



Premier League Structured Dialogue – Summary Notes (London, 25th April 2017)

Attendees

- Tim Payton (TP) Arsenal Supporters Trust
- Tony Maycock (TM) Cherries Trust
- Mike Benyon (MBe) Clarets Trust
- Tim Rolls (TR) Chelsea Supporters Trust
- Sue Maisey (SM) Crystal Palace Supporters Trust
- Dave Kelly (DK) Everton Supporters Trust
- Geoff Bielby (GBi) Hull City Supporters Trust
- Steve Moulds (SM) Leicester City Supporters Trust
- Gron Brookes (GBr) Spirit of Shankly
- Allan Galley (AG) Manchester City Supporters Club
- Duncan Drasdo (DD) Manchester United Supporters Trust
- Rob Nicholls (RN) Fly me to the Moon fanzine
- Nick Illingworth (NI) The Ugly Inside fanzine
- Matt Woolston (MW) A Love Supreme fanzine
- Angela Smith (AS) Supporters Council
- David Little (DL) Swansea City Supporters Trust
- Kat Law (KL) Tottenham Hotspur Supporters Trust
- John Fawell (JF) Watford Supporters Trust
- George Mann (GM) WHUISA
- Di Cunningham (DC) Pride in Football
- Kevin Miles (KM) The Football Supporters' Federation
- David Rose (DR) The Football Supporters' Federation
- Michael Brunskill (MBr) The Football Supporters' Federation
- Ashley Brown (AB) Supporters Direct
- Richard Scudamore (RS) Premier League
- Bill Bush (BB) Premier League
- Kat Allen (KA) Premier League
- Rachel Solich (RSo) Premier League
- Tommy Guthrie (TG) Premier League
- Mark Annett (MA) Premier League
- Ash Lord (AL) Premier League

Apologies received from John Homer (West Bromwich Albion Supporters club)

Agenda

- Fixture scheduling
- Disabled access
- Permitted standing
- Ticketing

- Structured dialogue
- Matchday travel
- Equality and diversity

Fixture scheduling

MA – It's a complex process which involves 2032 fixtures, 92 clubs and 34 police forces. It is done in conjunction with the EFL as there is fixture pairing i.e. where local rivals are in different divisions but a home/away pairing is preferable. A fixtures questionnaire is sent to the clubs and police and a review of fixtures takes place whereby date requests which have not been established can be satisfied. There is then a second review by the Fixtures Working Party, UK Football Policing Unit, British Transport Police etc. Once that is concluded the TV companies then choose their games (there are 168 "selections" across the season decided in seven different cycles with 4/5 games per game week.

KL – I understand that it's a complex process but are fans considered at any stage throughout the fixture compilation? Is any thought given to whether fans can use public transport to get to and from games? At last December's midweek fixtures, no set of away fans could get home using public transport. Are these issues considered? Do you liaise with rail operators?

MA – We have reduced midweek travel and yes fans are considered. We don't liaise with rail operators.

BB – The PL, clubs, and broadcasters want grounds to be full. But pulling together a fixture list is a long algebraic formula and 380 games to schedule. One point we raised with Ofcom was that we actually want to limit the number of games on TV as more domestic TV games means increased complexity. In La Liga only 10 days' notice is given for some games. No single set of concerns are given pre-eminence when putting fixtures together.

JF – Can you mitigate the impact of TV fixtures on match-going fans? E.g. systems to support how fans link scheduling and matchday travel more closely.

TR – 40/50 years ago Christmas fixtures were often to lessen the burden on travelling fans. Is that possible? Or criteria determining less distance travelled at certain times of the year. Most will accept longer journeys on a weekend. Similarly, a cap on scheduled midweek fixture distances would clearly be beneficial.

MA – The problem is pre-determining too many fixtures. As there are 5 Bank Holiday rounds and each also has a reverse fixture it would mean 10 game week rounds were pre-determined. Police might not want local derby games within 4 days of each other. It also means you could get to Feb/March and have played some teams twice and others not once. The more constraints you put in the harder it is to get the fixtures out.

