

New unified national supporters' organisation: Championship network elections

The Football Supporters' Federation and Supporters Direct will be merging into one organisation in the coming months and below is a list of candidates who have put themselves forward for consideration in the Championship network elections.

Each affiliate member can vote for up to three candidates to represent them on the new national council – over the next four pages you can find the supporting statements for each of the four candidates in the Championship network.

Teddy Bellamy – Millwall Supporters' Club:

Since being a committee member for the Millwall Supporters' Club, I have worked closely with club executives, including the Chief Executive, on many issues to improve the overall experience for our fans. For example, I am currently working on providing coaches to travel outlying fans to The Den on home matchdays, something which has never been done at the club before.

As the away fan liaison for our committee, I have begun to put together away day guides for our travelling fans in an attempt to improve their experience by providing them with innate local knowledge by going direct to the relevant supporters' club for information.

I have also liaised with other supporters' clubs and local police forces in order to improve policing and security for away matches which has been very successful when implemented. A good dialogue between all parties prior to the event has allowed us to mitigate past issues as well as keep our fans in the loop as I can now communicate any policing plans to them beforehand.

I'm passionate about improving the experience for away fans up and down the country and as such would be very eager to get behind campaigns that promote this. For example, I believe the Rail Fares working group is critical in ensuring football fans are recognised by train operators as important and lucrative customers and should therefore receive more flexible ticketing to protect them from short notice kick-off changes and missing return trains due to policing issues after matches. On top of this, I'd like to see a reduction in the restrictions placed on travelling football fans (such as dry trains) and the often heavy-handedness of the BTP who regularly berate fans simply for being fans.

Similarly, I feel that away fans are repeatedly let down by Sky and the EFL who agree to move fixtures solely for TV purposes without a thought for the fans who often have to make a crosscountry trip to get there. This often means that fans can't get a train either to or from the game, resulting in the further expense of a hotel. I would like to see a working group set up similar to that which the Premier League already has that lobbies Sky and the EFL on the behalf of Football League clubs, or at least see Football League supporter representatives co-opted on to the existing Premier League group.

Geoff Bielby – Hull City Supporters' Trust:

I first became engaged with fans groups in 2013 when, incensed that West Yorkshire Police arbitrarily chose to “Bubble” the Huddersfield Town v Hull City fixture on Easter Saturday restricting travel for Hull City fans. I joined a group of fans arranging protest actions together with FSF and HTST

Later in 2013 Assem Allam fell out with Hull City Council over their reluctance to transfer ownership of the Council owned stadium. This led to his attempt to change the club playing name to “Hull Tigers”. I became involved with the campaign opposing this name change, was elected as a Director on the inaugural board of the campaign group, City Till We Die, in early 2014.

Later that year a merger with Tigers Cooperative, the then dormant Supporters Trust originally established in 1999, was agreed. On 1st January 2014 the two organisations completed the merger and Tigers Co-op was reborn, trading as Hull City Supporters Trust (HCST). I joined the new Board of Directors.

Following the 2016 HCST AGM the new board of directors elected me as Chairman, a position I hold today. Shortly this our Club announced a new Membership Scheme, which had merits but not at the total abolition of all concession prices! Protests began initially with a “Red card display” v Brentford in late April, a live Sky Sports match, an idea of mine which we delivered in only three days!

Promotion to the Premier League followed and I attended the FSF led Premier League Dialogue meeting with other EPL Fans reps in July 2016, and the FSF and SD AGMs at Wembley where I was able to meet and forge relationships with like minded supporters from other clubs.

Having decided match day protests were not having any impact on the club during 2016 in January 2017 HCST changed our approach. We began written dialogue with the club backed by regular press updates. Then Hull City decided to host quarterly Supporter Committee meetings following structured dialogue requirements beginning April 2017.

Three meetings were held and after a protest holding up the Sky Sports game v Nottingham Forest in October. Extraordinary Supporters Committee meetings followed in November, December and February, attended by owners Assem and Ehab Allam. These ended with some initial movement on the principle grievances however I was cited by the club Vice Chairman as having personal issues with him, which is now an issue in itself!

