



## AGENDA

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021

18:00-19:30

Online Teams Call

**Type of Meeting:** Saints Voice Panel Meeting with Southampton Football Club Staff

**Meeting Facilitator:** Jim Gay

**Notetaker:** Aaron Heskins

**Attendees:** Southampton Football Club

**Martin Semmens (MS)** – Chief Executive

**Toby Steele (TS)** – Managing Director

**David Thomas (DS)** – Chief Commercial Officer

**Tim Greenwell (TG)** – Chief Legal & Risk Officer

**Anthony Cole-Johnson (ACJ)** – Director of Sales & Stadium Experience

**Luke Nicholson (LN)** – Director of Brand & Content

**Sarah Batters (SB)** – Director of Marketing & Partnerships

**Khali Parsons (KP)** – Head of Customer Relations & Fan Experience

**Matthew Silvester (MS1)** – Head of Ticketing, Membership & Hospitality

**Caroline Carline (CC)** – Operations & Compliance Manager

**Jim Gay (JG)** – Supporter Services Manager & SLO

**Aaron Heskins (AH)** – Supporter Services Advisor & DLO

### Saints Voice Panel (SV)

- 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

**Agenda Items:           Points for Discussion – Panel**

***Club/SFC Updates***

*Welcome*

*SFC Mobile App*

*Manchester United Result*

*SFC Accounts 19/20*

*Matchday Experience*

Feedback from return to football games this season  
Future plans around re-opening St Mary's

*Ticketing*

Season Ticket refunds  
Planning for 2021/22 season  
New ticketing system – purchase history

*Halo Effect & Sustainability update*

*Retail*

Online purchase experience & feedback  
New kit provider & launch plans

*Saints Voice*

Feedback form  
Junior Saints Voice

*AOB*



## Minutes

18:02 Start

### SFC Mobile App

LN – The App has not launched yet; however, I will give you a quick demo of what it looks like. We have been working with a company who also created the Spurs and Edgbaston Cricket Club App.

This will be available for all Android and Apple users.

The App itself will link to the website and will provide live updates. It will be a similar layout. You can watch video content, gain access to your tickets, visit the online shop, take part in a weekly quiz and more.

There will also be a matchday live feature, where you can vote for your player of the match, as well as pre-ordering your food/ drink at half time (once matches return).

A lot more is still to come, and I will be reaching out to you in due course to provide feedback on development that has been undertaken to date.

SV – We feel this is positive, and that this is something that has been missing.

### Manchester United Result

TS – Tuesday's result is something that I wanted to address with you all before we get going. It goes without saying that we are all shocked by the result on Tuesday. It certainly feels different to Leicester – which may sound a strange thing to say. We had been playing quite well up to the United game and felt hard done by against Villa. A number of circumstances around this game just came together particularly with injuries, the goal that was not given, VAR decisions, and the red cards. Not to brush this all under the carpet, we do not accept these recent results, and these are unacceptable. Lots of work goes on behind scenes after matches with the medics, analysts and everyone looking at it. We are not going to react the same as Leicester with media shut down where we had an internal look at ourselves. We are extremely disappointed with the result, but we are looking forward to the future and putting this result behind us.

From our perspective, most fans are behind Ralph and the team, as are we. In Ralph's press conference, he made it clear that he is very happy with the support that he gets and has been very complimentary of the club and especially the supporters.

Together with the busy fixture schedule recently, and maybe a bit of bad luck we have found ourselves on the end of a terrible result. From a club point of view we are certainly not wallowing after this. We accept it has happened; it is not acceptable, but we are in a much better place than in previous seasons.

SV – We agree that it did not feel like the Leicester result, however it is certainly worth watching Ralph's press conference – he has a lot of respect for this club and for the supporters. On a different point, the decisions in the past few matches have been poor – what are your thoughts?

TS – We have been really frustrated with all the decisions recently. We have made a case to The FA and the Premier League that we do not have the same officials again. We felt hard done by in several games this season and feel that we had to say that something. What the FA or Premier League do is up to them, but ultimately, we feel some of the decisions have cost us points and damaged our reputation. I respect that match officials are only human, but on balance the number of decisions that we feel hard done by has been disproportionate.



