

Fan Advisory Board – meeting with NUFC

Minutes

4 November 2024
5:30pm – 7:30pm
L5 Boardroom, St James' Park

NUFC Attendees:

COO – Brad Miller (**BM**)
CCO – Peter Silverstone (**PS**)
Director, Commercial Venue – Yvette Thompson (**YT**)
Head of Supporter Services – Sarah Medcalf (**SM**)
Head of Ticketing – Chris Parkinson (**CP**)
Corporate Communications Manager – Andrew Lisgo (**AL**)
Supporter Liaison Officer – Matt Willis (**MW**)

Apologies: Director, Communications – Lee Marshall (**LM**)

Fan Advisory Board (FAB) Attendees:

Chair - Michael McCarthy (**MM**)
Vice Chair - Marion Williams (**MW**)
Member - Rajat Nayyar (**RN**)
Young Person Representative - – Thomas Symonds (**TS**)
International – Natalie Noyes (**NN**)
NUST – Paul Karter (**PK**)
NUST – Adam Stoker (**AS**)
United With Pride (UWP) – Claire Wintrip (**CW**)

Agenda:

- 1) Welcome
- 2) Chair Update
- 3) Communications
- 4) Venue – key actions from workshops
- 5) Venue – ticketing presentation
- 6) Venue – Stadium development and atmosphere
- 7) Commercial – merchandise working group
- 8) AOB

WELCOME

MM welcomed all attendees. AL was welcomed online to provide a communications update, while CP joined his first meeting since joining the club.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

MM provided a short update and prompted TS for an update on the Young Person Forum (YPF).

TS outlined the challenge of ensuring a cohesive voice on behalf of young supporters. He outlined the group's second meeting of fans at St. James' Park and the process of obtaining feedback from contacts,

friends and family. The Football Supporters Association (FSA) joined the meeting to share insight about the fan voice at football clubs.

Predominant challenges raised through the YPF were:

- Limited access to season tickets
- Affordability

SM complimented the group and outlined that members could apply to join the FAB in future if there were vacancies. SM reflected that the club is the first in the Premier League to formally establish a YPF, and she acknowledged learnings from initial meetings to sustain and support the group.

COMMUNICATIONS

AL outlined ways to promote and elevate the important role fulfilled by the FAB to stimulate wider supporter interest and engagement. This is particularly relevant as the first anniversary of the first formal FAB board meeting will be in February 2025.

AS was encouraging of the FAB gaining awareness in the first instance, which was supported by MM and NN. MM expressed a view that the FAB could benefit from supporters being reminded of the group's continued involvement in significant issues and projects, such as the club's donation to the foundation from sales of home shirts in August 2024. PK proposed that a quarterly newsletter to supporters could be sent, highlighting any actions taken by the club based on fan suggestions. SM will discuss this idea with the Communications team and provide feedback.

SM reiterated FAB's long-term, strategic importance and supported the aim to grow awareness of FAB members and the group's influence.

AL identified ways in which the FAB can engage with supporters through the club's work in the community, including:

- Visiting the Foundation to see how [home shirt donations](#) have supported its programmes
- Participating in the club's annual 'Helping Hand at Christmas' campaign, which has activity with a range of people and organisations across the city.

MM asked for dates of relevant community events that the Newcastle United Foundation delivers to take back to group to see if FAB will attend. MM also asked about funds raised from the shirt sales initiative for Newcastle United Foundation.

PS encouraged further discussion with Newcastle United Foundation so that the FAB can gain a fuller understanding of the initiative's impact. SM will pick this action up.

The FAB members also agreed to work with the club to consider how the communication plan for FAB would look over the coming months.

VENUE – KEY ACTIONS FROM WORKSHOPS

SM provided a headline summary of the club's [Fan Engagement Review](#) for the 2023/24 season, which was published in July.

