



Report of the National Game Network meeting

*Sunday January 20th 2019
Manchester Mechanics Institute*

Introduction

The first meeting of the new National Game network was recently held in Manchester. Fifteen people attended online via digital link and in person in Manchester.

Members were welcomed to the meeting by Malcolm Clarke, the Chair of The Unified Supporters Organisation (TUFSO). As well as being the newly elected chair for the merged organisation, Malcolm and TUFSO vice-chair Tom Greatrex sit on the FA Council as supporter representatives. Malcolm explained the newly agreed structure of TUFSO, with affiliated organisations organised together in networks. Supporters from clubs in the non-league and Welsh pyramid structures are part of the National Game network. The network has three elected representatives on the National Council of the new organisation.

Membership

Membership of the network is open to all affiliated organisations in the English non-league and the Welsh pyramid. In this period immediately post the merger of Supporters Direct (SD) and The Football Supporters Federation (FSF) those organisations who have been previously affiliated to either organisation are being encouraged to affiliate to the new merged body. Those organisations that do not qualify as affiliates and individual supporters of English non-league and Welsh football are all still part of the network too. A major recruitment drive is planned before the end of the season to strengthen the voice of supporters and assist associate members and individuals to establish democratic supporter organisations at their clubs.

National Council and Network representation

Rob Street was elected to the National Council at the EGM in November, with two vacancies remaining it is down to the network to arrange for a by-election. The meeting discussed the process for filling the remaining seats and it was agreed that members would need at least a six-week period to consider nominations, which would allow affiliated organisations time to meet.

A call for nominations will be issued along with the agreed protocol, which would set out the process to be followed for nominations and any election. Rob Street will continue to represent the network at upcoming National Council meetings and report back to members on matters discussed.

Casework and Structured Dialogue

Network Manager, Nicola Cave gave members an update on current and recent casework. Nicola reported that a formal Structured Dialogue process has been established with the National League. A second meeting is due to take place shortly and we are awaiting a date for the national league officers. A question was raised about the National League's view on 3 pm broadcast blackout and the recent challenge thrown up with the EFL iFollow service. Nicola reported that the National League are in favour of the blackout and have no intention of seeking to broadcast any of their own matches during the international break exemption periods despite being notified by the FA that this would be a possibility. The briefing paper on iFollow will be made available to members

In response to a question regarding financial fair play and whether there are any plans in non-league to introduce measures in line with the EFL and PL. Malcolm Clarke reported that a paper on regulatory reform had been submitted jointly to the FA by SD & FSF and a follow up meeting is due to be held shortly. The paper will be made available to members as will the details about Financial Fair Play raised at recent national meetings.

Campaigns

Members were updated on recent campaigns including 'supporting football is not a crime', 'away day experience' and Fans for Diversity. Details of the football is not a crime campaign and how supporter groups can get involved with their local Independent Police Advisory Group will be made available to members.

Maria Horner gave members a report on recent Fans for Diversity Campaign activity and advised on how the network could use the experience of fellow clubs to extend the campaign. Details of how to apply for fund for campaign work are available for members and will be highlighted in the report of network meetings.

Maria reported on the recent successful community cohesion event organised at Curzon Ashton FC which involved our members, local club community schemes and local community groups. The work undertaken is varied and Maria reported on the transport to games for the over 50's organised by Worcester City supporters in partnership with Age UK and Worcester Wheels plus the upcoming 'Daggers Against Racism' day.

Maria made the point that successful campaigns are not always about spending large amounts of capital but just as much about clubs looking how the game can be made more accessible and welcome to fans from as many different communities and groups as possible. To this end Maria has been working alongside Level Playing Field, the experts in stadia accessibility and disability issues. This work has opened up opportunities to improve accessibility to grounds at non-league level. We are working with clubs that are often challenged by older facilities and limited resource.

March 8th is International Women's Day and Dulwich Hamlet supporters will be celebrating by producing bespoke scarves. Details of the 'Women at the Game' campaign will be made available to members.

Communications

The meeting discussed future communications between members and the challenges faced by having clubs from across England and Wales, with clubs playing at a number of levels of the game. The meeting agreed that a regular communication or newsletter should be distributed to keep members informed of news and the work and campaigns across the network. Members in the south of England have a regular regional meeting which will be notified to members.

The huge archive of documents and guidance notes that has been developed over the years by FSF and SD staff is to be made available to members once the material has been collated. This will include training plans and digital assets previously held on the SD Hub.

Any Other Business

Members enquired about CONIFA, the confederation of independent FAs. Nicola reported that CONIFA had in the past made a presentation to SD and details of the organisation will be made available to members.

Date of the next meeting

it was proposed that the dates of the next two meetings be 26th May 2018 and 29th September pending final approval. Members will be polled to decide on the location of the next meeting.