



## Saints Voice Panel – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### **Southampton Football Club Attendees:**

Martin Semmens	Chief Executive Officer
David Thomas	Commercial Director
Tim Greenwell	Chief Legal & Risk Officer
Anthony Cole-Johnson	Director of Sale & Stadium Experience
Khali Parsons	Head of Customer Relations & Fan Experience
Matthew Silvester	Head of Ticketing, Memberships & Hospitality
Caroline Carlin	Operational Standards & Compliance Manager
Aaron Heskins	Supporter Services Advisor

### **Minutes**

#### **Welcome:**

#### **Financial Position:**

SV – Finance situation of the Club following quite a few rumours in the press?

The LD issue was nothing to do with our ownership, there is no relation. LD have struggled in the current situation and couldn't support us.

During the pandemic we lose revenue on sales, tickets, shirts, events (concerts, weddings), TV revenue. We took a loan allowing us to operate effectively and come out at the end of the pandemic, in as good a position as before. This is a straightforward loan agreement. Did this for longevity – put us in a better position in 10years

David – All clubs need to contribute to the broadcast rebate – end of 19/20 season, all matches were broadcast. In order to agree to that, Sky and BT Sport who own the rights have negotiated a refund from the PL as they lost value in allowing all games to be broadcast. Our business decisions are based on commitments.

Martin – we have to make sure the club is safe and that we are not putting anyone at risk. If we didn't go back to playing, we wouldn't be where we are now. If we didn't finish, and the games had not been broadcast the PL would have really struggled.

#### **Shirt Sponsor:**

SV – new shirt sponsor was 1 year – Is this reflective of anything else in this company?

Martin – 1 year is reflective of the circumstances. We know this company well – David has a relationship with them. We didn't wish to negotiate a long-term contract in a short space of time.

David – We haven't recouped the same value as LD. A 1-year deal to allows the market to recover. Process for a new sponsor starts next month for the following season – these processes normally take 6 months. We hope the market rate that we could command this time last year will improve in 6 months' time.

SV – What are plans for those who have bought a now outdated shirt?





David – We immediately started to look at the options with the replica shirts. Mindful that shirts were selling well and that fans would want a solution. We are exploring all options. Until we go through the process and establish logistics, we cannot provide clarity – but we will not put any of the supporters at a disadvantage.

Martin – we would much prefer to have gone out saying we know exactly what to do and this is how we will resolve this, but we know it is better to wait until we had a full solution.

#### **Online Store:**

SV – online shopping experience? Members shared negative experiences:

- ST discount (10%) is not being added online when purchasing products from the store
- When you select an item, later decide you want to remove it from the basket, it doesn't work. Went to order an away shirt; I couldn't get discount online. I went to order in store instead but when I returned to the website later the shirt was still in my basket.
- Despatch – I ordered 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shirt x 2 – got 1 of each. Had the same issue with the away shirt. As if someone isn't reading what is on the order.
- 19/20 sale, ordered a large shirt and paid. About 2 weeks later I got an email saying there was an error with stock. It then took another 14 days for the refund.

ACJ – We have a new online journey, which was created from scratch. We have implemented a bespoke option, however there are some elements that we need to tweak.

Before the pandemic around 25% of orders were online which quickly went to 100%. We are working on getting retail back up to speed – they got overwhelmed with how busy it has been and we appreciate that there are learnings that we have taken on board.

We had a huge number of orders for shirts from previous seasons – website and internal stock did not connect as it should have. The website was essentially selling stock that wasn't there.

Development team are working on our retail site, and we are now dispatching orders within a day or two.

#### **Online Ticketing website:**

SV – ST process, positive comms. Negative around online purchase for larger groups.

SV – Others had same issue too. You can only apply your own credit and not others. There was an option to request a call back however in the end we just logged in individually to each account.

SV – The problem was that they had to try calling reception but sounds like it has been recognised by the club and a process in place to rectify.

SV – I requested a call back and got a call the following day. It did work really well and was fairly quick!

ACJ – We have gone live with new ticket system, which is a huge undertaking, especially coinciding with a lockdown. The new system benefits from improved GDPR criteria and a general improvement in the flow of the system. There have been challenges not helped by the pandemic and having a skeleton staff in place and little or no access to our stadium.

Matt Silvester – The new ticketing website project has taken a year to develop. We looked at all aspects of the journey and this was plotted out before this situation we found ourselves in.

You cannot use someone else's credit at all for security reasons, it is simply not possible. Not ideal, but this is not something we can change. As soon as we saw the difficulties, we tried to make the





info more apparent in the original articles and FAQ's. Although we couldn't be at the stadium to answer the phones, we put in place the call back request system and the vast majority of requests were responded to quickly.

Now we return 2 days a week with the phonedlines open and make it as clear as possible to assist as many Season Ticket holders as possible.

Working on skeleton staff from their homes on a new system has been a real challenge. Training, security, and responding in isolation.

Backlog built up when so many fans understandably waited until the last week to renew or contact, but we are making good progress.

### **Sustainability:**

SV – Sustainability has come up a few times – audit happening? What is the update?

Caroline – been very active. Lots of great work going on around the club, we are on a journey. We cannot do this on our own – we do need the supporters in the stadium to work with us and promote what we are doing.

We are creating a strategy with a 10-year plan, which is broken down into waste management, carbon footprint and education and engagement.

Will promote all over our social platforms, website we updated regularly.

Made changes – now use 100% renewable energy, reusable cups came in last season. We would like to know your thoughts, because we want to continue and not use single use plastics.

