FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

Supporter Advisory Board (SAB)

SABs are drawn from across a club's supporter base and can provide a more structured forum for supporter consultation. SABs can either be club or supporter led, but for it to be effective both sides must agree on the construct. A chair may also be appointed from either side, or rotate, but the key here is to select someone who is an effective chair. It is an important role that should bring focus, control and balance to the meetings.

SABs will provide a regular channel of communication and consultation in both directions between the club and its fan/community base. It is designed to be inclusive and to represent the full demographic range of the club's support base, to whom it is accountable. The SAB may discuss the actions of the club board, challenging them where necessary. The membership of the SAB should include nominated representatives of specific supporter or community groups and other individuals selected after a process of public invitation.

The FSA recommends that although the SAB should represent a broad range of supporters it should also be kept to a manageable size (six to 12). For larger clubs finding the balance between representation and the number of reps can be tricky.

Supporter members of the SAB are committed to using their skills and experience on a voluntary basis to augment the development of the club by working in an open, professional and creative manner alongside existing staff.

The SAB itself is likely to meet somewhere between four to eight times per year although you need to decide what works best for the SAB and the club. Ideally some of these meetings should be in person, but people are now becoming quite adept at online meetings and you may opt to utilise this method occasionally. Further, email communication between meetings is an easy way to take a snapshot consultation, disseminate information or just keep in touch.

SABs may benefit from utilising sub-committees, these can be formed and dissolved at any time, but be sure to only create them when they have real work to address. A

sub-committee should focus on a specific topic, and meet and work between SAB meetings, reporting back with updates. An example might be a ticketing group who meet for a period of a couple of months to discuss next season's ticket pricing.

Key principles (club-led engagement)

There are a few key principles that should be central to any model of engagement:

1. Representation. Supporters involved must be representative of the wider supporter body and accountable to those supporters (within the constraints of Company Law and commercial confidentiality). Representation could be achieved through direct democratic processes, nomination by a defined group of supporters (e.g. season ticket holders or supporters' groups), or by position (e.g. the chair of a democratic supporters' organisation). Each representative should be willing to be public facing, to enable supporters to get in touch. An easy way to achieve this is to create a webpage with a short biography and an email address. Social media is also a good route for engagement with the fans you represent.
2. Accountability. Members of the group should effectively report back to the relevant parties. This often takes the form of a written or verbal report. Clearly this is easier for those who are representing a recognised supporter group. Elected individuals may prefer to create an online presence through which updates can be provided. Local media may also be interested, with perhaps an occasional column in the paper or slot on the local football radio show. Finally, a SAB column in the matchday programme is also a great addition.
3. Transparency. The process through which supporters are selected and involved in club governance must be transparent.
4. Skillsets and competencies. It is essential there is alignment between the requirements of the representative position and the skillset and competencies of individual supporters. This is particularly relevant if the SAB opts to utilise sub-committees, for example if a finance sub-committee is formed the selected fan reps should have a working knowledge of finances, and be able to participate in detailed financial discussions.

What does good look like?

- A clear, open and transparent application process;
- A broad spectrum of topics, anything tackled;
- Feedback being used in a meaningful manner i.e. action is actually taken and isn't a talking shop;

- Be honest! Tell people how results of forums and consultations will be used and manage expectations;
- Ensure the club keeps records of board decisions;
- Engage, consult and involve the membership - their support is a competitive advantage;
- A trusted relationship between all parties where confidentiality is respected;
- Inclusive and diverse board.

What does bad look like?

- Topics shied away from;
- A SAB made up of "Yes" people unwilling to challenge the club;
- Decisions taken with little or no consultation;
- Being told what is happening and not generating discussion;
- Not listening to each other and respecting all individuals.

Selection processes

The selection process is key to success, ideally it should be discussed between key supporter groups and the club prior to finalising. The FSA is happy to help with this and all elements of SABs. Agreeing a representation guide that includes the detail of the selection process as well as a Code of Conduct is a useful start.

