



EFL Supporter Engagement Meeting

Friday 1st December, 2017 – 30 Gloucester Place, London

Attendees

EFL: Mark Rowan (Communications Director), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Andy Pomfret (Supporter Services Manager), Abigail Rodwell (Content Manager)

FSF: Kevin Miles (Chief Executive) & Michael Brunskill (Director of Communications)

SD: Ashley Brown (Chief Executive) & Deborah Dilworth (Network Manager)

Championship: Di Cunningham (Norwich City), Billy Grant (Brentford), Roger Titford (Reading)

League One: Tim Hillyer (AFC Wimbledon), Robbie Jackson (Blackpool), Martin O'Hara (Doncaster Rovers)

League Two: Roger Ellis (Coventry City), Kristine Green (Grimsby Town), Ally Simcock (Port Vale)

Apologies

EFL: Shaun Harvey (Chief Executive)

Agenda

1. Matters Arising
2. Supporter Engagement
 - a. EFL presentation
 - b. FSF/SD survey
 - c. Away Fans/SLO/Forums
3. Broadcasting
 - a. iFollow
 - b. Fixture Scheduling
4. Cup Competitions
5. Club Relations
 - a. Owners Conduct Review
 - b. Case Review Group
6. Ticketing
 - a. BBC Price of Football
 - b. EFL Press Release
7. Safety & Security
 - a. Stewarding
8. Travel
 - a. Discussions with Rail Delivery Group
9. Communication
10. AOB



Minutes

1 – Matters Arising - LED Boards

In response to the item raised at the previous meeting by RT, JN reported that there are no specific regulations regarding the content of LED boards but clubs are mindful of the supporter experience for those attending matches. KM offered to supply examples of LED board advertising that was fan facing and could be detrimental to those with epilepsy.

2 - Supporter Engagement

AP gave an update on EFL regulation 112 and supporter engagement, presenting data with regards to club meetings/forums held in the 2016/17 season.

A total of 70% of clubs reported that they had exceeded the minimum requirements of two meetings within the season, some holding in excess of five meetings. It was reported that nearly half of all meetings were attended by at least one owner, chairman or director. Most supporters were invited to attend via established supporter groups, though they were often advertised as open to all supporters.

Issues discussed at club meetings/forums (in descending order) were ticketing matters, followed by playing squad, fan engagement, stadium, and ownership issues. AP went into some detail on the areas discussed. He confirmed that there has been a renewed focus at many clubs and they were now planning for enhanced engagement with fans going forward on various topics e.g. ticket pricing, fan engagement etc. Clubs had also reported that it was very often the fans themselves that set the agenda for their meetings.

AP stated that many clubs were keen to point out that they were well-versed in meeting fans and carrying out this level of fan engagement, and had been for a number of years. It's been a very encouraging first year – JN added that the EFL was very pleased with the number of owners who have been involved in the supporter engagement sessions.

Following discussion regarding club compliance with the regulatory requirements, the EFL suggested that if the FSF have tangible evidence that clubs are not complying with the regulations they should forward it to the EFL for consideration. MR clarified that if a breach of regulation took place, the Executive would treat it the same as any other regulation.

AP summarised that the EFL are currently looking at as many ways possible to share best practice for clubs e.g. SLO seminar, Club Comms seminar and inevitably there would be learning from year one we can consider. MR confirmed that at the next Support Engagement meeting, the EFL will share a selection of the case studies with attendees.

JN asked Supporters Direct to confirm whether they had met their commitments to the Expert Working Group in the same way the EFL had given that it was nearly two years since its conclusion. AB confirmed that it was seeking to do so by the end of the current season.

AP went on to share a brief overview on the Away Fans Project for 2017/18 season. The EFL are midway through year two and he confirmed that clear opportunities are emerging for away fans, most notably on social media and in-stadia engagement. The EFL is looking at ways in which we can further encourage clubs by recognising those that are doing particularly well in this area. AP briefly spoke about the Sky Bet 'Away Days' campaign and how they are working with the EFL to look at ways to enhance the away day experience for fans.