Opportunities to turn food waste etc into liquids. Little log piles to create habitats for animals in the areas at the TG. Getting local schools involved and tree planting, Saints Foundation supporting. Changing Club vehicles to electric over the next few years and adding charging points.

Exploring matchday and day to day travel with a view to reducing congestion and emissions.

Talking to local bus companies, looking at lift share, perhaps even a park and ride. Liaising and getting advice from local councils and authorities. Everyone wants to improve and lessen the impact on environment.

Education and engagement is important, and share best practice with us. Staff did a beach clean at Weston shore. Will be doing more, probs on a quarterly basis – will promote.

Will add a sustainability page to our website soon! Lots of internal training going on. Sustainability group leading.

SV – how can we best help?

CC – We really need that help with pushing the understanding of what we are trying to do and the changes that we are trying to make.

Educate behaviours on supporters travelling to the stadium.

Also provide ideas and suggestions. We are still learning, and this is an evolving strategy.

TG – we deliberately started small to get us off the ground internally, to ensure we achieve and sustain.

Forest Green have been particularly good in this space, providing a good model to aspire too.

Anything you see that has potential for change or improvement, in particular the matchday footprint please do feedback.





SV – We talked about before, more water fountains have been put in at the stadium/training ground – are there still plans to put more access to water fountains in?

TG – We are in a good place to build on with this especially when fans are allowed back.

SV – Avenue traffic, now 1 lane. Has been an encouragement for cycling with this area. It is quite limited in terms of cycle options to store them etc.

CC – Have considered upgrading cycling storage facilities with potential for this to be looked after by security. We are looking at the Liverpool model. Staff promoted cycle to work scheme.

TG – On traffic, we are looking at a transport plan to St. Mary's. We know we have lots of supporters visit the stadium via car and it's something that we've got to develop.

CC – Survey shows a high proportion of supporter's travel on their own. We will encourage car share and other methods to take more cars off the road. Rather than dictating to fans we want to offer a number of options that may better benefit them rather than driving themselves. More details to come.

#### **Supporter Feedback Form:**

SV – Supporter feedback form. Came up with the idea following abuse on various platforms – idea of this form is for everyone to be able to raise an issue without targeting a particular panel member. We can present the subjects to the club with analytics which are categorised into certain segments i.e. ticketing, players etc. Some supporters prefer not to use the Club version which is another reason why we came up with this idea which we can release across current recognised digital channels.

KP – Anything that increases the engagement with the wider fan base and supporters would be great and a positive move.

TG – The form is fine, looks really good. Being able to see trends as they come through would mean we can respond quicker and looks to address anything as they happen.

#### **Return to Football**

SV – Returning to football with supporters?

ACJ – Working from draft directions from PL and Gov. Full assessment of how many people we can allow in, and how they move in and out of the stadium. We are undertaking full modelling on in flows and out flows with how many people we can safely accommodate under current guidance. We are working on a code of conduct agreement for supporters to understand the expectations. It will be a different experience, with clear guidance on how fans can help us by adhering to the code, which we will go out with as soon as possible.

Working with catering partners to see what food provisions and facilities we may be able to offer. We have moved to contactless stadium wide and across all of our sites, which has been communicated.

Our new ticket system allows us to understand family/social bubbles and what they look like. We will implement a new piece of work where bubbles can come together when applicable.

Vulnerability – we will consider their needs of those that are shielding and how we can support them.





Red zone – Current guidelines with the closed doors guidance wipes out large spaces of the stadium. Working how to align with the PL guidance which essentially is for the protection of everyone inside the stadium.

We will have an agreed attendance number with PL and local authorities. New entry system in place, which can speed up entry and make the process a lot quicker.

Will be e-ticket, via your mobile or a print at home ticket. Unlikely you will be in your normal seat for the time being, so we will not be issuing new season tickets until we are back to full capacity to prevent confusion. We need to map out a stadium that complies with social distancing, and ensure fans are as near to their own seat as possible.

Once we do get full guidance from the PL and Gov we will go out to all supporters in full. When we do open it will be quite clear and quick due to the amount of work that has already been undertaken.

SV – Matchday hospitality? Seasonal only not match by match – is this a lost opportunity to get fans to pay a bit more in a zone which is separated out already?

ACJ – We value our supporters, and do not feel comfortable telling someone they cannot attend under their season ticket then asking them to pay hundreds to attend in hospitality area. Doesn't sit right with us to do that

Key for us is to bring back our ST holders, including current seasonal hospitality guests as soon as possible.

SV – If you are uncomfortable with attending do you have the option to opt out?

ACJ – Yes of course – not on a match by match basis, but certainly for blocks of games at a time. For example, you will likely be able to opt out of Oct & Nov matches, with an opportunity to reassess after that.

#### **Squad numbers:**

SV – Squad numbers have just been released and obviously there has been a few changes to numbers. What are the plans in place for supporters that have purchased a shirt with now the wrong squad number?

ACJ – The proportion of this is very small for purchases. We will switch the shirt out when we can.

#### **Communication:**

SV – People didn't feel there was enough comms from the club. i.e. new player signings.

DT – We could not confirm until it is 100% confirmed. As I'm sure you can appreciate contract negotiations can take some time which would obviously be affected if we had announced anything.

Martin – We were waiting on a visa. Normally takes 2/3 days. FA put it on hold because of the pandemic.

We need to keep communicating, although I think you can over communicate when there is little happening. We want to keep being clear and open, but can't always share everything when it is sensitive.

#### **Next meeting:**

KP – Closed meeting, plans to catch up in between the next planned meeting when key points become clear.

