



EFL/FSA Supporter Engagement Meeting

Date: 6 December 2023
Time: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
Venue: EFL Offices, London

ATTENDEES

EFL: Trevor Birch (CEO), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Bob Eastwood (Head of Security & Safety Operations), Steve Dowson (Security and Safety Operations), Andy Pomfret (Head of Supporter Services), Nick Roberts (Head of Media & PR), Paul Snellgrove (Competitions Manager)

FSA: Ashley Brown, Jess Grundy, David Rose, Jane Hughes,

Championship: Sarah Graves (Norwich City – Canaries' Trust) Peter Tarbitten (Hull City Supporters' Trust)

League One: Heather Alderson (Charlton Supporters Trust), James Young (Cheltenham Town – Robins' Trust), Jonathan Kaye (Leyton Orient Fans' Trust)

League Two: Tim Hillyer (AFC Wimbledon – The Dons' Trust)

PGMOL: Ben Campbell (Head of Communications), Kevin Friend (Select Group 2 Manager)

Welcome & Introductions

TB welcomed everyone to the meeting following a round of introductions. JN thanked the FSA on a successful 2023 Awards Dinner earlier in the week. Having reached the mid-point in the campaign, JN provided a brief summary of the season so far. Notably that attendances are up 9% across the EFL, the Football Governance Bill is imminent, something JN noted how much the EFL & the FSA are aligned on. Continued regular communication, benefits both clubs & supporters.

Matters arising from Last Meeting

Away fan experience – AP reported on regular discussions with FSA on this topic
Club Fan engagement activity – to be covered in an agenda. Kevin Miles (FSA CEO) recently addressed the EFL Board on this matter.
BE & DR had a positive meeting and maintain regular dialogue on security and behaviour issues.
The EFL Supporters Survey is currently being analysed, AP appreciated the feedback given by the FSA when finalising the survey questions.

PGMOL Update

PGMOL representatives Kevin Friend and Ben Campbell joined the meeting to provide an update on a variety of matters relating to match officials, and measures introduced at the start of the season. KF outlined the ongoing training to improve and maintain refereeing standards. Before the season started, PGMOL went into each club to deliver specific messages regarding officiating; the high threshold of penalising challenges, not every contact is a foul; the intention to protect the players, aggregate calculation of added time in line with IFAB regulations and measures to combat time wasting; the robust approach to participant and technical area behaviour and an increase in transparency and communication from PGMOL.

Regarding enhancing playing time; KF confirmed that stronger actions were being taken against time wasting but admitted some opportunities have been missed. However, as always, post-match analysis helps address this for the next match.



Multi-ball has helped speed up the game but can sometimes lead to two balls on the pitch. In this instance, the game does not have to be stopped, unless the second ball is interfering with the game.

Added time is now exact rather than an arbitrary 30 seconds for certain situations. Treatment of injured players begins from the time when the physio comes on. The 4th official documents the added time, which can be shared after the game with managers. JY noted that many fans are not aware that the 4th official keeps this record, and fans would be interested in seeing an example of one. KF wants to be transparent. Continuing time clock at EFL games has helped spectators track minimum added time. VAR will be in use for EFL clubs playing away at a Premier League club in the FA Cup.

Statistics show increased playing minutes in the EFL and compares favourably with other leagues across Europe. Referees are encouraged to be proactive with players to increase the time the ball is in play and to show they are dealing with time wasting. Deliberately delaying the restart, kicking the ball away - referees are cautioning offences in this area.

If time wasting incidents are missed in games, it is addressed with the referee after the game.

An increase in effective playing time has allowed the opportunity for more goals to be scored. More cautions seen in the latter stages of games is often due to player fatigue. Cautions for delaying the restart have increased when compared to previous seasons, KF expects these to reduce as players adapt their behaviour. This strong approach will be maintained by referees.

Work is being done to develop the physical and mental fitness of referees to ensure they can maintain the highest performance throughout the game.