AP confirmed that Sky Bet have gone direct to clubs and fans to ask for feedback on their away experiences and areas that they believe could be a focus for the campaign. Following a request for contact details at Sky Bet, MR and AP confirmed they would provide Sky Bet PR contact details.

AP went on to give an update on SLO activity for this season, confirming the aim to raise the profile of the work of SLOs across the EFL



Following a discussion on application of the regulation regarding SLOs, how they are recruited and fulfil their role, AP reiterated that, aside from complying with the regulation, there has to be some flexibility for clubs in how they approach and recruit for the position. Ultimately the regulations set out the minimum requirements, not provide the full scope. However further EFL best practice and guidance will be issued to clubs this season with regards to the development of the SLO role.

MR and JN also confirmed that the EFL will take all feedback on board and look into the wording of the regulation to determine if there is any unhelpful ambiguity.

3 - EFL Digital – Broadcasting

The EFL gave an update on 2017 – a year of digital transformation for the EFL, highlighting the key principles of the new platform;

- mobile first
- more flexible design allowing clubs to personalise their product
- fast publishing CMS
- Enhanced video output

It was accepted that it wasn't without its challenges but stated that overall the feedback and transfer across to the new platform has been positive from both clubs and supporters.

iFollow

MR then gave an update on the new iFollow product that launched earlier this season, positioning it as a game-changing opportunity for fans that cannot otherwise get to see their clubs, primarily due to the fact they live abroad.

He also went on to discuss the new developments in regard to domestic streaming of the Checkatrade Trophy fixtures from Round Two this season and for matches outside the blocked hours (i.e. Saturday at 3.00pm) from the beginning of 2018/19

Following a question from RT regarding the potential for access for those supporters who travel abroad but do not live outside the UK, a short discussion took place on the current strategic approach and the restrictions placed on both fans and the EFL.

It was raised by BG that the customer service was very poor and a lack of response on match days forced people to unsubscribe from the product. MR countered that the EFL, in conjunction with their digital partners have upgraded their customer service and improvements continue to be made. MR requested that any supporters considering unsubscribing to contact the EFL Digital team before doing so to discuss their issues and to find a suitable solution.

MR confirmed that the EFL would not be allowing clubs to move fixtures from 3pm on Saturday afternoon in order to be able to screen their fixtures on iFollow. This prompted a debate on the issue of potential reduced attendance at matches as a result of the introduction of live streaming in the UK.

JN stated that the EFL match attendance remained a key priority for the EFL. It was noted that there is no substitute for attending live matches and this was an opportunity for those to be able to watch their team who don't, or cannot, usually attend. It was suggested by MR that by re-engaging supporters gave further opportunities to increase attendances in the future.

RT asked whether the domestic streaming of matches could be stopped at a future point if it was felt to be detrimental to crowd levels. JN replied by confirming that iFollow was 100 per cent owned by the EFL and therefore any decisions were entirely in the hands of the EFL and its clubs.



4- Cup competitions

Checktrade Trophy

MR provided an update on this season's Checktrade Trophy, the format changes and the learnings from the 2016/17 pilot. This included a short review of the consultation that took place in April 2017 that led to clubs adopting the format for two more seasons. An update on attendances for this season was provided with MR reporting that these had seen an increase year on year alongside presenting some data on the number of young English players involved in this season's competition to-date.

Carabao Cup

MR continued with an update on the Carabao Cup and again provide some information on this season's attendances, confirming that year-on-year they were up in the early rounds. MR made the specific point that the media continue to question the competition in its early stages but the attendance increase supports the theory that the competition remains popular. The media's position on team selection was also noted by the EFL.

A short overview of this season's Carabao Cup draws was provided against a backdrop of how the EFL are continuing to stay true to its commitment of being different and innovative, in order to increase the profile and exposure of the competition.

A discussion then took place on the scheduling of fixtures in the Checktrade Trophy. It was noted that as a result of the increased flexibility on scheduling, some fixtures had been arranged at short notice.

BG then raised the potential for blocking certain times out for staging fixtures, in particular TV games. His request was noted and the EFL responded that finding appropriate slots in the schedule to fulfil the terms of the Sky contract remains a challenge for EFL, its Clubs and the broadcaster.

