

National League Structured Dialogue

Wednesday 27th March 2024
Wesley Hotel, Euston

Present - Mark Ives (National League), Garreth Cummins, Vicki Goodfellow, Andy Walsh (FSA), Nick Brodrick (Torquay United Supporters Trust), Richard Tomkins (Hereford United Supporters Trust), Richard Wane (Tonbridge Angels).

Structured Dialogue/Meeting updates

- Following issues with securing a date for our first meeting of 2024 a schedule for future meetings to ensure the parties met three times per year would be agreed. FSA to send suggested dates to NL for meetings in September 2024, January and April 2025.

Action: FSA to propose dates for next structured dialogue meetings

- FSA also stressed timeliness of agreeing minutes so that our members can be informed of discussions - it was agreed that minutes would be published within 2 weeks of meetings.
- AW gave an update on the FSA's recent structured dialogue meeting with the FA (held on 26th March - minutes to be published separately), on proposed changes to the Standardised Rules regarding takeovers and the owners and directors test.
- MI gave feedback on the National League EGM in January - a proposal for a rule change on increasing the number of named subs from 5 to 7 was defeated, mostly due to votes by Step 2 clubs; a separate vote will be brought to allow the change at Step 1 only.
- MI gave an update on the National League's new strategy document, which will be out soon. There is also a working group who are looking at other governance issues in the league (such as board make-up), which can be discussed at future meetings.

Fan-led Review

- MI gave feedback on meetings that he had held with DCMS, the Secretary of State and the Sports Minister. The NL welcome the Football Governance Bill now that it has been published and tabled, and while it doesn't cover all the issues they had hoped - MI mentioned concerns, for example, on how clubs who fall out of the scope of the regulator after being relegated from Step 1 to Step 2 will be managed, for instance - they will look to help shape its implementation as it proceeds onto the statute books.
- The FSA and NL will engage once the FSA's governance group had highlighted the amendments that we would be pursuing, to see if there were shared areas of interest in terms of shaping the scope of the regulator.

Action: FSA to suggest date for meeting to discuss amendments to Football Governance Bill

- It was also agreed there would be further meetings between the FSA and NL regarding the supporter engagement aspects of the Football Governance Bill, for the FSA to help inform the NL about the trust model, and to develop some best practice for clubs to ensure supporter engagement is properly carried out.

Action: FSA to draft a fan engagement standard for the National League and suggest date for meeting to discuss

'Crisis Clubs' and takeovers

- It is expected that changes will be made to the FA Standardised Rules regarding takeovers, which will allow the National League to be involved in discussions before new owners are appointed and sign-off a takeover, rather than simply being notified once a change of owner has taken place, as is the current situation.
- NB gave an update on the situation at Torquay and TUST's actions regarding a consortium bid; MI said NL would meet with preferred bidder as part of the approval process and do all they can to keep the club afloat. The urgency in Torquay's case arises as any administration needs to be resolved before the NL AGM in June; if unresolved it means an automatic relegation of one division under league rules.
- MI gave background on the reasons for the 10 point deduction for Torquay, and the definitions of an insolvency event. The NL rules define a Notice of Intention as an insolvency event. The League sought legal advice and clarification before applying the penalty.

Action: FSA to draft a Whistleblower proposal to establish a process for sharing of information between the FSA and the NL in a timely manner.

Fan Behaviour

- VG expressed the FSA's concerns over recent issues at NL clubs regarding fan bans, namely the sharing of information with other clubs and the processes (or lack) in place when clubs ban supporters.
- The FSA will make a proposal to the NL around best practice, following the work done with the EFL, to make sure that information sharing and ban procedures are more standardised.

Action: FSA to draft a best practice guide as the basis for a discussion on establishing a standard disciplinary process and privacy policy across all NL clubs.

AOB

- TV broadcast - the FSA will draft a policy on fixture changes for broadcast for the NL's consideration, particularly focussing on notice periods.

Action: FSA to draft a policy document for fixture changes due to broadcast contracts.

- MI gave an update on the scheduling for next season - kick-off on 10th August, and explained the issues due to late easter clashing with proposed end of season and the loss of bank holiday games. The last day of the season is likely to be the early May bank holiday, and there will be potential flexibility to extend the season next year due to bad weather which isn't the case this year.
- MI explained the reasons for moving this year's playoff finals, due to ASLEF train strikes, which would have made getting to Wembley on the proposed Saturday date almost impossible by public transport.