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## SFC Accounts 2019/20

SV - We recognise that COVID would have an impact as to why our accounts show such a loss, but even taking that into account, that is 2 significant losses in a row. How do we plan to correct these losses, especially with another potential COVID affected year to account for? There are also other questions about reduction in intangible assets, and exceptional onerous costs.

TS – With regards the reduction in value of intangible assets, I would not read into that too much, as that is the depreciated cost of our players. For example, you buy a player for £20million on a 4-year contract. After all of that, the £20million gets capitalised into intangible assets. After 2 years the value in our books drops to £10 million, so you are charging £5 million a year to the profit/ loss account. After those 2 years, that players market value may be £30 million, but that does not get reflected in those accounts.

So, the fact that we have dropped from £138 million to £97 million is because we are charging each player transfer fees through the profit/ loss. We are adding new players that we bought – any players sold, come off that.

SV – Is Carrillo a contract right off?

TS – Just to be clear, we had not written off his contract because he left. We had to accelerate the cost that we would have had for him in 2021, back into 2020. As well as the remainder of his transfer fee that we had not taken to the profit/ loss yet. Just to reiterate, we did not pay him any money to go. It is just us accelerating the cost we had left, to take to our profit/ loss account for 2020. This results in us saving money in 2021 because we do not have those costs.

SV – The big message is the successive losses of £40 million, the 9% interest on the loan. With COVID we cannot see the way forward?

TS – When COVID started we felt we should take out a facility that covers us for the worst case, which is why it is at the level it is.

I cannot ignore the level of losses that we have. The one thing I would say in response to that is that we have one year left to wash through all those players on our books that are not contributing to the squad. Next year we start fresh in terms of the value in our asset base, and reinvestment back into the squad. However, that needs for the transfer market to recover. As we have seen in January it was the case of loan deals rather than permanent transfers.

We may have a year of losses due to COVID, but we hope to get fans back and our commercial teams can continue to do their great work in building that sponsorship base and so on.

SV - Why do we give long contracts to our young players?

TS- If someone approaches us for a player, they are worth far more than they are if they have one year left on their contract.

The plan is to continue investing in young players and develop them. Of course, we want them to stay with us, but we know that sometimes they do not, and we need to move some on, because that is how we become sustainable. We want to bring the wage bill down and we have made some inroads in doing that by trimming the squad and letting players go out on loan with loan fees covering their wages.

Please rest assured that we have a plan in place to get back to being profitable.

SV – There has been some discontent with transfers, especially as we are short in full back area. Why did we let 2 go?



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TS – This had nothing to do with finances. We tried to get new players in on several occasions. January is tough as teams do not want to let players go – especially with COVID due to squad depth. Players that may not have been getting regular game time have been kept by clubs just in case they are required due to sickness, mainly around COVID or injury.

Ralph's view on Jake and Yan was that they are at the stage where they need game time but were not going to get it here yet. We do have cover at full back with other players such as Prowse, Stephens, Diallo and Salisu.

We brought in Minamino because we have had a lot of injuries in the areas that he can play

## Matchday Experience

SV – Positive points overall, both games were really well managed in terms of safety and the overall matchday experience. Coming into the ground it was clear where we needed to go, the stewards were on point and understood what they needed to do. At the end of the game there was clear marshalling in terms of who should go when, and it was clear a lot of effort had gone into how this would work. One point to note, a lot of people in the queue had not arrived at the time they were supposed to. If anything can be done to increase comms around this to make it clear it would just speed up the process. It was a commendable effort and opens the opportunity when allowed to open more of the ground, I hope?

ACJ – Thank you for your feedback. There was no magic book to get this over the line, and it was quite a piece of work for 2,000 people to try and make it special, and address loyalty amongst our season ticket holders. What was wonderful was the noise those 2,000 fans made, which shows fans make a real difference. We take on board your feedback and will be looking at options using technology for future games. The only sad piece was the West Ham game which got cancelled. I think you all felt the change in relationship between fan and steward, and fan and the club. We are keen to increase the positivity and experience for when we get all 32,000 back.

KP – I can echo what ACJ said. We took on board feedback from the first game v Sheffield United to make changes for the next (Manchester City) and we will continue to do so to make the experience better each time.