5 - Club Relations – Owners Conduct Review

The EFL outlined the consultation it was conducting with clubs regarding the conduct of owners, directors and executives. JN reported that this was ongoing with clubs in the process of providing their responses.

Ultimately on such matters the EFL is guided by the wishes of clubs who set the rules.

The consultation seeks to:

- a) discuss with clubs an appropriate formulation of the responsibilities expected of the clubs themselves, the club owners, directors and other relevant employees;
- b) begin to outline conduct which could be considered contrary to those objectives, and how the EFL would begin to assess whether that conduct falls short of what is expected at any particular level;
- c) begin the process of developing guidelines on when the EFL may intervene to remind clubs and individuals of their responsibilities and where appropriate remedial action is not taken, proceed to regulatory action if it is viewed that the conduct is bringing Clubs and/or the EFL into disrepute.

KM expressed the view that by seeking the views of clubs only, the EFL would be asking the wrong people as it was the supporters that bore the brunt of poor ownership. JN insisted that clubs too were affected, as they were all shareholders of the EFL which suffers from any ensuing reputational damage. JN made it clear that these issues are among the most challenging that the EFL faces, and that it was the views expressed by affected supporters that had prompted the review in the first instance.

The supporter representatives from Blackpool (RJ) and Coventry City (RE) expressed disappointment at the way the EFL had handled matters relating to the ownership of both clubs and urged the EFL to change its approach



going forward. RJ proposed that the EFL should hold a Case Review to examine issues relating to its handling of the matter (and do likewise in other similar situations) to which relevant parties could contribute.

Alternatively, RE proposed that, as well as reviewing cases after they were concluded in order to learn lessons, the EFL should appoint someone to oversee an independent review while the matter was still at hand rather than just looking back over the matter at its conclusion.

JN indicated that the EFL's approach to such matters was ultimately defined by its rules. It could not 'make it up as it went along' and instead would apply its regulations as agreed with member clubs even though this wouldn't always make its decisions popular with supporters. Nevertheless, he indicated that the EFL understood the comments that were being made by the fans representatives and he committed to feed them into the EFL's decision making process.

6 - Ticketing

MB queried the figures release by the EFL ahead of the BBC's Price of Football survey and asked how the figures had been calculated.

The EFL reported that the figure released is the average price paid per paying spectator based on club gate statement information and was entirely accurate.

7 – Safety & Security - Stewarding

A pan-industry review of stewarding arrangements is currently under way that will look at the role of stewards, their training and funding arrangements.

KM asked if the FSF would be consulted on relevant issues as part of the review and JN indicated that it would, although it was not known what form that would take at this time.

KG referenced the statement released by the EFL recently with regards to stewarding arrangements for Stevenage v Grimsby Town, suggesting that there is ambiguity over responsibility for the conduct of stewards.

MR reiterated that responsibility for the conduct of stewards resides with clubs as their employers with the EFL providing relevant guidance from time to time to ensure best practice. The EFL is looking to work with all its clubs to ensure that attending matches remains an enjoyable, positive experience for supporters and, to assist, will be issuing updated guidance regarding a number of safety, security and stewarding matters.

8 – Travel - Rail Delivery Group

EFL continues to hold discussions with the Rail Delivery Group regarding the issue of ticketing arrangements in instances where matches are re-arranged for broadcasting purposes. Progress is being made and it is hoped there will be something in place for next season.

9. Communication

EFL will seek to provide a draft of the meeting notes within two weeks, with a final version to be agreed between the parties as soon as possible after.

10 – AOB

LGBT issues

DC wanted to see the level of engagement on LGBT issues maintained beyond the Rainbow Laces campaign.

JN indicated that the EFL's support for the LGBT community was not just limited to Rainbow Laces and other campaigns it supports, such as the Come Out 2 Play campaign but was a year round commitment.



MR offered DC the opportunity to meet with the EFL's inclusion advisor to discuss the matter.

Meeting locations

MR reported that a member of the fan delegation had suggested that one meeting per season should be in Preston.

The FSF will consider and provide feedback.