



Minutes

THURSDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 2018
 18.00-20.00
 Terry Paine Suite, St Mary's Stadium

Type of Meeting: Saints Voice Panel Meeting with Southampton Football Club Staff
Meeting Facilitator: Khali Parsons
Notetaker: Aaron Heskins

Attendees:	Saints Voice	Southampton Football Club
	Mark Chee	Toby Steele Managing Director
	Katie Maidment-Smith	David Thomas Commercial Director
	Tara Doel	Paul Boon Director of Catering & Events
	Michael Sadler	Kate Tarry Brand & Marketing Director
	Mark Middleton	Danielle Lewis Head of Hospitality & Ticketing
	Louise Burke	Mark Hannibal Head of Venue safety & Security
	Michael Edwards	George Martindale Media Relations Officer
	Zoe Wilson	Khali Parsons Supporter Relations Manager/SLO
	James Whitworth	Daniel Whittington Senior Supporter Relations Advisor
	Yasmin Wiseman	Paul Shears Warehouse Supervisor

Apologies: Mike Allott Anthony Cole-Johnson Director of Sales
 Oliver Boast Tim Greenwell Director of Legal and Risk

Objectives:

- The Club to develop a further understanding of issues affecting supporters
- Saints Voice to understand the thinking behind key decisions
- To share thoughts and ideas

Minutes: **TS - Welcome**
 Reminder of how to get the best out of the meetings, some 'house rules', thanked everyone for giving up their time to attend, reiterated the commitment from the Club

Introduction
 Round table brief introduction of staff and panel

Mike S – Brief overview of the panel's actions to date. Conversations over social media, meeting in person.
 Over 50 subjects brought up or to their attention. Enthusiasm building. Subjects prioritised resulting in the agenda items requested.
 Explained the panel were looking for early impacts to build confidence in the process.
 Thanked staff for their attendance.

Admin

KP – Terms of Reference agreed with no amendments
Minutes to be shared and agreed with SFC and Saints Voice before publication on the website. We will aim to share within 1 week of the meeting where possible.
Next meeting to be agreed before conclusion of this one

Mike S – asked if Saints Voice ought to hold back on speaking publicly about the meeting until minutes published. It was agreed we all would.

Mike C – can we share agenda items and generate interest before a meeting? TS – agreed but spoke about managing expectations

KP – Initiative and process is new to all of us and open to development. Attendance by so many key staff is testament to how seriously we take structured dialogue with fans. Cynicism of some fans will hopefully dissipate with time.

Communication

KMS – Southampton Way and Five Year Plan.

Where are we? Fans have not heard anything in a long time. 5 year plan appeared to be achieved early then communication ceased. Lack of transparency. Southampton Way was talked about extensively but now fans hear nothing more on the subject.

TS – admitted that there has been a lack of communication from the Club on this and we have not been as forthcoming as we should have been. The Club are now in the process of consulting with staff and players about our strategy moving forward, The Southampton Way and our values and mission. The Club hopes to present back to staff later in the year and then communicate this to fans as well, possibly early next year.

KP & DT – What does The Southampton Way mean to you?

KMS – Family Club. Talent coming through Academy, all the way to the first team. All about families but that players don't feel a part of that any more.

DT – Spoke about the meeting that very day at SeaCity with all players and playing staff where they engaged in the same strategy activities and discussions as all staff. The value they felt most strongly about was UNITY.

Mark M – Felt that at big clubs there was little connection between players and fans, but that Saints had always been good in the past.

Mark C – wanted to see ambition, ruthlessness, show 'bigger' clubs what we can do!

Mark C – asked about the 5 pledges promised by Ralph

TS – accepted that our form last season stalled the communication of these pledges and there was a strong focus on the pitch. These will now be interwoven within the Club strategy, which will be communicated to fans. Accepted we needed to communicate better. Although there will be times we won't talk fully but always a reason why.

Mark C – needs an improvement in the message to fans, even if small

DT – already thinking around how we communicate strategy and values after staff meetings to fans and share updates. Important part.

KT – reiterated that the most important part of our values and strategy is us living it and being able to demonstrate it within our work.

YW - Public Response to Issues/Website & Social Media Presence

Communication is up and down. Club seems to pick and choose when to be present on social media. When we do well we are out there, when things don't go well we hide.

LB – example issues with Training Session and Player Signing. Lots of people had a great day but there were problems and Club were quiet. Tainted a fantastic experience.

KT – Agreed SV make very good points. Decisions around communication are always thought through and we don't deliberately hide.