It is important to note that if the club are reluctant to adopt a completely open process, or reject applications from the more vocal supporters, there may dilution of important topics and the wider fanbase might cynical of the SAB as an effective engagement medium.

Similarly, constituted supporter groups should operate on democratic principles and a one member one vote basis, including in the nomination and election of members to a Board. If your club has numerous supporter groups and you need to limit how many are represented then the FSA recommends places go first to FSA affiliates, and then perhaps by number of members. FSA affiliates must be democratic, inclusive and submit annual financial returns.

Template SAB Remit / Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Definitions

"The Supporters' Board" is the body established by [INSERT NAME OF FOOTBALL CLUB] according to the terms of this document.

"The Club Board" is the Board of Directors of [INSERT NAME OF FOOTBALL CLUB]

"The Club" is [INSERT NAME OF FOOTBALL CLUB]

Mandate of the Supporters' Board

The purpose of the Supporters' Board is to strengthen the structured relationship between the football club and its supporter groups, its supporters as a whole and other community representatives. As well as to enhance the club's profile as a model of transparent and sustainable governance and to ensure the Club actively listens to supporters and takes their views into account at all levels of decision making.

Remit of the Supporters' Board

The Supporters' Committee will provide a regular channel of communication and consultation between the Club and its fan/community base. It is designed to be inclusive and to represent the full demographic range of the Club's supporter base, to whom it is accountable.

The Supporters' Committee should be consulted on a wide range of matters relevant to fans, examples are covered in the MOU albeit topics are not limited to those listed.

The Supporters' Committee will expect the club to provide relevant staff to cover the agreed agenda topics at each meeting and may, on occasion, request the attendance of relevant stakeholders.

Supporters' Board's Agenda.

These may include, but are not confined to: ·

- *Club stability and sustainability for the benefit of current and future generations (including the club's strategic vision and objectives, short, medium and long-term plans, and if relevant proposals for supporters' investment);*
- *The club's financial and operational performance;*

- *The matchday experience of home supporters and season ticket holders, travelling and geographically distant supporters, the fans of visiting clubs, and supporters travelling to away games;*
- *Communication between the club and supporters, including publicity and information exchange;*
- *Proposals for developing the Club's fanbase;*
- *Volunteering opportunities at the club involving supporters;*
- *Ticketing proposals and issues;*
- *Community engagement and contacts with local institutions (e.g. schools), local communities and community groups;*
- *Relations with the local Council, charities and other public bodies;*
- *Youth development and Academy strategy;*
- *Protection of the Club's heritage and brand.*

Information to be shared

This will include, but is not confined to:

- *Annual budget and balance sheet (profit / loss and supporting information). Presentation from the club's chief finance officer and opportunity to question them coinciding with the annual release of the company accounts;*
- *Regular financial update provided to each meeting of the SAB;*
- *Significant items that may affect the future financial situation of the Club, such as the disposal of assets, change in the level of debt, significant share transaction, or related party transactions;*
- *Club colours and badge / kit designs;*
- *Significant changes to matchday arrangements that have an impact on match-going fans;*
- *Fundraising for special projects;*
- *Joint events such as Open Days or Community Days;*
- *Events organised by supporters' organisations;*
- *Matters related to marketing, merchandising and sponsorship;*
- *Discussions with public bodies that would impact supporters;*
- *Stadium issues and plans that would impact supporters.*

Certain information (e.g. financial) may be better dealt with in detail by a sub-committee with the relevant experience and report back in summary.

Mandatory consultation:

'Mandatory consultation' includes matters which an SAB deems sufficiently important that a club should always consult with the SAB on. These include:

- *Key heritage matters to include any changes being considered to club name, colours, crest or kit designs;*
- *Items that significantly impact fans in relation to matchday arrangements;*
- *Pricing, format, terms and conditions, and availability of tickets (both individual matchday tickets and season tickets).*

Excluded issues

The Supporters' Board will not be concerned with team matters such as player recruitment or selection, or the details of personal employment contracts entered by the club, or with football management appointments.