TG – The two-way dialog between fans and the club is vital moving forward, so please keep that coming. In terms of the capacity, we were only permitted and signed off for 2,000 as you know. We have been working on and have sign-off once government & SGSA restrictions allow to increase the capacity.

## Ticketing

SV – I think the announcement that came out a few weeks ago regarding season ticket refunds, or the ability to store funds and put towards next season is very positive. I think the refunds around other games has been a little patchy, I know the ticket office have been busy getting game ready, but some people have not been sure what refunds were coming and when. I think the communication could have been a little better around this.

ACJ – Really valid point. This is exactly why we ended up making the decision around the full refund piece. The scale of the operation to refund game by game is very time consuming and we did not envisage this really going on past October. We have been hitting around 90% of refunds being fully processed, with a number not being issued due to different payment issues/card providers, split accounts etc. Some of the communication issues, and slow refund process was the reason why we took the decision to offer full refunds.

SV – Just around the purchase history, quite a bit of feedback around people who wanted to check what groups they were in or tiers etc. We will be in a position soon when a lot of people will want to start having a look at this again.



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MS1 – We have been working on a dashboard, which at present is in the backend of what we see but we will be looking to push this through so that everyone can see it. Once pushed through supporters will be able to see a history of what games they have attended plus how long they have been a member/season ticket holder for.

ACJ – Just to add to this, our new ticketing system was bought in a pre COVID world. Ultimately the user experience was around purchasing a ticket in a full stadium world. We have had to adapt the system and essentially hold some developments to focus on refunds or building a plan in the system for the games we were able to stage. There is a lot more to come from the system which we just have not been able to show yet.

### **Planning for Season Ticket 2021-22**

SV – Our question was around what the plans are for next season?

ACJ – We are starting our planning now and have been getting a lot of insight in terms of what clubs are doing and what supporters need. Once we have an idea of the proposal, we will bring supporters in on the detail.

SV – On membership I was not aware of any communication this year that it would not be going ahead which would have been nice. We were just wondering if this would be re-instated next season, albeit numbers permitting in terms of how many tickets that might be available to members?

DT – Just to give you the top line view, we are currently looking at our long-term loyalty strategy in which membership will play a part moving forward. At present this has been very much ticket led but we really want to shift this into more added value schemes of which ticketing will be part of it.

SB – One of our priority pieces is to look at the loyalty strategy to see how we reward our most loyal fans as well as fans that might not come that often, and international fans to. This is something that we are working on and hope to be able to share with you soon.

### **Halo Effect & Sustainability update**

SV – Quite impressed with the speed at which the Halo effect was put together. Some time ago I remember a league table around sustainability in which Saints were close to the bottom. The main issues listed around being more sustainable are listed but we just wanted to know a bit more about transport, the carbon footprint and your thoughts on the team flying to games.

TG – We are looking at revamping matchday transport and across all our operations, so it does feature. In terms of flights to games we are doing a big piece on our carbon footprint and are looking at the data and overall patterns within the club, and how we go about offsetting these. Some matches we must fly to just because of logistics which is ok if we are running as effectively and as environmentally friendly as we can.

DT – Our home-grown initiative, Carbon offsetting which has been launched as part of the Halo Effect is linked to our academy success. So, every time an academy player makes his first team debut, we plant 250 trees. We are averaging 3 debuts a season, so over a 4-year period we hope to offset around 3,000 tons of carbon.

CC – Really delighted with the home grown initiative and the Halo Effect that was launched last week, which has received a lot of positive feedback. Moving up from the bottom of the sustainability league table to 6 is fantastic. We have been undertaking a lot of work to ensure that our approach is authentic on how we are dealing with the environment element of the sustainability strategy. You may remember that we spoke about the “Green City Charter” as we became founding signatories. I am delighted that we have now also signed up to the UNFCC Sport for climate action framework. We are making these very public pledges that as a club we will do all we can to reduce our impact on the environment and tell our story as we go. We hope that this will help to educate and influence others while also creating a positive legacy within our own City.



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## Retail

SV – We have had fans state to us that there were issues over delivery dates over Christmas, where dates were promised but not achieved. We all appreciate the difficulties we are facing at present; however, it may have been a little short sighted in stating that deliveries could have been made with the stated time scales. Additionally, on the replacement shirts with the megastore being shut you have dealt with that, but we have heard of a few issues. We are sure the issues will be resolved but just seems a bit more communication would be beneficial.