We did hold hands up to not getting everything right with training session. Personally spoke to fans affected on the day. Supporter Relations open and transparent in responses to fans. However, we have over 4 million followers and can't talk about everything that affects a small number across social media. However, we have learned from this.

With positive stories – we do report on the good things we do but often we do things because it is the right thing to do and not for PR.

YW – Talked about recent issues with kit launches – home kit leaked, away kit late. No acknowledgement or information about away kit. Lots of questions and confusion.

Mark M – No one knew what the issue was with the away kit

DT – we did announce the delay in away kit when talking about home kit. Clearly need more.

KMS – was aware of this information but saw that most people had no idea as they missed this info.

TS – What would you have liked to have seen? Where could we have improved?

YW – Twitter, pin it at top.

GM – Spoke in detail about the media team and how they monitor and communicate. Are asked often and discuss frequently whether to post lots when we lose. Overly optimistic vs silent?!

Interesting to hear thoughts of fans. Will bear in mind and look to be more open and communicative on certain issues.

KMS – loves the little videos and Q&A's on the site. Important to praise the good things too. Kids love them too.

Mike S – Suggested using SV as a sound board to run past them potential communications to gain feedback first.

KP – Communication a big subject and we could talk for hours! Perhaps park this for now to get through all agenda items.

Safety and Security

ME – Bottle Tops & bag Searches – Policy & Inconsistency

Bottle top policy not consistent. Why do they do it? Bottles not allowed but flasks OK?! Seems ridiculous. Not consistent across the stadium.

MH – Talked about Ground Regs (never a popular document) and rules across PL not just stadium. Stewards try to be pragmatic and use common sense but understand there is not always complete consistency, a challenge for him.

Had to enforce bottle tops in response to multiple incidents in past. Have to report on these. Will look to accommodate different areas of the stadium.

MH – bag searches should be consistent. At SFC we suffer from late walk up to most stands, posing challenges to stewards. Talked at length about stewards being trained in customer service, working on advice and intelligence from police, dogs around stadium.

PS – Express turnstile without bag search??

MH – has been discussed at length. Difficult to implement as all turnstiles need to be available to all walk ups.

ZW – frustration is not the bag searches as that is understood to be important. It is that not All are searched, some swerve, seems unfair and inconsistent.

MH – good point, thank you for bringing it up.

Safe Standing – Club Stance

TS – Club is awaiting PL and Government Safety Reports. Made clear that even with full reports and recommendation there is much to consider if implementing safe standing and these need to be fully explored. Immediate implementation for anyone unlikely.

DT – What are the thoughts of SV??

Mike S – Wanted to understand the Club position as they really had no idea.

ME – thanked MH for the ethos of how stewards are trained and how the Club approaches safety issue. Members talked about how good and engaging stewards are.

Ticketing

JW – Virgin media initiative for away supporters

VM £20 for visiting fans is causing resentment among home supporters. Linked with FSF?

DT – Virgin Media do have a relationship with FSF, and part of our sponsorship deal is to support them in that. VM's business strategy is that it's important to benefit all football supporters, although we benefit from their sponsorship money. Reality is that all visiting fans pay £20 once and our supporters benefit twice.

JW – two not seen as enough.

TD – feeling is we wear logo on our shirts everywhere we go giving additional advertising but that we don't benefit as much as we should.

TS – Is the perception that other fans are benefitting 19 times when the reality is they are not, it is only once per Club?

DT – we are currently in discussion with Virgin Media regarding how they can support home fans better. It is a live discussion and we hope to have an update soon.

JW – Allocation Issues

Is it possible to introduce a live counter on the website of tickets remaining? Also, is it possible to agree allocation of tickets sooner? Criteria seems ever changing, why? It is difficult to plan around this. Doesn't always seem fair for members to always be behind season ticket holders for away tickets.

TD – can we have an away season ticket option introduced?

DL – not considered away season ticket in the past due to the small amount of fans that attend every away match. Criteria for tickets depends on many factors – allocation, popularity, how many people in each bracket. We rarely sell out at membership level, as most fixtures reach general sale.

JW – is it an issue when you can't get tickets at the same time as your friend/s.

LB – hard to find out how many games you have on your history.

Mark M – can we introduce a number – easy to see. Point system?

DL – tried point system in the past – very difficult to get right for any club. Can look at system capability for purchase history. Fans can always talk to ticket office to get this information.

Mike S – hoped for a gesture on season ticket prices after poor season. Incentive and thanks for support.

