date with detail on his experiences at Bradford City and Burnley respectively.

He outlined his ambitions for the EFL with three guiding aims to improve club sustainability, keep clubs at the heart of the community and enhance the reputation of the League as a whole.

2. Matters Arising

Oldham Athletic

John Nagle (JN) confirmed that its finance team has been receiving the required accounting information from Oldham Athletic to satisfy EFL regulations, adding that Oldham Athletic Supporters Trust would need to discuss its requirements with the club directly as a shareholder of the club.

Ashley Brown (AB) confirmed that OAST had now received copies of full updated accounts though questioned whether the club were subject to a transfer embargo. The EFL stated it's unable to confirm embargos as a result of confidentiality.

Article 48 and World Cup 2022

Mark Rowan (MR) stated that initial broadcast schedules were in place but no guidance as to how Article 48 will be implemented during the Qatar 2022 World Cup is available as yet.



Comsec

Andy Pomfret (AP) outlined the role of Comsec as a contractor of the EFL. In light a small number of complaints about the approach of some operatives at EFL matches in 2019, EFL Security and Operations Advisor Bob Eastwood met with Comsec to discuss processes around approaching fans and gathering intelligence. Changes have now been implemented after review.

3. Club Dialogue and Engagement

Charlton Athletic

Heather Alderson (HA) stated that Charlton Athletic supporter groups are seeking a meeting with the EFL and suggested that fans have a role to play in helping to resolve ongoing club matters. The EFL acknowledged the point adding that a meeting date had already been discussed but was subject to confirmation. The date has since been confirmed following the meeting.

HA added that fans were of the view that sanctions should apply to individuals as opposed to clubs, questioned potential transfer embargoes, and stated that while outcomes of the recent Owners' and Directors' Test applications were welcomed, ultimately fans want to see the club ownership challenges resolved.

MR reiterated that it does not disclose transfer embargos as a policy, though more broadly, DB confirmed he would be proposing an amendment to policy that would see clubs made aware of any other club(s) that may be subject to recruitment restrictions.

Hull City

Geoff Bielby (GB) provided a brief update on the Hull City Supporters' Trust (HCST) and Club relationship, stating that he has stepped down as Chair of HCST in the hope that a new Chair can initiate more productive dialogue with the club. HCST state they are now awaiting a response from the club with MR adding that the EFL would be happy to help facilitate discussions where appropriate.

4. COVID-19 (impact on 2019/20)

JN presented a series of slides explaining the challenges faced by Covid-19 and the rationale of the EFL's approach in responding to the unprecedented crisis. While seeking to protect the competition and conclude the 2019/20 season on the pitch, ultimately the health and safety of all involved in the game was held paramount.

JN recapped the decision making processes behind curtailment and the conclusion of the season, outlining how the EFL Board's framework for curtailment was ultimately voted through by clubs for Leagues One and Two in line with similar developments in leagues around the world.

It was highlighted that the widespread community response from EFL clubs and their Club Community Organisations to support local services amidst the pandemic were recently commended by the Sports Minister.



Challenges to EFL and club finances were discussed with the EFL outlining its general approach to preserving revenues across the pandemic stating it's a matter that is continuing to be discussed on with the Premier League and DCMS.

Fielding questions, HA asked if there were there any covenants attached to the early payment of club central funding. JN replied there were no restrictions as it was merely an advancement of monies already due to the clubs. DB stated that the EFL did have some powers to withhold funds in certain instances, but could not disclose details of specific cases.

Kevin Miles (KM) used the opportunity to put on record the FSA's thanks to John Nagle for all of his efforts in keeping FSA informed on developments through the pandemic crisis. DB followed up to echo thanks to JN and wider executive team who worked for fan interests throughout the pandemic response, outlining how the resumption of play and the game's response to coronavirus may have looked significantly different without their efforts.

Discussing the implementation of iFollow in the behind closed doors format, DB stated that apart from isolated technical faults on the season resumption opening day, iFollow as a platform has delivered overall, enabling fans to watch games en masse and without it, many fans of EFL clubs would have been unable to watch their matches at all.