GM – Can there be more transparency to broadcast dates? Advanced details of when blocks of fixtures are to be released?

MA – We have done this for the first time. *(FSF note: The FSF will promote these)*

JF – Do the BBC/FA get involved?

MA – The FA do as the second half of the season is very complex.

BB – Safety Advisory Groups (SAG) also add complexity and there has been a more aggressive stance from SAGs in terms of trying to control weekends or KO times. We spend

more time on SAG discussions now trying to break down their objections. There is now a Sports Ground Safety Authority consultation which seeks to identify fan behaviour as a reason why the fixture list should be under safety control rather than football control (*FSF note: this could mean, for instance, 10am Sunday KOs designated by local SAGs for safety reasons*).

Disabled access

(FSF note: The Equality and Human Rights Commission has given Premier League clubs “failing to meet the minimum requirements” for disabled access until September 2017 to “to publish their plan of action and timetable for improvement or face an investigation.”)

BB – In an imperfect world we do a pretty good job. Such is the Premier League profile though we will often be a hook for people to hang their cause. In early September 2017 we'll report to the PL board. We're happy to involve fans for feedback although there is a timing issue – the clubs, fan groups, and then back to the EHRC. Little case law but we believe it's on our side. The question is what's proportionate? What level of disruption is fair and reasonable (i.e. the displacement of fans who aren't disabled). Disabled fans would argue that there's already an imbalance so non-disabled supporters might need to accept change.

DD – We are concerned that clubs (MUFC at least) did not consult with those fans who would be displaced, nor the supporters trust, in advance of their decision on the expansion of disabled facilities. We support an expansion of such facilities. Supporters need to know that all avenues have been explored to avoid long-term season ticket holders being compulsorily relocated. If that truly proves the only option then they should be offered seats at the same price not simply matching that price for one season only. Furthermore as this affects the cheapest seats in the ground and this pricing will not be replicated elsewhere this is a significant loss of financial accessibility for supporters generally and there is a long term concern about pricing out fans.

BB – Watford FC seek to be ahead of the curve in offering disabled seats but don't want empty disabled facilities (*FSF note: as season ticket holders might be moved to accommodate new disabled section*) so they'll try and stimulate demand for disabled tickets even if they don't offer EHRC levels which could result in empty seats.

JF – Disabled fan groups at Watford are not just wheelchair users and the club has done lots.

BB – EHRC Select Committee haven't engaged with the disabled fans group at Watford, although we would like them to.

TG – Are fan reps aware of disability officers at their clubs? (*FSF note: mixed response from the fans present, the FSF will circulate the list of those officers*).

KM – Is the consultation looking at architecture or across the whole spectrum? Also to remember “invisible disabilities” such as people being refused entry for cerebral palsy as presumed drunk.

BB – The latter. It's patronising to think that disability just equals wheelchair and we're trying to do more re: ambulant disabilities. Many autistic fans are not going to games but clubs are introducing sensory rooms for them. We don't see as many people campaigning for that.

SM – What about away fans who are disabled but can't sit with their own fans?

TG – Away location is part of club commitment made in 2015 and it is progressing. Sensory rooms are being retrofitted at some grounds and might even be included from the start in

new builds. We expect to see more of these and back the Shippey Campaign. There is an online training module for club staff regarding disability issues and it will be codified into the handbook for disability officers to work with other officers. Keen for feedback which we can pass onto disability officers.

Permitted standing

BB – The PL is carrying out a review with safety experts, fan groups but won't be rushing into it. We believe The he EFL are more enthusiastic and there has been real lobbying there as they still have clubs with standing areas. There are advantages and disadvantages. There are different types of accommodation, not just rail seats, and we will talk to fan groups. Also the issues of variable space which can change match-to-match depending on demand. Aim to have data, costs by end of Autumn. It won't be final then – the EFL want to go faster and pilot.

TP – We welcome that you're open to a debate on safe standing. The Arsenal Supporters' Trust has surveyed our fans. Will your consultation with fans be formal or informal?