DL – good to have a subgroup/additional meeting to talk about prices for next season.

ME – thanked club for concessionary rates in premium area.

It was agreed that a separate sub-group will meet to discuss 2019/20 prices.

Matchday Experience

Mark M – WiFi. Brighton was very good.

KT – would love great WiFi. No stadium has it right just yet. Technology not ready but coming soon. Currently in talks and research. Concentration of people in small area creates the issue. Very expensive to fix at this time. We have to weigh up cost against benefit.

TS – the Ageas Bowl have spent a considerable sum and for me it didn't work particularly well on the day.

KT – we want the money spent to be effective. High priority for us. New technology in 2021. We are looking to build 4G capacity so all fans can make calls, text and access data whilst at the stadium. This will rely on getting all, or the majority of, networks on board – something we are aiming to do.

Player interaction

Mark M – player interaction at end of match – disappointing. Appreciation to fans, even when we lose.

KT – aware of this and understand it hasn't been good enough. Mark Hughes on board and is encouraging relationship between players and fans. Can be difficult when we lose a match but will feedback the benefits of this.

Mark M – players signing autographs before fixtures – why has this changed?

KT – was a great thing our team did, however team preparation has changed with new managerial regime. Still opportunity after fixture – understand this is not ideal. Will again feedback to football side of business. Increased other opportunities such as player signing at open training session.

Sound system

Mark M – many fans not happy with the upgrade. Announcements get lost, fans complain that it is too loud, muffled and they can't hear in certain areas.

Mike E – can't hear and worrying if supporters were to miss important issues.

KP – no technical staff here to discuss, but we can bring this issue up in future meetings.

JW – supporters finding the loud music inhibiting atmosphere just before kick-off.

TS – we need to improve the atmosphere in the stadium. Element of trial and error.

KT – we have new staff introduced to improve matchday entertainment.

JW – difficult to get chanting and atmosphere going with loud music.

KT – trying to get balance right with football side and supporter side. Players want the lift of loud atmosphere.

Difficult to please all fans – some supporters like loud music, some don't.

Really keen to get an additional group together for matchday experience at some time soon.

It was agreed that a separate sub-group will meet to discuss matchday experience

Smoking Areas

MH – stadium access system will only allow ticket to be used once. To control smokers going in and out we would have to build a fence around the whole stadium. It is very difficult to manage because the design of the stadium prohibits this.

Mark M – can we add smoking facts to FAQ's?

Food and Drink

Mark C – service and queuing times have been getting longer, not the same as away games. Seems as though there is a lack of staff understanding and efficiency.

PB – This season we have had a large turnover of staff, with a high number of university students leaving. Worked hard to recruit additional staff in the summer. We are aware of the issues that we had at our opening two home matches, as we had to depend on a large number of agency staff. These staff do not have the experience that experienced members of the team do and therefore average service times were longer (24 seconds average service time gone up to 35 seconds this season). Have tried new methods to help ease the queues in the concourse, such as a beer token system.

YW – felt that the staff members selling these were not vocal enough.

PB – points taken on board and will liaise with network for advice on how to improve.

Mark C – do you meet with other clubs?

PB – yes we do. We are also part of a stadium experience group and meet regularly to share best practice. Important to note we have trialled new opening times and now stay open through the first half until the 55th minute.

Mark C – can we invite people to stay behind after the fixture – offer food and drink?

DT – Spoke at length around fanzone plans. Challenge we currently have is that there is getting fans to come to the stadium early. When we can get the fanzone up and running it will increase engagement and pressure will be lessened. Currently in discussion with council.

KP – club are really open to feedback around these areas – please keep an eye out for post-match survey and encourage fans to fill it in.

ME – suggested drink only queues.

PB – good suggestion although we have to look at how it effects other queues.

Operation of season ticket discount

LB – bought up issues surrounding missing out on season ticket holder discount because of long queues. Arrive early enough, miss discount because of queue – not fair.

PB – Really good point – will take away and come back to you in the next few weeks.

Conclusion

KP - Great first meeting. (Things to take away – please see action points below)

Dates for next meeting discussed. Beginning, middle and end of season. Therefore next would be just after Christmas. Subgroups in the meantime for specific issues.

MS – how would subgroups work?

KP – not something we have done before but keen to learn. Potential dates to follow shortly.

Action Points;

Increased communication around key issues
Investigate counter on ticketing site
Subgroup – Matchday Experience
Subgroup – Ticketing
KT – to feedback regarding player interactions
PB – Will come back with update regarding STH discount

Meeting ended.