

Proposal for Effective Fan Representation: Everton Football Club

Executive Summary

Overview

The fallout of Project Big Picture in October 2020 & the European Super League proposals in April 2021 highlighted the need to strengthen the role football fans have in the decision-making processes within football clubs, to ensure that:

- the views of fans are embedded in the club's strategic and commercial strategies;
- the interests of the local community are protected; and
- communication and engagement between the Board of the Football Club and its supporters is meaningful.

Background – Everton Stakeholder Steering Group

In June 2021, the:

- Everton Disabled Supporters' Association;
- Everton Fans' Forum;
- Everton Football Club Shareholders' Association;
- Everton Football Club Supporters' Club Committee;
- Everton Heritage Society;
- Everton Overseas Supporter Group Representatives from Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America; and
- Everton supporter organisations that are members of the Football Supporters' Association

came together to form the Everton Stakeholder Steering Group (ESSG) – with the objective of developing a proposal for effective and meaningful Fan Representation at Board level at Everton Football Club.

The ESSG sought and considered the views of Evertonians drawn from a wide range of sources, including e-mail submissions to the Everton Fans' Forum, a series of stakeholder workshops with fan group representatives, independent online forums and the results of a survey undertaken by Everton Football Club.

In all, this engagement embraced the views of more than 10,000 Evertonians.

Recommendation

Considering and led by the breadth and strength of views gathered during the engagement phase, the ESSG recommends that Everton Football Club should have Fan Directors on its Board of Directors who are accountable to, and elected by, Everton supporters.

This should be underpinned by the creation of a Fan Advisory Board representing the diversity of the fanbase and to ensure that the interests of Everton fans are considered in strategic decision making.

Fan Directors will be:

- full members of the Board, will attend all Board meetings with no restrictions and with equal voting rights to other Board members;
- directly accountable to and elected by Everton supporters; and

The overwhelming feedback from Evertonians is the need to ensure that their views are listened to, understood and can be represented at the highest levels of Everton Football Club.

We believe the recommendation for Fan Directors at Board Level, underpinned by a Fan Advisory Board representing the diversity of the fanbase provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to enable this.

We call on Everton Football Club to quickly accept our recommendation.



Everton Disabled Supporters' Association



Everton Fans' Forum



Everton Football Club Shareholders' Association



Everton Football Club Supporters' Club Committee



Everton Heritage Society



Everton Overseas Supporter Group Representatives (Asia Pacific, Europe & North America)



Annexes:

- A. Everton Stakeholder Steering Group – Terms of Reference

Enclosures:

- 1. Everton Fans' Forum Fan-Led Review Submission
- 2. Everton Fans' Forum Letter to EFC CEO

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Introduction

This document provides background details on the drivers for seeking the views of Evertonians, the groups involved, the process undertaken and some of the considerations that have informed the recommendations.

Background

In October 2020, Project Big Picture was first reported in the media.

This would have shaken up the top flight of English domestic football by reducing the Premier League to eighteen teams; abolishing the League Cup and Charity Shield; giving special voting rights to six teams (Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur); and granting 'limited' voting rights to three teams (Everton, Southampton and West Ham United).

The proposals were dropped after strong opposition from Premier League Shareholders.

On 18th April 2021, proposals for the creation of a European Super League (ESL) were published that would have posed a serious threat to the English football pyramid and provided protections for a limited number of Clubs.

Over the next 72 hours, football fans across Europe united to oppose the plans.

The threat created by the intention of six Premier League clubs to break away to form and perform in a European Super League led to the Government accelerating its planned Fan-led Review of Football Governance.

On the 22nd April 2021, the Government announced that Tracey Crouch MP would chair a fan-led review of football¹.

The key objectives of the review were to:

- Consider the multiple Owners' and Directors' Tests and whether they are fit for purpose, including the addition of further criteria;
- Assess calls for the creation of a single, independent football regulator to oversee the sport's regulations and compliance, and its relationship with the regulatory powers of The FA and other football bodies;
- Examine the effectiveness of measures to improve club engagement with supporters, such as structured dialogue, that were introduced on the back of the Expert Working Group;
- Investigate ways league administrators could better scrutinise clubs' finances on a regular basis;
- Examine the flow of money through the football pyramid, including solidarity and parachute payments, and broadcasting revenue;
- Explore governance structures in other countries, including ownership models, and whether any aspects could be beneficially translated to the English league system;
- Look at interventions to protect club identity, including geographical location and historical features (e.g. club badges); and

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fan-led-review-of-football-governance/terms-of-reference-for-the-fan-led-review-of-football-governance>

- Examine the relationship between club interests, league systems and their place within the overall football pyramid.

Everton Response to the Fan-Led Review

On 23rd April, the CEO of Everton Football Club (EFC) Prof Denise Barrett-Baxendale MBE emailed Evertonians to explain the process that the football club was taking to ensure that Evertonians had the opportunity to share their views about the future of football, the fallout of the European Super League and any other issue important to them.

Initially, Evertonians were invited to submit their views directly to the Everton Fans' Forum.

Following this, the Everton Fans' Forum carried out a series of engagement activities between the 10th May and 7th June via a series of hosted workshops with established Everton supporter or stakeholder groups, representing the views of more than 4000 Evertonians.

The groups involved in this phase included:

- Everton Disabled Supporters' Association;
- Everton Fans' Forum;
- Everton Football Club Shareholders' Association;
- Everton Football Club Supporters' Club Committee;
- Everton Heritage Society;
- Everton Overseas Supporter Group Representatives from Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America; and
- Everton supporter organisations that are members of the Football Supporters' Association.

