



EFL Supporter Engagement Meeting

Wednesday 2 November 2016
30 Gloucester Place – 1pm to 5pm

Attendees

EFL: Shaun Harvey (Chief Executive), John Nagle (Head of Policy), Mark Rowan (Communications Director), Andy Pomfret (Supporter Services Manager) & Nick Roberts (Public Affairs Manager)
Football Supporters Federation (FSF): Kevin Miles (Chief Executive) & Michael Brunskill (Director of Communications)
Supporters Direct (SD): Ashley Brown (Chief Executive) & James Mathie (Club Development Manager)
Championship: Di Cunningham (Norwich City); Billy Grant (Brentford); Roger Titford (Reading)
League One: Matthew Breach (AFC Wimbledon); Roger Ellis (Coventry City); Ally Simcock (Port Vale)
League Two: Andy Higgins (Blackpool); Dave Matthew-Jones (Cambridge United); Martin O'Hara (Doncaster Rovers)

Agenda

1. Welcome & EFL Introduction
2. Supporter Engagement
3. Whole Game Solution
4. More and Better Home Grown Players
5. Club Relations
6. Away Fans
7. AOB

Opening Remarks

EFL Chief Executive Shaun Harvey welcomed all in attendance and outlined the format of the session which consisted of presentations from the EFL on key issues with questions and follow up discussion.

In accordance with the Expert Working Group recommendations the meeting is to be recorded as one between the EFL, the FSF and SD with club reps present representing the FSF and SD not individual clubs.

It was stated that engagement between fan representatives and clubs should happen separately in line with EFL regulations and not be conflated with this central meeting between the EFL, FSF and SD.



1 - EFL Introduction

The EFL gave a series of presentations in order to provide an overview to fans on the following issues:

The State of Play – The EFL gave an overview of its current circumstances citing strong stakeholder relationships, healthy attendances, and robust financial mechanisms to support sustainability, financially solvent clubs, commercial successes and long term broadcast deals in place.

Redressing the Balance – The EFL outlined its new guidelines for selecting and announcing televised fixtures with Sky Sports including the introduction of a new 5 week commitment regarding fixtures for broadcasting purposes.

The EFL confirmed to SD that the Sky Bet Play-Off arrangements can only be confirmed once the final divisional standings are known due to potential policing issues but much preliminary work is done ahead of time.

Club Websites – The EFL provided detail of its new centralised club website platform which is currently being developed which, from 2017/18, will provide an improved service for fans of the 61 clubs that have opted-in and afford live streaming opportunities for overseas fans for the first time.

Inclusion – Details of various inclusion campaigns and activity being managed by the EFL were introduced. This included the Code of Practice, Playing for Inclusion training, LGBT initiatives and general participation campaigns. On the latter, the EFL outlined that it would be supporting Stonewall's Rainbow Laces campaign and designing a rainbow version of its EFL logo which was welcomed by Di Cunningham.

Similarly, Di Cunningham stated she would be happy to support the work of LGBT groups at EFL clubs around the country by sharing experiences and promoting best practice.

BAME Managers & Coaches – The EFL outlined its work to tackle the under representation of black and minority ethnicity managers and coaches in the game.

Accessibility in Stadia – EFL representatives outlined a programme of activity outlined to the Government that seeks to raise standards of facilities and the overall experience for disabled supporters.

Safe Standing and Alcohol in Stadia – The EFL acknowledged that it shared the same goal with regard to Safe Standing as the FSF and thanked it for its important work in this area. Discussions continue with Government and both organisations are hopeful that progress can be achieved.



The FSF asked what could be done in the short term to alleviate the problem of standing in all seated areas and whether it was possible to place those who want to sit at the front and those who may wish to stand at the back of the stand.

Given the difficulty of resolving this issue with different stadia configurations the EFL reiterated that this issue is one of the reasons it's pursuing a return to standing at EFL matches.

The FSF suggested undertaking research to exploring attitudes toward safe standing amongst different demographics could be valuable in the safe standing debate. The EFL agreed to discuss the proposal further with the FSF.

The EFL is currently reviewing issues relating to the sale of alcohol in stadia during matches which is currently prohibited by law and acknowledged the recent article published by the FSF on this matter.

Government Expert Working Group – Following the EWG report, the EFL confirmed that new regulations had been approved by clubs that would put the recommendations into practice.

2 - Supporter Engagement

SD welcomed the EFL's implementation of the EWG commitment on supporter engagement in its regulations and acknowledged that it was the only football body to have done so.

SD presented the results of its recent fan survey result conducted in September/October to get a fan view as to how well clubs are engaging with supporters.

The EFL responded to say it is keen to give the engagement process time to run to enable engagement to take place before jumping to any conclusions and would review its operation in the first year later in the season in conjunction with clubs. At the next meeting we would discuss how this would be done.

SD questioned what sanctions were available should clubs not engage in accordance with the regulations. The EFL clarified that any breach of regulations is treated as misconduct and could be subject to a range of sanctions.

SD stated that clubs should supply information to fans attending meetings in advance so that a level of understanding is ensured to enable "meaningful engagement" to take place.

The EFL's view was that it had provided guidance to clubs on this matter to state that they should be willing to supply any documents that are available in the public domain and anything they feel is constructive to the debate. Ultimately this remains an independent decision for clubs to take.



3 – Whole Game Solution

The EFL Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Whole Game Solution outlining the approach taken, the potential benefits for EFL clubs and the consultation process that would be followed.

Using its survey data, the FSF suggested that the importance of the national team's success had been overstated in the EFL's justification for Whole Game Solution.

The EFL contended that not only does evidence suggest that a successful national team boost the domestic game but also that the FSF survey actually show that approximately 70% of fans would be keen to see both a thriving national team and a successful domestic game so that is what it should seek to achieve.