SAB Meetings

The Supporters Board will meet a minimum of four times per year and the chair selected on an annual basis, this could be either a supporter representative or someone from the club. Focus on the appointment should be given to who will be effective in the role, the prime focus being the chairing of meetings. No other privileges are expected of the chair and they should only represent the SAB elsewhere when requested to do so by the SAB members.

In addition, all supporters' groups and sub-committees shall meet with the Club's head of supporter services and any other appropriate members of the senior management team, at relevant points to be decided throughout the season. Regularity of all meetings to be agreed by both SAB and the club.

Both parties agree to:

- *Meet a minimum of four times per year;*
- *Share agenda items in a timely manner, circulating sufficient supporting information to be read ahead of the meeting;*
- *Respect that some items may be sensitive and deemed confidential, the confidentiality of such items will be governed by the agreed Confidentiality Policy;*
- *Ensure the meeting is 'structured' so that any topics that either party wants to discuss can be done so in an appropriate environment;*
- *Plan SAB meeting dates for the upcoming year and make every effort to stick to those original dates;*

- *Aim to plan sub-committee meetings at least one week in advance at dates suitable to all;*
- *Respect the chair and the role of their position.*

Minutes

A minute taker will be agreed by all parties with actions clearly laid out in the minutes and reviewed at each meeting, following the agenda. Draft minutes will be circulated to attendees within three working days of the meeting taking place, with deadline for comments within three working days from that point. A summary report will be agreed by all parties and published online no later than seven to 10 days from the date of the meeting alongside a copy of the minutes. Individuals should not publish any details of the meeting prior to that point.

Should any items within the meeting be deemed as confidential these will be redacted from the published version of the minutes.

Membership

The membership of the Supporters' Board Is structured with an aim of representing a broad cross section of the Club's supporters to aid constructive discussion. Supporters' groups will be represented on the Supporters' Board, each will democratically elect their own representative during the close season, by their own means. Supporters' groups should be affiliated to the FSA. In addition, representatives may also be elected from within various areas of the fanbase.

The Club commits to an independent election process to run all elections and accept that the SAB must provide its approval. Further the club accepts that the FSA may have sight of the election process and, if requested, the FSA will provide a scrutineer to oversee all elections.

Term of Office

Each democratically elected supporter representative will hold their position on the Supporters' Committee for two football seasons, the elected chair will be annually elected at the start of each season. Supporters' groups will nominate their representatives at the start of each season. There is no restriction on the number of

times a representative can be re-selected.

Sub-committees

The Supporters' Board has the power to form and dissolve sub-committees as required. The members of sub-committees are typically nominated / elected from the committee. However, in special circumstances it may be that the board wish to include others from outside should they have particular skills or experience. In addition, it is expected that the Club will allocate appropriate staff to support each sub-committee, dependent on the topics covered and their role in the Club. Sub-committee will meet as and when required, and typically ahead of SAB meetings, where they will present ideas/proposals, and updates. Sub-committee topics will be determined by the board.

Recommendations and decision making

Recommendations and actions will be discussed and agreed between both parties during meetings. Agreed actions will be recorded in the minutes and reported on at the next meeting. The aim of the meeting should always be to try and make decisions by consensus. Where consensus agreement is not possible, the chair may decide to call a vote. The Supporters' Board recognises that the Club is not bound to act on the outcome of these votes, albeit it is expected to take note of the outcome and use that in any considerations.

Confidentiality

A major objective of the Supporters' Board is to improve the flow of information between the Club and its supporters. This must however occur on the basis of mutual trust. Any matter offered by any member of the Supporters' Board on a confidential basis will be governed by the agreed Confidentiality Policy. For the committee to be effective members must respect each other, their views, any collective decisions made and recognise items flagged as confidential.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The MoU may be revised by the parties upon consensus of any suggested changes by either party.