BB – We want informal discussions but also like to know about any surveys that fan groups do. This isn't a yes/no, black/white issue. For instance, if you have a safe standing area, do you clamp down in other areas on persistent standing? How do you find that balance? Stewarding/crowd management techniques to be considered as well.

(FSF note: BB gives commitment to follow-up meeting to discuss these issues.)

KM – We attended the SGSA Conference on March 2nd and there were references by the chief inspector to “clampdowns” and “zero tolerance” of standing in seated areas. He perceives it as a safety issue but I've seen no evidence of that – but the stance could create public order issues.

BB – Agreed. There is the view of an SGSA inspector – who want standing banned and thinks there are hidden injuries covered up by fans and clubs. The other view is that fans/police/clubs working together have in a dynamic system managed accidents away. It's an area that needs more care than you might think. Watch this space.

(FSF note: At this point Premier League CEO Richard Scudamore joined the meeting)

TR – Since the last meeting in July we have set up a working group, sponsored by the supporter representatives, and produced a report analysing several years' worth of data relating to TV/fixtures. We have also engaged with Sky Sports, BT Sport and the PL at separate meetings where the report was discussed.

KL – The working group's focus has been on TV's impact on fixtures and travel plans. There is support from Sky Sports and BT Sport for a “cross-party” group to bring everyone to the table. Sky have flipped some fixtures following the meetings and BT Sport said they would find help from the PL useful when looking at logistical issues relating to rail network and impact on fans. Would you support a cross party group?

RS – Can I check with them? If they think it's a benefit then it would be silly of me to say no. I need to check with their take on this. Mark Annett and I are at the sharp end. Normally if I get involved it's because I'm upsetting someone. But if it has some merit, yes, but they get to pick. We set up 38 rounds and then Sky/BT pick their TV games.

TR – Subsidised away travel. Some clubs kept subsidising, some not post-£30 cap. When there is no public transport because of a game being moved for TV, clubs should be mandated to offer travel.

KL – In our recent meeting with BB and TG, BB said he would raise with the 20 PL clubs making subsidised away travel mandatory for those fixtures where supporters can't travel to and from matches on public transport owing to broadcast rescheduling. Would RS support that?

RS – We promised clubs having got the away cap in place we wouldn't interfere. It's unfair as you'd be mandating something to happen arbitrarily – clubs are passive in the sense of choosing what games are on TV but they'd have to pay out on that basis. Having said that we do encourage clubs to do more above the away ticket cap – that isn't a bad thing.

KL – But clubs can decide not to be on TV?

RS – No, we the PL board have the power to tell clubs. The PL could not function without that power. Look at the next 4 weeks and the Cup schedule. I get regular calls from clubs regarding fixture moves. Clubs can object for rational reasons why matches can't be played but to say clubs approve fixtures is not right.

KL – And the £1m facility fee for games on TV?

RS – No club thinks of the facility fee as being for the inconvenience of being on TV. Every club starts the season with a model for overall TV finances.

KL - How can we change the mindset? Clubs are getting more money for TV but not helping fans. It's £40,000 to charter a train which would help travelling fans.

RS – Mandate subsidised transport? No. Talk to clubs about the sense in doing it. But not mandated.

TR – Subsidised away travel. Some clubs kept subsidising, some not post-£30 cap.

TG – There's 3 years from clubs doing the Away Supporters Initiative (ASI) so clubs have a good sample. Do fans speak to their clubs about this?

TP – Arsenal were at Middlesbrough on Easter Monday and the club put £10 coach deals on. Praise good practice or name and shame those who don't.

AS – Stoke kept ASI but when games are moved it isn't just the money – it's days off work etc. *(FSF note: after 3 seasons ASI was replaced in 2016/17 with £30 Away Price cap. Stoke didn't keep the ASI as the league wide initiative ended but they did retain some of its elements in initiatives for supporters.)*

TM – AFCB withdrew the ASI but have now done a few.

AS – Stoke are putting more and more on – they are very popular offers. Coaches are popular.

