

# **Cross Party Working Group: The Future of Scottish Football**

**30 June 2020**

**By Zoom Conference Call**

## **Minutes**

**Present:** Fulton MacGregor (Convenor), George Adam (MSP), Stacey Adam (MSP Staff), Simon Barrow (SFS), Danny Bisland (Scottish FA), Neil Campion (Scottish FA), Andy Gould (Scottish FA), David Hamilton (Scottish Government), Maurice Golden (MSP), Stuart McCaffrey (Scottish Football Partnership), Michael McEwan, Lindsay MacKenzie (SportsScotland), Marian Maclean (Police Scotland), Iain McMenemy (Stenhousemuir FC), Paul McNeill (Scottish FA), Craig Peattie, (Scottish Powerchair FA), Ann Quinn (Scottish FA), Sandy Riach (SDSA), Douglas Samuel (The Spartans FC), Cammy Watt (Scottish FA)

**Apologies:** Calum Beattie (SPFL), Campbell Crawford (Police Scotland) Fiona McIntyre (Scottish Women's Football), Alan Russell (Supporters Direct Scotland), Colin Smythe (MSP)

### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Fulton MacGregor opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

### **2. Minutes of 27 January 2020**

There were no changes to the draft minutes and they were proposed by Cammy Watt and seconded by Fulton MacGregor.

### **3. Cross Party Working Group – AGM**

The AGM was held and the following agreed:

- Convenor – Fulton MacGregor MSP nominated by Andy Gould and seconded by Stuart McCaffrey
- Depute Convenor – George Adam, MSP, nominated by Sandy Riach and seconded by Fulton MacGregor
- Secretary – Ann Quinn (Scottish FA) nominated by Fulton MacGregor and seconded by Craig Peattie.

### **4. Impact of COVID-19 on Grassroots Football**

Paul McNeill gave a presentation on COVID-19 and the impact on grassroots football. He summarised the key dates during lockdown and also the charitable work being carried out by clubs in the community. He emphasised the commitment of the volunteers in the grassroots games and the innovative ways in which they have reached out and contributed to the community during this difficult time.

This was followed by a presentation from Douglas Samuels of The Spartans FC who talked about the immediate and medium term challenges facing his club and grassroots football in general. He discussed the challenges from both a football club perspective and also from an Academy (charitable arm) perspective.

Following these presentations there was a discussion around how the grassroots volunteers have supported their communities and how the power of sport can make a difference. Mr McNeill felt it was important to capitalise on the good work that has been undertaken to give a positive legacy to the COVID situation.

Mr Samuel said he had found the whole experience very humbling and inspiring and that it was clear that we could improve the quality of life through sport and people. He talked about the food distribution initiative which they started during lockdown where initially they were distributing 40 food parcels to families. The club identified those families by liaising with local Head Teachers. Mr Samuel said it was survival mode at the start however it grew from there and they formed a consortium with other stakeholders and as a result provided 60,000 food parcels over the last 3 months. Mr Samuel said they moved from survival mode into enable mode; they had players donating wages and parents still paying fees to help out the club.

There were challenges for the Club; leadership capacity (everyone had their day jobs); effective communications (am I doing the right things according to information supplied); confidence and anxiety (are we doing things correctly?) and a loss of sponsorship which was critical to the club.

Mr Samuel also pointed out that whilst there were challenges; there were also opportunities as they were engaging with people in the community that they had not managed to reach before eg single parents. He felt it was important that they grasped those opportunities to grow the club.

Mr McNeill said he never thought we would be in a position where we were trying to restart the sport however he agreed that there were big opportunities as people seemed to have grasped the idea of using outdoor space more, so we had to harness that.

Mr McNeill then talked about how we move forward from here and, in particular, how do facilities get up and running again. He talked about the 13 July 2020 and relaxation of rules for Children and Young people; he felt it was important that football continues to be for all and that we don't leave anyone behind when we re-start again.

Mr Riach took on board the point that was made earlier, that clubs could attract people from other areas, eg single parents due the food parcel initiative. He asked about attracting disabled people to clubs. Mr Samuel agreed that whilst clubs were welcoming of disabled players there was still some work to do on this. Mr Riach questioned whether facilities at clubs were an issue.

