

Cross Party Working Group: The Future of Scottish Football

15 March 2021

By Zoom Conference Call

Minutes

Present:

Fulton MacGregor (Convenor), Jeremy Balfour (MSP), Simon Barrow (SFSA), Neil Champion (Scottish FA), Keith Ferguson, Andy Gould (Scottish FA), David Hamilton (Scottish Government), Molly Hyde (SPFL), Jen Malone (Scottish FA), Stuart McCaffrey (Scottish Football Partnership), Lindsay MacKenzie (Sportscotland), Marian Maclean (Police Scotland), Iain McMenemy (Stenhousemuir FC), Paul McNeill (Scottish FA), Ann Quinn (Scottish FA), Sandy Riach (SDSA), Alan Russell (Supporters Direct Scotland), Marion Waddell (Scottish FA), Cammy Watt (Scottish FA)

In attendance:

Miss Amy Cornelius, teacher, Holytown Primary School
David Weir, PEPASS PE Lead Officer, Glasgow Life
Ursula McFarlane (Scottish FA, Euro 2020 Team)

Apologies:

Craig Peattie, (Scottish Powerchair FA)
Finlay Carson (MSP)
Malcolm Dingwall-Smith (Sportscotland)

Welcome and Introduction

Mr MacGregor opened the meeting at 1.05pm and welcomed those present.

Cross Party Working Group – AGM

The AGM was held and the following agreed:

- Convenor – Fulton MacGregor MSP nominated by Allan Russell and seconded by Jeremy Balfour (MSP)
- Depute Convenor – George Adam, MSP, nominated by Fulton MacGregor (MSP) and seconded by Iain McMenemy
- Secretary – Marion Waddell (Scottish FA) nominated by Fulton MacGregor (MSP) and seconded by Stuart McCaffrey.

Minutes of Meeting of 16 November 2020

The minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2020 were duly approved by Fulton MacGregor (MSP) and seconded by Paul McNeill.

EURO 2020 Schools Project

Mr MacGregor welcomed Miss Amy Cornelius, teacher, Holytown Primary School and David Weir, PEPASS PE Lead Officer, Glasgow Life to the meeting to discuss the Euro 2020 Schools Project. Mr Weir talked about the success of this initiative and the fact that it was linked to the Curriculum for Excellence so was a very useful tool for teachers as it encourages creativity for all children whether they play football or not.

Miss Cornelius spoke to the presentation saying that it was such a flexible resource which allowed teachers to adapt it to their individual classes and take on as much or as little as they wished. It provided teachers with new ideas and pupils with life skills eg one of the exercises was on how to book flights. It also related to Modern Languages in the Welcome to Glasgow project and their also used the tool during their Fair Trade week by making Euro 2020 trophies which could be recycled. In summary Miss Cornelius said it proved that football was so much more than kicking a ball and the children had embraced it.

Mr MacGregor thanked both Mr Weir and Miss Cornelius and wanted to place on record his thanks for the work that had been done in developing and implementing this during a pandemic. He also acknowledged the reach of the project by the re-tweet from the footballer Marcus Rashford. Mr MacGregor invited questions.

Mr Watt asked about the roll-out of the initiative; in particular the reach and uptake of it and whether it was focused primarily on just Glasgow. Mr McNeill agreed that it was important to record this in order for this to be a legacy project which will last into the future. He also acknowledged that all of the feedback so far had been extremely positive. Ms McFarlane advised that they wanted to make the use of this tool as easy as possible and not put barriers in place to access so they did not have definitive numbers of how many teachers were accessing it.

It was agreed to send the slide desk to all members of the Cross Party Working Group.

5. Re-engagement of Community Football after COVID

Paul McNeill presented slides on the re-engagement of Community Football following recent Scottish Government announcements. He talked about the requirement to follow the guidelines in respect of bubbles, U12s return and proper risk assessment of activity. Mr McNeill recognised the impact of not playing football on mental health but emphasised the need for a step by step approach in order to get football back on the pitch.

Mr McNeil also emphasised the challenge around facilities and, in particular, the school estate. He felt it was important that this was open during the summer holidays which is when football is predicted to be back on the pitch. He also discussed the issue of cost of such facilities.

Finally, Mr McNeill discussed volunteers and how the pandemic has affected them. He felt we had a duty to inspire another generation of volunteers because they were so critical to the game.

Mr MacGregor thanked Mr McNeill and the Scottish FA for the speed in which they disseminated information from Scottish Government briefings to football clubs to inform them of the next steps. He also commented on the link to the Scottish FA web-site which proved to be a very useful tool for all clubs to access up to date information.

Mr McCaffrey informed the meeting of the funding that had been made available through the Scottish Football Partnership (SFP):

£70K grassroots funding for children suffering hardship
£50K development funding to the SYFA to re-start 1,000 new coaches into the game

Mr McCaffrey asked about the additional UK money via the Football Federation which had been announced and how we access this as he considered that we require to invest in our facilities in terms of maintenance and repair. Mr MacGregor agreed to investigate this and report back to the group.

6. Supporters Direct

Alan Russell presented to the group from a fan's perspective on the lack of engagement with fans regarding decisions taken. He emphasised the following:

- No engagement with fans re curtailment of 2019/20 season
- No engagement with fans by league reconstruction task force in April/May 2020
- Fans looking to "fight their club's corner" re promotion/relegation following curtailment of season and through High Court and mediation process

- No contingency plan in place for a repeat in 2020/21
- Distribution of financial aid from Scottish Government mirrors the uneven distribution of prize money, and the uneven voting structure for decision-making within the SPFL
- No engagement with fans re temporary suspension of League One, League Two, regional leagues and women's football in January 2021
- Suspicion that lower leagues have been sacrificed to avoid penalties for COVID-19 breaches in higher leagues
- Grievances remain about the treatment of relegated clubs last season

Mr Russell then discussed the journey from 2010 to the current day and emphasised his opinion that there was a need to break the imbalance on finances with more equity and revenue sharing required.

Mr Balfour empathised with this view and felt that there was still a lot of discussion to be had both at the professional and semi professional level. Given this is an SPFL issue, Miss Hyde agreed to pick this up with Mr Beattie (Company Secretary, SPFL).

Mr McMenemy said that last summer was difficult and somewhat embarrassing for football and he was frustrated that there appears to be nothing in place for this season should the same situation arise. He felt that engagement with fans was not sufficient. He believed feedback had been sought not in sufficient measure. He discussed the proposal of an Independent Regulator for Football however acknowledged UEFA would not support this as they are against any politicising of football.

Mr MacGregor thanked Mr Russell and said this required further discussion. Mr Russell said that he would be happy to participate in a sub-group of the Cross Party Working Group if that was felt useful.

7. AOCB

There was no further business and meeting concluded at 14.20pm