



Board Meeting (virtual)

MINUTES

9pm – 31 October 2023

Present: Ian Bennett (IB), Paul Smith (PS), Tom Scott (TS), Peter Bradbury (PB), Richard Marsh (RM), David Lee (DL), Phiroze Mackenzie (PM), Neil Seepujak (NS)

Apologies: None

Guests in attendance:

- Clive Betts MP (CB)
- James Silverwood (JS), Member of the Trust
- Emma Partridge (EP), SWFC Women's Supporters Group
- Bethany Patrick (BP), SWFC Women's Supporters Group
- Adam Eccles (AE), SWFC Armed Forces Supporters Club
- [redacted]

In addition, Jane Hughes (JH), EFL Network Manager from the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) joined the meeting as indicated in the Minutes below.

Purpose of the meeting: the meeting had been arranged at short notice to discuss the items detailed below. PS introduced those present from the Trust and guests in attendance.

Minute		Action
1.0	<p>Emergency Financial Planning Committee</p> <p>CB explained that he had had a call with the EFL earlier in the day and confirmed that the transfer embargo had been put in place as the Club had been two days overdue with their HMRC payments. It was noted that the rules have been toughened recently (i.e. an embargo is in place after two days, rather than the previous 30 days). CB stated that the Club did not contact the EFL about this, but that the EFL will now contact the Club to try to understand the position.</p> <p>CB also referred to the separate ownership of the ground and the possible impact on this ownership structure in the event that the Club was to get into further financial difficulties or enter administration.</p> <p>CB stated that it may be that the Chairman has no fundamental problem in paying HMRC and that he may be trying to emphasise his importance to the Club.</p> <p>It was noted that the money paid to the Club from the Chairman is reported to the EFL as 'gifts' and that, in future, it is expected that it will be a requirement for football clubs to provide transparency on where funding comes from.</p> <p>It was noted that players and staff at the Club have been paid today, despite indications yesterday that this might not happen. CB stated that he will check with the Professional Footballers' Association on this point.</p>	CB

	<p>JS presented a proposal to establish an Emergency Financial Planning (EFP) sub-committee, which would be a sub-committee of the Trust, and which would require 4 to 6 people with the appropriate expertise to manage it. JS stated that the intention is that the sub-committee would plan for a 'doomsday' scenario (i.e. where the Club's financial situation gets worse and the Chairman decides to 'switch the lights off'), but hopefully these plans would never need to be used.</p> <p>In response to a question from RM, JS confirmed that the sub-committee would <i>not</i> seek to raise the £2M requested by the Chairman to pay off the HMRC debt, <i>nor</i> would it look to buy a small share of the Club (which the Chairman could then ignore). JS stated that a second strand of the sub-committee's work could look at possible sources of finance and which would include looking at a supporter-led takeover of the Club.</p> <p>Following a short discussion, the Board approved the proposal to set up an EFP sub-committee; the Trust's members are to be consulted on this. In addition, CB stated that the FSA can help with forming an EFP sub-committee, from experience of similar work regarding other football clubs.</p>	
<p>2.0</p>	<p>Umbrella arrangement with other fan groups</p> <p>CB stated that the upcoming King's Speech (on 7 November 2023) will hopefully include the legislation that will introduce a requirement for football clubs to publicly consult with fan groups.</p> <p>CB stated that it is likely that the best solution is for one group to represent the fanbase and that Kevin Miles (KM, Chief Executive, FSA) is strongly urging all football clubs to form one overall fan group so that this can be the representative body that clubs will have to recognise when the legislation is put in place. CB stated that KM will be writing to the Trust soon with more details and offer help / guidance regarding the formation of an 'umbrella' group.</p> <p><i>JH joined the meeting</i></p> <p>EP stated that members of the SWFC Women's Supporters Group are in favour of their group taking action to form a unified voice in consultation with other fan groups, noting that the Club's Engagement Panel does not fulfil this role. JS stated that having an umbrella organisation would be very beneficial and AE stated that feedback from members of the SWFC Armed Forces Supporters Club indicates that they would be willing to get involved with the formation of an umbrella group.</p> <p>During some further discussion, it was suggested that a list of fan groups, podcasts etc. could be collated and that an umbrella group could be operated informally to begin with, pending guidance from KM. JH stated that each fan group could have its own independence / identity within the umbrella group, and suggested that a Terms of Reference could be agreed to document why the group is being formed, and include a common set of objectives and the parameters of co-operation. In response to a question from AE, JH stated that each fan group should have the flexibility to have a representative of their choosing at any umbrella group meeting.</p>	

	<p>JH also stated that now really is the time for SWFC fans to come together given the recent statements from the Chairman. CB suggested that the group could be called Umbrella Owls. Following a comment from IB, it was agreed that no fan group should be excluded from the umbrella group. AE stated that it would be good for the umbrella group to have a public image for the benefit of the fanbase.</p> <p>TS is to refer to a document that the Trust's university interns collated earlier in the year and use that as the basis for creating a list of fan groups. Some fan group names were also provided in the 'meeting chat'.</p> <p>The Board agreed to support the creation of an umbrella group; the Trust's members are to be consulted on this. In the meantime, the list of fan groups is to be collated with a view to convening an initial meeting.</p>	TS
3.0	<p>The 1867 Group</p> <p>PS shared a copy of an exchange of emails with the 1867 Group, noting that the Trust's position is that the Trust's members would have to agree to support any protests against the Chairman, which they currently do not. It was noted that the 1867 Group appears to only represent nine people.</p> <p>In addition, PS stated that, following a statement from the 1867 Group on X, which indicated that they had support from the Trust and the SWFC Women's Supporters Group, he had written an email to Phil Rushforth (of the Engagement Panel) to clarify that the Trust does not support protests. JH suggested that protests (and the timing of any protests) could be something that the umbrella group considers, as this would likely achieve greater numbers and significant media coverage. JS suggested that the form of any protests could be online or via email campaigns (as well as in person before and after matches).</p> <p>It was noted that PS had invited the 1867 Group to the Board's next meeting on 7 November 2023.</p> <p><i>NS left the meeting</i></p>	
4.0	<p>Safety Advisory Group (SAG)</p> <p>RM stated that there would be some strength in the proposed umbrella group being a member of the local SAG. RM stated that he had had a call with Matt Proctor (from the licensing team at Sheffield City Council) earlier in the day regarding the attendance of the Trust at the SAG's next meeting on 5 December 2023, noting that it would be the first time that a group representing SWFC fans would be in attendance.</p> <p>RM suggested that the Trust's members should be asked if there were any issues that they would like raising at the SAG meeting.</p> <p>JH stated that the Trust could reach out to other fan groups and ask them to contribute to collating the 'everyday' issues for raising at the SAG meeting (e.g. how matches are managed, limiting tickets for away fans). In addition, JH stated that membership of the SAG could be one of the items that is included in the Terms of Reference for the umbrella group.</p>	

5.0	Associate of the Trust It was agreed to consider the 'Associate of the Trust' item at the next Board meeting on 7 November 2023. <i>Post meeting note: the Board subsequently agreed to launch an 'Associate of the Trust' option for fans, and this was done on Thursday 2 November 2023.</i> The meeting closed at 10:30pm.	
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