Mr Gould wanted to thank all of the clubs and groups on the incredible work that has been done during lockdown. He felt it was important that this was recognised and embraced.

Mr Watt raised the issue of the challenge that Local Authorities and Leisure Trusts as they try to recover lost income during lockdown. He felt it was important for government to open a dialogue with them in order to get facilities open at an affordable cost to financially strapped clubs.

Mr Barrow said the re-engagement with fans had been good. He was grateful to the financial support recently given from external stakeholders to the professional and semi-professional clubs. His concern was that this type of charitable money was largely given to “project” based initiatives where there were objectives to be met. He questioned whether it could be used for the employment of staff to help run the clubs. As a result of the pandemic, volunteers were being asked to do more and more and there was a real risk of burn-out. It would be helpful if charitable donations could fund posts within clubs.

Mr McCaffrey thanked Mr Samuel and all the clubs for the tremendous effort during lockdown. He felt the key was sustainability; football had shown a positive side but he felt that volunteers need to get something back from their efforts and this would require significant investment from Government. Mr McCaffrey wanted to look creatively at how we support clubs going forward. There is no doubt that lockdown has made people more active so we have to capitalise on that.

Mr Golden also complimented the clubs on the work that has been undertaken and asked about the impact on the loss of being able to train at elite level. He felt there must be an impact on health with the lack of regular training. Mr McNeill confirmed, that whilst lockdown has meant no group training or physical exercise, that there have been many initiatives on-line for young people to keep fit.

Mr Adams talked about the work of the St Mirren charitable trust and the fact that what they are doing now is totally different to what they would normally do or what they thought they would do. Fans were still buying season tickets as charitable gesture to the club but Mr Adams felt it was so important for football to be at the funding table to make a case. Mr Adams suggested a meeting with Mr Joe FitzPatrick, Health Minister, in order to present the facts and figures of what has been happening during lockdown and to make it clear that we believe football is a solution to the health issues facing society. Mr McNeil agreed and felt that we could produce some very compelling information to support a funding case.

Mr Samuel also felt it would be important to raise the issue of Community Asset Transfer with the Government as clubs who venture down this path appear to find obstacles. With the pressure on LA’s and Leisure Trusts this could be a win-win situation. He also talked about prescribed exercise and the value of that.

Ms MacKenzie said that from Sportscotland’s point of view, where football went other sports would almost certainly follow. She felt it was important to keep and build on the outreach work during lockdown, for clubs to be able to efficiently capitalise on funding available, and to make the most of the increased health and fitness of people during lockdown. To do that there were several things we had to look at; financial support, infrastructure, communications and strategy. She also felt that it was important to get things right in the short term as this would benefit the long term solutions. She said she would be delighted to work alongside the Scottish FA to make this happen.

Mr Adams went back to the comments from Mr Samuel regarding social prescription. He felt that trust would have to be developed between the GP’s and the external bodies concerned for this to be successful but agreed that it could be a solution. Mr Samuel cited the obesity issue in Scotland and how football could impact on that with this initiative.

Ms Maclean informed the meeting that Police Scotland were publishing a draft Engagement Strategy looking at the response to football and the attitudes towards football. She acknowledged that this would predominately be aimed at the professional game however she felt it was important to focus on all of this good work that has been going on. Mr McNeill agreed and also said that if we could engage young people in football then it would have an impact for the police as it would perhaps keep them out of trouble.

Mr Peattie said that with the Powerchair players it would be some time before they could come back to football as many would be shielding. Also important to note that most volunteers in this particular area would be the parents of the players who would also be shielding. He said however he was interested in the steps being taken as they would probably piggyback onto that when they do return.

Mr Riach asked about a phased return to indoor football and the possibility of looking for alternatives as he felt that the longer it was delayed the more of an impact it would have on mental health.

Mr McNeill emphasised that it was important that we got everyone back to football; regardless of the challenges and we need to manage all groups equally so he would follow up after the meeting with Mr Peattie so see what else could be done.

## **5. AOCB**

There was no further business and the meeting concluded at 14.27pm