The insights from these sessions were used to help inform an Everton Fans' Forum submission to the government-sponsored Fan-Led Review and a follow-up survey of Evertonians to be conducted by Everton Football Club.

The key summary findings of the engagement activities were presented to the Everton Chief Executive at a meeting on 22nd June.

Everton Fans' Forum: Engagement with the Fan-Led Review

On 14th June, the Everton Fans' Forum Chair was one of the Football Supporters' Association's Premier League Network's briefing team²; that gave a presentation to Tracey Crouch MP and the Fan-Led Review panel.

The discussion focussed on:

- The approach taken to seek the views of Everton fans on the Fan-Led Review;
- The feedback and experiences of Evertonians; and
- What Evertonians believed was key to ensuring effective and impactful supporter representation in the future.

Based on the engagement activities carried out in May and June, the Everton Fans' Forum formally submitted its evidence³ to the Fan-Led Review on 27th June (see Enclosure 1).

² <https://thefsa.org.uk/news/premier-league-fan-groups-give-evidence-to-the-fan-led-review/>

³ https://twitter.com/efc_fansforum/status/1412687450095427585?s=21

Everton Fans' Forum: Presentation of Findings to EFC

On 22nd June, Everton Fans' Forum Chair presented a summary of the findings of the May to June engagement activities to the EFC Chief Executive Officer.

The findings focussed on the following key themes:

- Fan engagement;
- Barriers to accessing football;
- Matchday experience;
- Disclosure;
- Community support; and
- Grassroots support.

At the culmination of the presentation, the EFC CEO asked the Everton Fans' Forum Chair to develop a proposal for effective and meaningful Fan Representation at Board level for EFC.

On 23rd July, the Everton Fans' Forum Chair wrote to the EFC CEO, confirming the development of this proposal would be done in partnership with a range of EFC stakeholder groups to ensure as full representation of the Everton fan and stakeholder base as possible, through the establishment of the Everton Stakeholder Steering Group; a copy of this letter is at Enclosure 2.

Everton Stakeholder Steering Group (ESSG)

The first meeting of the ESSG took place on 19th August and was formed of the groups represented during the Everton Fans' Forum engagement workshops; this catered for formed bodies that have structured dialogue with EFC, along with groups of other stakeholders who do not.

The members were:

- Everton Disabled Supporters Association⁴;
- Everton Fans' Forum⁵;
- Everton Football Club Shareholders' Association⁶;
- Everton Football Club Supporters' Club Committee⁷ (Conwy County, Han's Tours, Rice Lane, Croston Blues, Everton Mid Cheshire, Taxi Club Blues, South Manchester, Crewe & Nantwich, Tri-Service Toffees);
- Everton Heritage Society⁸;
- Everton Overseas Supporter Group Representatives from Asia Pacific, Europe & North America; and
- Everton Supporter organisations that are members of the Football Supporters Association⁹ (Everton Fans' Forum, Everton Supporters' Club Harrogate, Everton Supporters' Club South Wales, Rainbow Toffees, SATIS, The Blue Union, Everton Women Supporters' Club).

⁴ <https://www.evertonfc.com/club/disabled-fans>

⁵ <https://www.evertonfc.com/club/fans-forum>

⁶ <https://www.efcsa.org/>

⁷ <https://www.evertonfc.com/club/supporters-clubs/supporters-clubs-committee>

⁸ <http://efcheritagesociety.com/>

⁹ <https://thefsa.org.uk/about/affiliates-and-associates/>

The aim of the first meeting was to elect a Chair and Vice-Chair, to agree the Terms of Reference (Annex A) and for the new Chair to propose the way ahead in generating the proposal to EFC. Further meetings took place on 14th September, 14th October and 24th November.

Everton Stakeholder Steering Group Recommendation: Fan Directors

In October 2014, the Government sponsored an Expert Working Group¹⁰ on Football Supporter Ownership and Engagement and this was run by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, culminating in the publication of the official report in November 2015.

One extract from the report states:

“Whilst the Group is in principle supportive of the general idea of greater supporter representation on club boards, it recognises that there are challenges with appointing - or electing - supporter directors, who then have board confidentiality, accountability, and potentially, liability issues as a formal club director.”

This may have been the catalyst for action within the English football league pyramid, as now there are over 40 appointed Fan Directors; there has even been precedence set within the Premier League.

When Swansea City AFC were last in the Premier League during the 2017/18 season, Stuart MacDonald and Will Morris were on their board of directors; albeit the latter was in a supporting role as he was unable to vote.

During May and June 2021, the Everton Fans' Forum carried out engagement activities, including a series of eight workshops, with a reach of over 4000 individuals, during which support for the concept of a Fan Director at EFC was the most prominent theme.

This was also supported independently, through the EFC fan site Grand Old Team's one-week long post-2020/21-season survey; this survey took place in June 2021 and had 3615 respondents.

When asked “Should Everton's board contain fan representation?” 55% stated Definitely and 26% stated Probably.

Also in June 2021, the Everton Fans' Forum formally submitted feedback to the Fan-Led Review.

The full submission is at Enclosure 1, but several comments directly relate to the benefits of having Fan Directors, as listed below:

“There needs to be a system where boardrooms are not closed shops and that there is representation by a fan, who is representative of the broader fanbase and not on the payroll.

This ‘Supporter Director(s)’ must have equal voting rights and will also ensure that heritage is preserved, while being mindful of the community which supports and has helped to grow the club.”

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-expert-working-group-on-football-supporter-ownership-and-engagement>