ACJ – I would like to offer an apology on the communication element, we have known of these challenges and there are reasons for them. Not making any excuses for it but to put the situation in perspective last year we did just under 2,000 online orders. This year we have had over 9,000 online orders, with a smaller workforce as we have had to adapt to COVID restrictions. Normally around 25% of our sales would be online, with the rest being made in our stores and of course on matchdays which is part of the reason why it has been so challenging.

On the shirt replacements we had a lot of orders, many of which needed to be decorated before being dispatched. Shirts on pre order needed to be brought in from China, with the youth shirts arriving slightly later than the adult ones. Once in the country they then needed to clear customs and be decorated before being dispatched. We were able to dispatch all 3,000 shirts in early December but appreciate that the communication should have been better. Around 100 shirts did arrive late which is really disappointing, but we were able to deliver the vast majority by the 20<sup>th</sup> December. The big thing we have learned out of all this is around communication, which we know needs to improve.

## Hummel Kit

SV – Really inspired by the new kit provider Hummel, which we think a large section of supporters will be as well. Above everything else well done for getting this done. Going forward is there a plan for when Hummel will be publishing the new kit, or does that happen when the Under Armor deal ends?

SB – Really happy that this has been received well, as we were excited to announce this deal. In terms of moving forward we are working everyday with Hummel to understand how the kit launch and partnership will work. Now it is a case of watch this space, but we should have something towards the end of the season. Hummel are keen to be a partner of the fans and have a real love for the Club, so watch this space.

ACJ – One of the things we are keen to do is bring in ranges that excite people and that are technically good in terms of quality. The same shirt the players wear will be the same the shirt that we have available in the store and available online.

SV – Under Armour were quite pricy, would you consider doing 2 shirts and changing the 3<sup>rd</sup> every other season. Or Would there be a different pricing structure on the new shirts?

ACJ – We will have a range that we think is more affordable. On the shirt types and the frequency of these changing it is very much an obligation that we produce 3 shirts.

SV – Are Hummel a sustainable company and do they recycle kit?

DT – Yes this is part of what we have been looking at, and I can assure you that more in to come so please watch this space.



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SV – Under Armour & the club seemed to struggle to keep up with delivery of new kit required. Do you see this happening at all with Hummel?

DT – Hummel partner with a company called Elite, so in terms of what this gives us is a much more agile process. As Elite are based in the UK, we believe this will provide us with a much more effective response in terms of the speed at which orders can be dispatched which is a great benefit. Elite are connected right into Hummel, so we are confident if there are no external factors as we have experienced we will not have the challenges that we have encountered in the past.

## Saints Voice

SV – We have created a Google form for ourselves which we can use on social media or email. This is to bring back feedback to the group which would allow us to discuss and put questions from the wider fan base to the club. We have discussed this, and it may well be the case that the current Saints Voice form may need to pull from the SFC website. We are hoping to have our form as the one and only form to enter and feel that the current form may confuse or prevent supporters from using as they may believe (incorrectly) that the club has sight of the form.

JG – This is something that we can look at with you and work out a solution, we do have some website changes currently in development around the Supporter Services pages. I would be happy to chat with our web team and yourselves over this so please do leave this with me.

KP – We have not really had sight of the emails that come through the form as they all come to you. We would have to speak to our web guys and discuss any changes that you want and what that means data wise in terms of any disclaimers that may be needed but happy to discuss this further.

JG – Just a last comment from me, we did have an item on the agenda “Junior Saints Voice” which is something that we are looking into. As we are tight for time, we will look to talk over this in more detail next time or arrange a separate session to go through some ideas.

## AOB

MS – Just to end, I did want to say that we have been through a tricky time over the last few days. I cannot leave the call without saying the impact that the fans have on the club and Ralph in particular. He is fine, and he was obviously hurt but the messages of support that he has received has been nothing short of amazing, and he cannot believe it. The fans have been amazing, and it was a big moment for him and us. The connection between the fans is even closer, and if you can pass our thanks onto all the people you represent that would be great and really appreciated. On behalf of everyone at the club, Thank you!

## Close

19:44 Finish



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