Similarly, JN outlined that the presence of the service has helped preserve the financial model of the EFL by enabling clubs to provide an offering of value to season ticket holders rather than having to provide refunds in most cases. The EFL is very grateful to those supporter that have supported clubs over the last few months by not taking refunds, but also recognises that the financial challenges of the last few months mean that some people had no choice but to do so.

MR concluded by extending thanks to the FSA for their support in engaging fans through the challenging pandemic period and outlined a desire to deliver future messaging to fans in 2020/21 where appropriate.

5. 2020/21 Fixture Scheduling

MR presented an overview of the 2020/21 season schedule which covered details of additional midweek fixtures through the regular EFL season, the amended Carabao Cup format and schedule, and the renaming of the EFL Trophy competition with the Leasing.com sponsorship coming to an end.

MR outlined that the EFL Trophy remains an important competition for League One and Two clubs for a variety of reasons and outlined that more would be done to promote this to fans.

6. Return of Fans (safety/ticketing)

JN presented an overview of the new season format and the proposed return of fans with thanks to Sky Sports' commitment and ongoing support for the EFL through the pandemic.

Giving a chronology of events, JN described how it began scoping out how fans may be re-admitted to stadia back in April. This saw the development of a crowd behaviour and management project with the SGSA, which would go on to help inform the Government's support of a policy which would see a proposed return of fans in the Autumn.

Ensuring different stand designs and terraces were considered, this study saw the Valley and the Abbey Stadium used as the test sites.



With the target still remaining that fans will return in October, it is clear that based on the challenges involved, the matchday experience as we know it will be a lot different.

JN confirmed that it was in discussion with broadcast partners about arrangements for the period ahead and that its intention was to make all matches available either via Sky Sports or via streaming whilst clubs were playing matches BCD or to reduced capacities.

Away Fans

JN confirmed there will be a temporary suspension of the EFL regulations that require clubs to provide/sell away tickets, in order to assist clubs in configuring their stadia to comply with government guidance.

While the decision on whether to admit away supporters will be left to clubs to determine on a local basis, the EFL recognised the importance of away fans as part of the fabric of the game and gave the FSA assurances that this regulation amendment was strictly a temporary measure in response to the logistical challenges posed by the pandemic. Therefore the EFL would be returning to normal arrangements as soon as the external environment permitted it.

Consumption of Alcohol

While lobbying Government to permit the consumption of alcohol at EFL matches has been a long held policy ambition, renewed efforts have been made with return of fan planning as the EFL believes there is an opportunity for clubs to enhance the spectator experience in a reduced capacity, reduce the impact of busy concourses with seat delivery and boost much needed revenues for clubs.

Fan Dialogue

KM outlined that dialogue remains more crucial than ever before and urged clubs to engage with fan groups about the best way to implement systems and changes as the return of fans nears. Asked the EFL to remind clubs of need for dialogue.

Home fan ticket prioritisation was flagged as a concern in that some clubs may take the opportunity to prioritise more lucrative customers e.g. Hospitality over other groups of fans eg. Disabled, non-hospitality fans. KM stated that all fans need to be considered and admitted equally.

MR stated a communication is shortly going to clubs, part of which will include reference to the importance of fan engagement and consultation and the need to consider specific fan groups eg. away fans, disabled fans

AP outlined that a Supporter Code of Conduct was currently being drafted in line with SGSA recommendations, and would welcome input from the FSA as requested by Malcolm Clarke.

ACTION – EFL to circulate and share draft with FSA

Billy Grant (BG) questioned whether rules prohibiting singing at matches were a reality and to what extent clubs would be given autonomy to set their own rules for admitting fans.

DB responded to say that ultimately clubs will work with local Safety Advisory Groups to determine what measures will be put in place to stage matches safely.



7. FSA Reform Campaign

AB provided the group with detail of its new Sustain the Game campaign and outlined its key objectives which support and complement its football reform policy proposals.

MR stated the EFL would consider the campaign aims while DB reiterated that the EFL is similarly committed to achieving sustainability within the game adding that the pandemic has demonstrated that the model cannot return to business as usual.

BG echoes that the pandemic represents a unique opportunity for the game to reset its financial model and make changes that will safeguard the future for clubs across the EFL.

8. AOB

iFollow

MR stated that details of iFollow availability for the season would be confirmed to fans ahead of the new season as soon as the details have been finalised.