Malcolm Clarke – Stoke City Supporters’ Club:

Football biography

I support Stoke City home and away. I am a committee member of Stoke City Supporters Club. I was also the first Chair of the Potters Trust. I tried to achieve a merger of the 2 organisations as a Trust. We achieved the merger, but not as a Trust because the members were deterred by the then stringent SD audit requirements (ironically subsequently relaxed).

I worked with Stoke City to establish a democratic Supporters Council for dialogue with the Club and was its first Chair. I stood down due to pressure of time from national supporters activities.

I have been national chair of the FSF since it was established in 2002. Before that I was Chair of the Football Supporters Association. I have been the supporters’ representative on the FA Council since 2007.

I have a long track record of successfully working for supporters’ interests at both club and national level. There is still plenty of fuel left in my tank.

My vision

The members voted for an FSF-SD merger because a united organisation can be more effective in campaigning for our policies and supporting our members. It can both increase and make better use of our human and financial resources. It can remove confusion among both our members and those with whom we have to deal. Most importantly, it can be much more than the sum of its founding parts, and presents exciting new opportunities. But these things will not happen on their own. We must make them happen.

We know we are right, but being right is not enough. We must translate that into real change for the benefit of supporters, which requires a range of political and organisational skills. We must mobilise those, not only at the “top” of the organisation but draw upon the skills and passion of the members we serve. I can make a contribution to make that vision happen.

The Championship

Many of the issues of interest to Championship Clubs’ supporters are, of course, exactly the same as those of other supporters, be it club ownership and governance problems; choice to stand at games; customer care issues; policing and stewarding; games moved for TV; travel problems etc. But we must also respond to our members views about ‘Championship’ issues, e.g it is absurd that away fans at some clubs are paying more than the £30 cap in the Premier League.

Rick Duniec – Leeds United Supporters’ Trust:

Currently elected member of the outgoing FSF-NC and former Leeds Supporters Trust Chairman with resultant inevitable experience of football's ownership, governance, and financial issues (including the EFL financial administration processes) and of Shaun Harvey.

Attended FS Europe Barcelona¹⁰, Copenhagen¹¹, Istanbul¹², Amsterdam¹³, Bologna¹⁴, Belfast¹⁵, Ghent¹⁷ and Gijon¹⁸.

Extensive experience meeting with the EFL, F.A., M.P.s, and Local Government.

Numerous interviews and appearances in media including newspaper, radio, television, and football related documentaries, though none recently.

Graduate of the University of East Anglia; worked in The City before moving to sales with Kalamazoo in UK, & Sales Management in Arabian Gulf states including time working in Qatar. 10 years as an IFA, registered with the FCA.

In many ways the experience I have gained regards the real workings of football is something that I would have much preferred not to have been forced, by circumstances, to acquire. I wish to continue to put that knowledge and experience to wider use and for the greater benefit of Football Supporters as a whole. I feel that the NC is the best place to achieve this aim, alongside like minded colleagues.

Much progress has been made and this should be acknowledged but I remain comfortable in bringing supporters issues to bear at the most senior levels which have included pressing issues with the FA, EFL, Sports Ministers, MPs, including the DCMS Select Committee.

I have knowledge of the workings of Commercial Property, which I believe to be one of the major factors in the problems which regularly confront clubs.

Whilst I take interest in a broad spectrum of fans issues my primary concerns will be to continue involvement in Football Governance, Finance and Regulation. I have an active interest in the way the Rail operators market to Football Fans and in particular I am seeking greater flexibility in validity of rail tickets when fixtures are changed.

I intend to progress concepts regarding football heritage issues and seek to achieve some regulatory degree of separation between the club as a business which can be bought and sold, and the club as “construct” (its heritage, etc.) which cannot and should not.

My objectives over several years have been to seek a greater involvement for fans in football in general and to strive to deter their inappropriate financial exploitation. Essentially I believe that fans require and deserve a fair return on their “investment” in their clubs (both emotional and financial) and in football more generally.
