

Cross Party Working Group : The Future of Scottish Football

20 February 2018
The Scottish Parliament

Minutes

Present: Fulton MacGregor (Convenor), Alan Stubbs (MSP Staff), Sheena McCulloch, Richard Lyle (MSP), Iain McMenemy (Stenhousemuir FC), Simon Barrow (SFSA Chair), Andrew Jenkins (Head of Supporters Direct Scotland), David Hamilton (Scottish Government), Greig Mailer (Scottish FA), Ann Quinn (Scottish FA), Donald Gillies (Scottish FA), Andy Gould (Scottish FA), Paul McNeill (Scottish FA), Gavin Michie (Scottish Women's Football), Malcolm Dingwall Smith (Sport Scotland), Finlay Carson (MSP), Calum Beattie (SPFL), Nicky Reid (SPFL Trust), John Mason (MSP Shettleston), Lee Anne Menzies (MSP Staff)

Fulton MacGregor MSP opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

1. AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM were read, moved and adopted

2. Election of Office Bearers

2.1 Convenor – Fulton MacGregor MSP nominated by Richard Lyle MSP and seconded by John Mason (MSP)

2.2 Depute Convenors – James Dornan MSP and Jeremy Balfour nominated by Fulton MacGregor MSP and seconded by Richard Lyle MSP

2.3 Secretary – Ann Quinn (Scottish FA) nominated by Fulton MacGregor and seconded by Richard Lyle MSP

Fulton MacGregor thanked Sheena McCulloch for her services as Secretary and for bringing her professionalism and knowledge of the game to the role.

3. Scottish FA: Grassroots Football

Andy Gould presented on grassroots football within the Scottish FA outlining the progress that the Association has made over recent years and the challenges they face moving forward. Paul McNeill talked about Clubs for Communities and how we plan to take that forward.

The concluding slides outlined the four main areas of challenge/opportunity:

- Facility Access
- Affordability
- Developing from voluntary organisation to small business
- Strategic connections between national & local objectives

Fulton MacGregor opened up the meeting to questions following this and asked about touchline behaviour and what the Scottish FA were doing regarding this. Andy Gould said that there are various initiatives within the Scottish FA around Positive Coaching. The philosophy for children is on participation rather than winning, particularly in the small sided game where we try to encourage trophy free tournaments. The emphasis is on the importance of education, structure and format of games.

Finlay Carson suggested that there should be closer involvement with the senior clubs and the junior/community clubs and Andy Gould said we support those types of relationships and believes that this is improving all the time with senior clubs taking more interest in the community; not just on football matters but on social issues.

Greig Mailer discussed the situation at Hibernian FC where he was previously. They had a Club Liaison Officer whose role was to build relationships with community clubs; starting with player development and this worked both ways as players dropping out of the senior game would then become involved in the amateur game. Hibernian also took the Scottish Cup around the local clubs which created good PR and better relationships. Andy Gould also praised the model at Aberdeen FC who have invested in an individual to support grassroots football.

Fulton MacGregor informed the group about an initiative he had heard about entitled Family Fund which gives grants to families with disabled children and suggested that we could use organisations like this to spread the word about accessibility to football.

4. The Work Programme

Allan Stubbs then asked the representatives from the Scottish FA how they felt this group could help. Andy Gould said that we should focus on one or two key areas such as access and affordability. James Dornan said the work programme should not just be one strand and asked about the future of Hampden and the governance of the game. Andrew Jenkins also raised the issue of Sports tax and the facts that Clubs are struggling with this. George Adam asked if we could not do more via the Community Empowerment Act and there was a suggestion that we get in speakers from groups who have already been involved in this.

David Hamilton said that football was a very busy landscape with lots of stakeholders and felt that we should consider where the forum would be able to add most value. He suggested facilities, accessibility and affordability. Inclusion on the terraces as well as on the pitch should also be considered and whilst some of the issues raised were important we should not overlap with other committees.

Nicky Reid said accessibility was not just around facilities but could be anything from transport issues to mental health and that there was a wider portfolio to consider. James Dornan cited the recent case of a footballer who left the game because of stress and he said that this proved there was still some way to go. Simon Barrett said it was important to take into account the fan's perspective.

The Offensive Behaviour at Football Act was raised and Allan Stubbs indicated that this was already being discussed at all levels so is maybe not for this group. It was suggested that it would be sensible to invite someone from Sporta or COSLA to the next meeting.

Sheena said that accessibility is also about publicity and that the women's game does not get the same amount of publicity as the men's game and therefore girls do not know where to go to play football and this is a barrier.

Iain McMenemy said that fans' surveys were always bringing up the subject of governance so it is important to take cognisance of this as our fans own the game and we must represent fans on this committee. Iain also felt that there was not enough being done for those people who cannot afford to play and that we should find a discrete way of helping out families financially to allow their kids take part in programmes.

Paul McNeill agreed that this was an issue but said that most of our community clubs already had a humanitarian fund in place already and that it might be good to show these case studies.

Fulton MacGregor summarised the meeting and agreed that we should take accessibility forward as the main topic for the next meeting and invite along guest speakers. Fulton felt that the issue of the future of Hampden Park was a separate issue for a one off meeting with an agreed panel and that we would come back to that.

Greig Mailer then briefed the meeting regarding the current situation on the National Stadium which was that the Scottish FA started out with four options on the table which had been narrowed down to two; stay at Hampden or move to Murrayfield. These options will be investigated thoroughly over the coming months with a decision in the summer.

James Dornan asked if it would be purely a financial decision or would other factors be taken into consideration and Greig confirmed that all aspects and opinions would be taken into consideration.

George Adam talked about the fan ownership model and St Mirren. He believed that fan ownership could be the way forward for many clubs.

Fulton MacGregor concluded the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and said we would look to bring more focus in upcoming meetings.