

RANGERS FAN ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Fan Advisory Board / Executive Board meeting
Ibrox Stadium
Monday 4 March 2024 – 3.30pm

Attendees:

Rangers FC

James Bisgrove, Chief Executive Officer
Creag Robertson, Director of Football Operations
James Taylor, Chief Finance Officer and Company Secretary
Karim Virani, Chief Commercial Officer
Graham Horsman, Football Legal Counsel
Calvin Stroyan, Fan Engagement Executive
Nick Thomson, Head of Communications (for part)

Rangers FC Fan Advisory Board

Fahd Bari
Matt Boyd
Jamie Cook
Craig Hannah
Kelly Johnstone (via Zoom)
Stuart Langan
Gary Ralston

Introductions

JB welcomed everyone to the second FAB meeting. Apologies were received for Greg Marshall (who was in attendance at ORSA in Australia) and JB introduced GH, who joined the Club at the end of January as Football Legal Counsel, working closely with the Executive Team across many topics.

GH said his focus is to reduce club disputes and generally take a more proactive approach.

SL said progress is being made with workstreams following interaction with different areas of the business and links are being established with supporter groups.

Club Updates

JB summarised the main projects which are in train.

Copland Stand – work is progressing at pace with a main contractor having been appointed. The Club is working closely with them and the steel manufacturer to ensure project completion by 21 July.

JT said savings had already been achieved on the initial cost proposal as a result of the competitive tender process. The aim is to hold a full-scale test event at the stadium before the start of the new League season.

Stadium expansion – medium and long term expansion of the stadium beyond summer 2024 is still under discussion with the main Board.

Sports Bar – plans for opening the G51 Sports Bar in the summer are still on track. Discussions are ongoing with regard to design & concept and usage in terms of matchday and non-matchday.

Edmiston House – it is now a full year since the launch of Edmiston House, which has hosted 140 events during that time. Relationships continue to be developed with local promoters for live entertainment and new formats will be tested, such as Boozy Bingo. Pre & post-match Fanzones are proving very popular, especially when other sports events are shown after the game.

Walter Smith statue – the statue is in the final stages of development and discussion is taking place with the family with regard to a date for the unveiling before the end of the season. Groundworks are underway at the site of the statue, and other projects were discussed.

Club website & app – KV reported that a new Club website & app will launch in the summer alongside a new content strategy. The new app will bring together existing apps and will provide a means to communicate with our wider fanbase.

Club Updates – further discussion

JC asked if the Copland works would negate the chance to play home friendly ties ahead of the new season. CR ran through the pre-season plan, indicating it was unlikely there would be fixtures at Ibrox, but the Club was planning UK and international matches.

The group discussed at length the options for how the Sports Bar might operate. FAB members suggested dialogue is needed to test out any proposals as expectations are high from the fanbase. The group also discussed the commercial partnership aspect of the Sports Bar and the overall relationship and performance of Levy.

It was agreed Ibrox/EH being added as a stop to the City Sightseeing bus tour has helped the Museum and stadium become a genuine tourist attraction.

The group discussed stadium expansion options in more detail. It was agreed some of the expansion proposals will be presented at the next FAB meeting.

CH asked about the recent financial results for Edmiston House and how the Club viewed the negative reaction received. JB explained the figures were skewed due to only 4-5 months of trading being recorded in the accounts in what was the first year of trading for the venue.

Additional retail revenue was not included within the accounting process for EH (and is captured elsewhere), the Museum was not yet open and the events side of the business was only in its infancy. £1m profit per annum is the expectation, but it will take time for the multi revenue streams to scale up to their maximum level.

SL asked if 140 events in EH so far was on par with expectation. The overall consensus is this is good in terms of pace. The Museum gift shop is performing well and the retail trajectory is good.

SL said the FAB could assist in areas such as the dissemination of financial results to the fanbase once they are in the public domain, to help add context.

FB suggested an impact statement could accompany the publication of accounts in future, summarising the social impact of the Club's activities and its contribution to the GDP of the area.

JC asked if there are plans to host any further high profile concerts at Ibrox. JB said there are a few active discussions for summer 2025 for big touring acts. Timing is restrictive as we only have a small window due to the football calendar.