Similar questions were raised by the FSF about the need for a winter break as it wasn't necessarily popular with supporters.

The EFL stated that it would only apply in the Premier League and Championship and that within professional coaching ranks the belief was that it would be beneficial to our national team.

SD asked about the timetable of the Whole Game Solution to which EFL responded stating that consultation with fans would begin via clubs in January, clubs again thereafter and ultimately any final proposal would be taken to the June 2017 EFL AGM.

SD offered to help facilitate the fan consultation but the EFL felt that the consultation should be coordinated through clubs directly. That consultation process will be determined with clubs over a series of regional roundtables that will take place in the coming weeks.

NB. Subsequent to this meeting, Whole Game Solution discussions have now ceased as per the EFL's [statement](#) of 16 November

4 – More and Better Home Grown Players

The EFL stated that changes to the Checktrade Trophy format, Whole Game Solution and initiatives such as EFL Futures are all ultimately part of the EFL's commitment to support the wider development of English football following the FA Chairman's England Commission review findings of May 2014.

While many of the solutions offered by that body had been questionable the general issues it raised were valid and the onus was on the EFL to support English football.



On the Checkatrade Trophy, SD questioned why the competition rules don't allow EFL clubs to play their own young players while Category One Academy sides can. The EFL affirmed that the competition has been specifically designed to give Category One Academy team players the opportunity to gain competitive experience playing senior EFL teams. This has been identified by the coaching fraternity as key to improving the development of the best young players in the domestic game. Additionally, it is this requirement that underpins the significant investment into the competition by the Premier League that will deliver much improved financial rewards for clubs.

Notwithstanding this, EFL clubs can still field as many as six young players of their own if they so wish as the rules only require the EFL club's starting 11 to include a minimum of 5 players that have played in the preceding or following match or in the most games this season.

An FSF survey of fans stated that 46% wanted to revert to a League One and Two only competition (see the full survey results [here](#)). The FSF also stated that many fans of League One and Two clubs felt snubbed by the competition changes by allowing Academy teams to compete in an EFL senior competition and stated that there could be no justification that would stop the attendance boycott.

The EFL acknowledged that the Checkatrade Trophy format had not been without its challenges and that introducing the changes alongside discussions about the Whole Game Solution had caused issues over the motives for the change with many fans believing it was the 'thin end of the wedge' with regard to the introduction of such sides into the pyramid. Instead the two processes were entirely separate as demonstrated by the recent statement confirming that only 'sovereign' English/Welsh clubs would be permitted to join the EFL as part of the Whole Game Solution.

The EFL reiterated that the financial rewards for the competition were potentially significant and represented a new improved revenue stream for League One and Two clubs, for whom it is often a challenge to identify new sources of money.

The EFL confirmed that a full review will be conducted at the end of the pilot season and that there would then be further discussions with clubs about the competition's future.

5 – Club Relations

Roger Ellis questioned whether EFL regulations could incorporate a requirement on club owners to run clubs in the best interests of its community and heritage. It was suggested that there need to be more proof points to ensure that perceived "problem" clubs are more mindful of fans and the community in which they exist.

The EFL stated that it understood the point being made but felt that defining this into written regulations that could take meaningful effect would be very difficult. The EFL's regulations regarding ownership



(for example the owners and directors test) are deliberately objective in nature to ensure they can be enforced and are not subject to legal challenge. This is much harder with subjective tests.

The EFL stated it would however be happy to consider any relevant proposals supporters groups may have to table in this area at future meetings.

6 – Away Fan Experience

The EFL outlined details of its new Away Fans Initiative which has been supported by the FSF and aims to improve the matchday experience of away fans across the league.

The FSF welcomed the initiative and stated it was pleased to be working collaboratively on the scheme.

Notwithstanding the good work in this area the FSF was keen to stress that there were still issues relating to away ticket prices with particular problems at five or six Championship clubs. Concerns were also articulated around match categorisation which the FSF believed should be prohibited on the basis that it unfairly affects fans of the bigger Championship clubs.

While stating that ticket pricing ultimately remained for clubs to determine, the EFL recognised the concerns and committed to continue to monitor the situation with the aim of providing some best practice guidance for clubs following the roll out of the Away Fan Initiative.

The FSF raised the issue of local promotions for home supporters. They suggested they are a topic of contention with away fans, who aren't eligible for ticket discounts in the event of a local promotion being applied. Local promotions are defined in EFL regulation 34.2.11 and exist so that clubs can run discounts that are 'local' by definition and aimed to encourage home fans to attend matches.

The EFL confirmed that, as per the regulation, all local promotions are to be lodged centrally and statistics from recent seasons show on average that a relatively small total of 47 (16% of total permissible) are run each season, with an average of three out of 72 clubs utilising all four promotions available to them when looking across seven seasons of data.

The FSF asked if local promotions could be extended to away fans. The EFL stated that many clubs already run discounted tickets for both home and away fans though as these aren't regulated there is no requirement to lodge them with the EFL centrally. Local promotions however are designed specifically for local fans though their use is sporadic and their impact are continually reviewed. Ultimately the EFL stated it would be for clubs to decide whether changes should be made to local promotion regulations.



7 – AOB

An SD/FSF rep questioned whether parachute payments in the Championship were affecting fair competition.

The EFL felt that as yet there wasn't a clear case that such payments provided an overwhelming advantage with much of their benefit often being swallowed by wages agreed during the club's period in the top flight but nevertheless it is something it always monitors. Ultimately these payments are made directly from the Premier League to their former members so any changes could only ever be achieved with the consent of the PL. The EFL had had some success in this area recently with the PL reducing parachute payments from four to three years (or two years for clubs relegated after one season).