

GOVERNMENT EXPERT WORKING GROUP ON FOOTBALL SUPPORTER OWNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT: FINAL REPORT: NOVEMBER 2015

- 3.31 The Group has developed a model for a minimum level of structured engagement and dialogue between clubs and fans which will deliver the commitments made by the Premier League and the Football League in their response to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in 2012. This is a significant step change in ensuring that clubs give supporters regular opportunities to discuss the issues which matter to supporters with relevant senior club personnel.
- 3.32 This new model will assist clubs, and their management boards, meet the obligations of the Companies Act, which requires all businesses in the UK to take regard of the need to foster the company's relationship with its customers - in the case of football, the fans - and the impact of the company's operations on the community.
- 3.33 The Leagues will recommend to their member clubs that the 2012 undertaking and **the subsequent application of the relevant League rules will be met by meeting a representative group of supporters at least twice a year to discuss major issues.**
- 3.34 The Leagues will recommend that this representative group of supporters includes the club's Supporters Trust. The Leagues will advise clubs that **no individuals should be excluded from the meetings without good reason**, and, if attendances at these meetings is restricted to a small group of supporters – which is the preference of SD/FSF– a significant proportion of this representative group of supporters should be elected, selected or invited to these meetings in line with basic democratic principles.
- 3.35 **Senior representatives from the clubs – either club owners / directors and/or senior executive management should represent the club at these meetings.** The Group recognises the importance of Supporter Liaison Officers and their roles in providing a key interface between clubs and fans on a wide range of issues - and this should continue - but this formal, structured dialogue should be led by owners / directors / senior executive management.
- 3.36 **The Group recognises that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach** to either clubs or Leagues and that the fans' appetite for specific information, and to discuss specific issues will vary from club to club. Whilst SD and FSF believe these meetings would be most productive with a tighter, independently democratically elected representative group of supporters with an interest in strategic and governance issues, the PL and FL support clubs having the flexibility to invite a broad and open group of supporters.
- 3.37 **Each of the Leagues will therefore provide a template to clubs outlining the minimum level of information which should be shared at these meetings.** Although the focus of these meetings will be on strategic and major issues, all parties will be able to table additional topics where relevant and timely, to ensure that the issues which matter to supporters and clubs are discussed.
- 3.38 It also aims to develop and improve relationships between fans groups and their clubs which may, over time, facilitate new opportunities for fans to invest in their clubs and encourage opportunities for collective share ownership. Building trusted partnerships can be a step towards a sensible, managed exit route by owners who intend to sell, and giving supporters a transparent and visible view of the strategic direction of a club, is a good backdrop for dialogue on potential supporter ownership/ investment opportunities.
- 3.39 **The Leagues will oversee these commitments and, if needed, clarify them in their rule books and will take into account any feedback received from SD and the FSF on the effectiveness of this approach.**

- 3.40 The Premier League and Football League will lead with the new structured dialogue model. The proposed new Licensing System for the National Leagues will be reviewed to ensure that due consideration is given to structured dialogue and engagement when licensing clubs to operate in the National Leagues.
- 3.41 The football authorities have also committed to meeting fans groups who may have concerns about governance standards at their football clubs, or the way their football clubs are run. Whilst this happens formally and informally anyway, the football authorities have stated for the record that they are committed to listening to fans who have such concerns, and will meet legitimate fans groups seeking a meeting on significant issues.
- 3.42 Whilst the Group is broadly supportive of the idea of supporter directors on club boards in principle, we believe that strong, structured dialogue with a representative group of supporters, embedded in the rule books, is a more inclusive way of ensuring supporters have access to strategic information, can discuss key issues with club owners, directors and senior executives and hold them accountable.
- 3.43 The Group reviewed the appointment of independent non-executive directors to club boards. Whilst the football authorities have a model-neutral approach to club ownership and corporate structures, the Group believes independent non-executive directors can add value to club boards, but it would be a matter for individual clubs to decide their approach to this issue.
- 3.44 The Group notes that The FA, PL and FL Boards now all include Non-Executive Directors which is in line with 'good governance' recommendations.
- 3.45 The Group also notes that The FA has, during the course of the Group's discussions, announced its own review of decision making structures within The FA. The Group recommends that, as part of The FA's review, The FA considers how to best engage with representative supporter groups within its decision making structures. The Group noted that there is only one supporter representative on the 123 person FA Council and SD/FSF have asked that this is reconsidered as part of The FA's structural review.
- 3.46 The Group recommends that Supporters Direct and the Football Supporters Federation are formal consultees in this review, to ensure improved and more effective representation for supporters within the key decision-making bodies, including the Professional Game Board and the National Game Board – a commitment made in 2012 – is delivered.
- 3.47 **The Group recognises the importance of the name of the club, location of the ground, club colours and the club crest to supporters.** Requirements now exist within both the Leagues and The FA for ground changes and name changes. In 2015, The FA Council approved a new procedure for name changes which is supported by the Group. The Group also reviewed the Leagues' requirements for ground changes which make it clear that such moves should not adversely affect supporters, and should, where possible, include consultation with supporters as part of the planning process. The football authorities agreed to keep these regulations under constant review. The Group would recommend that any substantial changes to club colours or crest are discussed as part of the structured dialogue.

You can download the full document: <http://bit.ly/EWG-DCMS>

Read the FSF response here: <http://bit.ly/EWG-FSF-response>