SFA / SPFL Updates

Refereeing / VAR

CR said refereeing continues to be an ongoing discussion across Scottish Football. There is a disconnect between decisions made by the SFA's Referee Department and the independent review panel. GH said we must push for consistency.

We will continue to challenge and drive standards with referees. We and all other clubs are asking what are the learnings and what are they doing differently? This is not just a Rangers issue.

A working group has been established to look at things such as; refereeing / VAR department strategy, how we can improve referee training, transparency in how VAR decisions are communicated and whether there is a pathway for ex-players to become referees.

FB questioned the consequences for poor referee performance. CR responded that in England, if a referee makes a mistake, they are dropped down to referee at a lower level. We only have 5 Grade 1 referees in Scotland to manage the top tier.

JC asked if refereeing should be made professional in Scotland. JB said the response to that is usually that referees are already earning big salaries in their day jobs, but agreed this should be explored to help raise standards.

OF away ticket allocation

The current SPFL rule states that the home club must make a 'reasonable' number of away tickets available. Discussions with the SPFL, Celtic and local authorities remain ongoing.

Independent Governance Review

JB advised that the report was commissioned as part of the cinch dispute settlement agreement and conducted by Henderson Loggie. The report has now been shared in full with all 42 member clubs. An all-club meeting will take place in April to allow clubs to scrutinise and challenge the report and the process.

Other issues

The SFA are looking at the gap in player transition from Academy to First Team. They have taken ownership of the issue and are driving options and solutions.

Artificial pitches were discussed. FB asked if anything is being done to improve the consistency of grass pitches. CR said UEFA solidarity payments are set to jump due to Rangers and Celtic both reaching the UCL Group Stage last season. Could we have a say on where this money is spent, ie playing surfaces?

SL thanked the Executive Team for the valuable updates. Proactive communication is why FAB was set up, to engage directly with the Club and communicate with the fanbase. CH said it is important to project the positivity which the FAB are witnessing and hearing about at these meetings. The some supporters perceives a detachment between the Club, the Board & Exec Team, the FAB can be a conduit and interpret all the good things that are going on and the momentum that is building.

GR said it is important to get information out and set the narrative. FAB could occasionally make announcements so that fans can see the engagement process.

CH said there has been little feedback so far by email or on social media which is surprising – how do we make people aware of and pay attention to what we are trying to do? Do many people read the minutes? KJ said the next step is to determine what comms are released and via which vehicle.

JB suggested at the next Fans Forum event perhaps the FAB could come on stage and present the work of the FAB.

Copland moves supporters meeting (12 February). It was felt there was a missed opportunity here and there should have been moderators present. The post event narrative online did not resemble what actually went on in the room. SL said the FAB can support in these situations. SL said club representatives could have been better prepared to answer some of the specific questions on the night – for example project timelines across the close season. It was a worthwhile exercise to let those affected have their say and understand that the Club is trying to mitigate the issues.

RFC Media & Comms Strategy

Nick Thomson joined the meeting and introduced himself as a lifelong Rangers fan who has been with the Club for 9 years.

NT presented slides outlining his vision for a modern communications strategy. He gave a broad overview of staff structure & roles within his team and their aims and aspirations going forward.

NT was asked about the Club's relationship with the mainstream media. Previously this had been aggressive and confrontational. We now have a collaborative approach and, as such, are in a better position to manage the narrative. NT said Rangers now provide the best working environment for media in Scottish Football.

NT said protecting the name and enhancing the reputation of the Club is of paramount importance. Maintaining open and honest relationships with different types of journalists is key. Challenging incorrect stereotypes and dealing with inaccurate narrative is also vitally important.

We must reset the narrative about the Club and its supporters, highlighting how much Rangers is worth to the city and the country.

The aim is to be the best comms team in Scotland. The focus is on proactive comms - we must look to expand our horizons and find a way to get our players and content on platforms in Europe and the US and increase exposure for the Women's team.

KJ thanked NT for his positive presentation saying we need to work out ways in which the FAB can help with comms. How do FAB become a positive voice for the Club?

KV reported that the official Club podcast is in progress. Technical tests have been carried out.