In response to the [Participant Behaviour Charter](#), introduced this season, DR asked if a rugby style, zero tolerance approach would be possible in football.

KF noted that there is a stronger approach to intimidation and / or disrespect, which will be maintained. The Participant Behaviour charter has three core principles: Respect – in every action and interaction, Protect – your reputation, the reputation of your role and the reputation of the game and Fairness – promote positively through your contribution to the game. KF reported fewer mass confrontations and more individuals cautioned for dissent.

PGMOL wants to continue to improve transparency. KF visits each newly appointed manager to outline expectations and there are weekly visits to clubs to discuss broader issues across the game. Clubs can ask for feedback on decisions within games, which will usually be responded to within 48 hours.

The Key Match Incident (KMI) panel review and discuss all decisions in the EFL. The KMI categories are Penalties (awarded/not awarded), Sending Off (issued/not issued), DOGSO (issued/not issued), Second Caution/Dismissal (issued/not issued), Goal (awarded/not awarded), Offside Judgement leading to Goal (awarded/not awarded), Major Application of Law and Technical Area Removal (issued/not issued). This report is shared with clubs each week and is confidential.

Sharing an example of these reports could help educate fans on why decisions are made (JY). A number of these decisions are shared on Sky Sports' website each week.

BC reiterated while IFAB currently prevent live in-stadium communication, PGMOL do a monthly review programme in the Premier League to explain some key decisions.

The existing VAR FSA working group is also being expanded to cover wider refereeing decisions. BC welcomed input from the FSA into this expanded agenda.

Other officials, including Championship referees, have ongoing training in VAR. Select Group 2 referees participate in 'live' offline VAR officiating during a game to get real time experience. If it was to be used in EFL Play-Off Finals, officials would be ready. JY raised concerns about players not being used to VAR if it was used in a one-off game.



Green Football Weekend

Sarah Graves (Canaries Trust) outlined the progress made with the first Green Football Weekend which was successfully held last season; involving 39,000 fans, making 63,000 pledges and reaching 30 million people. The FSA continues to work with Pledgeball to reach fans and encourage their involvement (SG).

NR stated the EFL was pleased with how clubs engaged last year and confirmed the EFL's ongoing support of Green Football Weekend. The EFL meet regularly with Green Football Weekend staff to assess media opportunities and develop overall strategies. It is an important issue for the EFL and provides an opportunity to promote its [Green Clubs](#) initiative. Two clubs are currently accredited: Forest Green Rovers & Bristol City. Thresholds for accreditation are high.

SG asked about the EFL's strategy to help more clubs to achieve Green Club status.

The EFL's Green Club set up to start clubs on their environmental journey, JN noted more clubs are progressing in this space over the last 12 months with 51 / 72 Clubs involved. Most clubs engaged in some way in green issues. The EFL has ongoing dialogue with clubs on how best to support green initiatives. Forest Green Rovers FC offers a lot of support to both the EFL & individual clubs on how to engage more in environmental issues.

The FSA's Green Working group supporting clubs and fans as many begin to address environmental issues. SG sees this as a great opportunity to work together, club and fans, and develop sustainability across the game. DR confirmed the FSA is more broadly looking to progress its knowledge of green issues in the coming year.

TH suggested the EFL consider financial incentives to encourage clubs to incorporate green initiatives into their business plans and practices.

Action

- EFL & FSA to liaise on plans for [Green Football Weekend 2024](#), 2 – 5 February 2024
- EFL & FSA to work collaboratively on environmental issues where practical.

Stadium / Security update

JK outlined Leyton Orient's recent experience of the medical emergency, which tragically led to death of supporter Derek Reynolds, and asked if a review had been completed and if there would be any feedback to Mr Reynolds family.