TR – Would the PL liaise with Network Rail [to identify future infrastructure issues/engineering works which could affect fans] and pass this information on to the TV companies. Some works are planned two years in advance and a better information flow is needed.

RS – In principle yes, although I'm not across how it all works [TG says this can be taken to rail forum meeting]. I'm frustrated at the attitude of rail companies to fans. The holy grail is advance ticket validity when games are moved for TV.

Ticketing

GBi – On 31 March our club announced the new membership scheme – and there are still no concessions for kids, OAPs. There were interim arrangements in family areas but that amnesty has now gone. If kids/OAPs are fortunate enough to sit in the cheap zones it's OK – but they could be paying as much as £500 for a season ticket in other areas. That's why we're 5000 short on gates. What is the PL doing about this?

RS – It's a live issue with the Premier League. The PL is entirely convinced they are not in keeping with the spirit of the rules.

NI – Away fans allocation – Southampton haven't taken the full allocation at Liverpool or Chelsea and there is a feeling that clubs are putting pressure on away clubs not to take full allocation so they can sell those tickets to home fans at £50 instead of £30.

TG – Neither home club has changed sales policy – it's a decision Southampton made, a judgement call that they wouldn't sell out the away end.

Note: Rules for visiting club, from PL Handbook (see www.premierleague.com/publications):

- *R.11.1. may order and sell tickets on a sequential Seating Block by Seating Block basis (the sequence of release of Seating Blocks to the Visiting Club to be determined by the Home Club);*
- *R.11.2. must confirm its final order of tickets (subject to the conditions set out in Rule R.12) at least four weeks before the League Match to which they relate; and*
- *R.11.3. shall pay for the entirety of the tickets so ordered save that it may return (and not pay for) any unsold tickets in the final Seating Block for which it ordered tickets if it has sold 50% of the tickets in that Seating Block.*
- *R.12. Unless otherwise agreed, the provision by a Home Club of tickets for sale by a Visiting Club shall be conditional upon:*
- *R.12.1. the Visiting Club making the tickets available for purchase by the later of either three working days after receipt from the Home Club or the date that is four weeks before the date of the fixture;*
- *R.12.2. any unsold tickets being returned by the Visiting Club to the Home Club not later than 10 days before the date fixed for the League Match to which they relate;*

Structured dialogue

(FSF note: MBr gives overview of interim FSF survey results, AB likewise for SD.)

TP - Is there an update of when this will be in PL rules? It would be a lot quicker if the PL provided template information to stop clubs saying we don't have to give anything away.

BB – We prefer flexibility to “one size fits all”. What have the EFL done?

KM – I have the EFL guidance here and it is a more detailed rule.

Timing of future meetings

BB – Two per season is fine, one in October and a second in early March. It remains the case the dialogue is open all the time through the national orgs, bi-laterals etc.

KM – Working groups also very important when it comes to detail.

Matchday travel

TG – Rail delivery group – teaming up with the FA and EFL to meet the 23 rail groups. Summer close season project to take some of these views such as “flexible” bookings forward. Will update.

Equality and diversity

TG – Encouraging clubs to get involved with the Rainbow Laces. Also, improved steward training so homophobia is treated seriously as well as making greater efforts to promote diversity. Feedback from clubs and groups has been good.

DC – It’s been a revelation this year and a lot of visibility from players. There are now 30 Pride in Football fan groups – a slight caveat is a concern that the Football vs Homophobia campaign clashes with Rainbow Laces, so the former may lose some impact.

BB – The objective is to strengthen groups in football and we agree with the timing issue. Maybe merge the campaigns or have a clear separation and very different times of the year.

DC – And with the B&HA promotion there’s work to do with clubs who haven’t played them...

BB –In EFL there’s been a diminution of abuse - clubs working with fan groups and the media helps. But how do you send a message that grounds are welcoming places, while having that underlying threat against abusers, without giving off counter-productive messages to those you wish to attract?

AOB

No further questions or topics were raised.

Meeting closes