BE noted that the EFL had previously been in contact with Mr Reynolds' son, Matthew, to offer condolences and discuss the protocols in place at the fixture. JK suggested that Matthew Reynolds considered the EFL may be following up with a further review and queried if this was the case. BE stated that the EFL would look to provide further feedback.

BE outlined that, generally, a football stadium is one of the safest places for a medical incident to happen due to the number of medical staff on hand available to help. Making the decision to stop a game will be made by the stadium's safety officer and will happen if required. On most occasions, it is more appropriate for the game to continue and allow the medical team to assist in the best possible way. Safety officers have many discussions when an incident arises as to how best to deal with it; clearing part/all of the stand as appropriate. BE stressed that naturally all responses must be appropriate to the specific circumstances of each incident.

JK asked about medical teams coming across the pitch if this was the most direct route. BE stated that, the priority is always how best the casualty can be treated while affording him/her dignity and respect during the emergency.

JK asked if more could be done to promote awareness of the guidance and protocols to fans. The EFL noted that this was something in development and would be keen to collaborate with the FSA in terms of communicating the key areas.



Action

- EFL & FSA to work together to raise awareness of protocols on the [SGSA Guidance on Crowd Related Medical Incidents](#)
- EFL to arrange further communication with Matthew Reynolds

Safety & Security

BE provided a brief overall of some key operational activity for 2023/24 focusing on Strategy, Data recording, Work with Clubs, Fan engagement, Sanctioning and Restorative Justice.

BE would like safety officers to work more closely with fans from the club visiting them.

AB asked if training and work could be done with SLOs to involve them more in this area, actively engaging them in the process. AP agreed, pointing out that good work already exists in this area, and that this could link into the work the EFL is planning around the away fan experience.

BE is encouraged by the data that indicates incidents of poor behaviour is declining with reduced use of pyrotechnics and of missile throwing. BE continues to work with clubs to address the worst levels of behaviour to improve the experience for all.

Bans cannot be the only option to address poor spectator behaviour, other strategies must be used to promote positive behaviour. The success of the Sanctions and Restorative Justice Guidance is regularly reviewed with clubs and any changes that may be needed are looked at. The EFL is leading on this, and has undertaken a 10-club pilot project, to tackle certain aspects of poor behaviour, including tragedy chanting. The EFL believes that restorative justice can play a huge role in addressing anti-social behaviour of some fans and can impact positively on future actions.

TH highlighted the importance of fan representation on Safety Advisory Groups. BE suggested any approach should be made to the council as SAGs are run by the local authority.

BE noted that the EFL is working with railway authorities to discuss transport to games for football fans. AB stated his view that train operators frequently do not consider football fans, with cancelled and over-booked trains. AB called for train companies to improve the service for football fans.

BE believes the Rail Delivery Group do want to improve this and reiterated that the EFL are engaging with them on such matters.

NR then provided a summary of some of the work undertaken this season with respect to the Love Football, Protect the Game campaign, which has focused on participant behaviour this season with monthly content produced aligning messaging across football (NR). Key activity also undertaken around events such as Bonfire Night (Pyrotechnics) and will be developed over course of the rest of the season.

Action

- BE to scrutinise implementation of the current guidelines

Fan Engagement

AP provided an update on EFL activity with regards to Fan Engagement work with Clubs. Regulation 128 currently sets out the requirement for clubs' senior representatives to meet with fans at least twice a season. In light of the Governance Review, the EFL is looking at further supporting Clubs' fan engagement work, to improve transparency, leadership and accountability - and is currently discussing the best approach from 2024/25 onwards.

In summary, the EFL is currently discussing a range of new activity for Clubs, with the emphasis on a pre-season engagement plan and set objectives to work towards. Furthermore, Clubs will likely have to nominate a senior member of staff to ensure delivery of the new measures, with additional requirements likely to include an end of season review of engagement activity and objectives met.

The EFL will consult further with the FSA in the New Year to move the process forward. Further discussion on any regulatory changes would require a Club vote at the June AGM.



While the FSA is aligned with EFL in many aspects, DR has concerns about fan engagement at some clubs and welcomes the assurance that things will be improved. He noted that some clubs across the pyramid are already moving towards Fan Advisory Boards. The EFL acknowledged that Clubs will already have engagement frameworks in place, and for some that might mean progressing down that route.

JY concurred that while some clubs have great fan engagement, his view was that other clubs do not and is keen to see a minimum standard that all clubs should meet.

AP stressed that overwhelmingly Clubs have adhered to the current requirements and the intention behind new measures is to make clubs more accountable - while understanding that each club will have the flexibility to meet the requirements in the best way for them, as has been echoed in the proposed approach to the Governance Review.

HA sees this as an opportunity to create case studies for clubs to promote good practice and show why worthwhile fan engagement can only make clubs stronger. HA invited the EFL to direct any clubs looking for support to The FSA who can help clubs and fan groups develop effective fan engagement.

DR noted that for some clubs it is about a willingness to engage with fans. It is not resource heavy, but it does require a willingness by senior executives to engage and to value fan engagement.

The new regulatory order that will come with legislative reform will affect how football clubs are run, development of fan engagement by the EFL is part of this (JN). The intention is to set terms and provide good guidance for clubs to move fan engagement forward. TB wants to promote a club's role and position within its community.

EFL Supporters Survey

AP updated that the survey had received a very healthy response rate from fans. The aim was to build on pre-existing data/areas and had an increased focus on Matchday home/away fan experience, Community impact, Broadcasting/viewing habits, VAR & Match Officials, Sustainability and Financial distributions. Results are being analysed and AP hopes to share these at the next EFL/FSA meeting.

Away Fan Experience

Previously the EFL has run the Away Fan Experience Project & provided ticketing/safety guidance to Clubs. The EFL knows away fans' attendance is important. They generate atmosphere, elevate match experience, and provide additional revenue via ticket sales and secondary spend. Against the backdrop of a new broadcast deal, and the increase in the number of matches available to view online/on TV, it is important away support remains a key part of the EFL matchday experience (AP)

AP noted that the EFL is exploring how to provide further guidance for Clubs in this space, to bring together a range of best practice for Clubs regarding Away Fans and the Away Match Experience. The aim is to conduct seminars for Clubs and provide guidance across a range of operational aspects linked to Away Fans.

Ticket Pricing

The FSA has been monitoring the away fan experience as well, particularly regarding ticket prices across the EFL Championship prices range from £20 - £47 per adult ticket. JG reported on some research that had been undertaken by the FSA.

The average price in league 1, so far this season is £24 and £22 in league 2.

While there has been a lot of success with reciprocal deals with Leeds United and other clubs, some fans are still facing very high, ticket prices. The FSA stated their view that the forthcoming EFL broadcast deal will impact kick-off times and increase challenges to travelling fans in terms of time, money and transport. An away ticket price restriction of £30 has been in operation in the Premier League for several years, the FSA put forward their belief that now is the right time for away ticket prices to be discussed in the EFL. (JG). DR noted that many clubs are already charging competitive prices, but some are clearly outliers in terms of value.



JN acknowledged the points raised and stated that the broad topic of ticketing is currently part of an area of work being undertaken by the EFL with Clubs currently.

Action

- EFL & FSA to work together to develop Club fan engagement process & guidance
- AP to contact FSA about specific SLO issues raised
- AP to contact the FSA to discuss Away Fan work, where appropriate
- AP to share results of the EFL Supporters Survey at the next meeting
- EFL to remain engaged with the FSA following its ticketing work with Clubs

AOB

TH raised concerns that a recent move by the owner of Reading FC in which playing staff, but not off-field staff were paid, was a contravention of EFL regulations. It prevented a further point deduction but left many staff out of pocket just before Christmas. The EFL reassured TH that the situation was being closely monitored.

Meeting closed at 1:35pm