This included:

- [STACK consultation](#) – the club consulted with supporters, the wider public and local stakeholders, with an overwhelmingly positive response to the project and launch.
- Fan working groups – more than 2,000 supporters participated in Q1, providing vital feedback and ideas across away ticketing, ballots and matchday atmosphere. 7,000 fans took part in the wider Away Ticketing Access and Operations Survey.
- Young Persons Forum (YPF) - the club was the first in the Premier League to formally appoint a YPF under the Fan Engagement Standard (FES) framework. More information on the YPF can be found in the club's [2024/25 Fan Engagement Plan \(FEP\)](#).
- Wider engagement – the club continues to hold regular meetings with Newcastle United Supporters Trust (NUST), NUDSA and United with Pride. Also engage with IAG (Inclusion Advisory Group) via EDI team.
- Deliver a number of digital and global fan events during the season.
- Community initiatives – the club worked with Sela on the multi-award-winning '[Unsilence the Crowd](#)' campaign and became the Premier League's first [Football Club of Sanctuary](#).

SM outlined the following examples of ticketing and matchday developments following engagement with supporters:

Away tickets

- Current loyalty system has remained unchanged.
- The Loyalty points system remains to protect eligible supporters who continue to go to matches up and down the country. Loyalty points are only applied once data from the away club has provided verification that the ticket was scanned into the stadium (supported by more than 80% of supporters who completed the survey).
- 54% of respondents supported a form of ticket checks.
- Away ticket transfer now available to a linked family member, or friend, twice per season.

Home Tickets

- Ballot process changed to allow members that are successful in the ballot to select their seat within a specified time period (65% of members surveyed in favour of retaining a ballot model)
- Percentage of available home match tickets retained for a new, later Member General Sale Period on a first come, first served basis – 66% of survey respondents were in favour of this option available.
- Members can now access seats made available for re-sale by season ticket holders on a first come, first served basis.
- Adjustments made to ticket sales and the ballot system timelines for both home and away fixtures, ensuring consistency and minimising scheduling conflicts.

Venue

- New stadium speakers have been installed at SJP (Level 7 remaining)
- New mixing desk installed.
- Working with external agencies on improving stadium sound output match-by-match.

Matchday experience

- Implemented way for fans to suggest songs for matchday.
- Reduced celebration messages at half-time
- Arranging more Half-time interviews when possible.

SM explained that the club has also recently held a food and beverage workshop in partnership with its catering provider, Sodexo. The club is awaiting potential actions from Sodexo following the insight gained.

MM agreed that there are now greater opportunities for supporters to directly engage and provide feedback to the club, but suggested the club could enhance how it reports on the changes it makes, with more 'you said, we did' updates.

RN agreed some supporters may not be aware of the changes and therefore clearer communication on the club from the actions taken as a result of consultation with supporters would be helpful.

SM outlined the workshop process and the challenges the club can face when implementing suggested changes and new ideas within a short timeframe.

MM suggested the FAB can support in helping to communicate changes, including providing contributions/comments from a FAB perspective when updates are publicised.

VENUE – TICKETING PRESENTATION

CP gave a presentation on ticketing operations, outlining the following:

- The final grouping of 'long term season ticket deals, which were introduced in 2011, will conclude as scheduled this season. The previous grouping ended in 2022.
- Compared to those supporters who paid annually the supporters on the long-term deal paid on average £1,300 less during this time period.
- Season ticket pricing for 2025/26 has not been finalised just yet but this will be communicated in due course.
- Direct Debits for supporters on the ten-year deal will end in February.

CP outlined the benchmarking the club does in relation to other Premier League clubs to ensure pricing remains fair and competitive. Newcastle United had the cheapest season tickets for the 2024/25 season in comparison with other Premier League clubs and the clubs most expensive season ticket ranked middle of the table when compared to other Premier League clubs most expensive Season Ticket.

MW questioned whether ticket pricing makes a difference to clubs against the wider context of money generated through broadcast and commercial deals, stating price increases in football could generally be seen to be exploiting loyalty.

PS explained that ticket pricing – as with all other revenue – does have a material impact on the club's ability to keep pace with rival clubs.

MW suggested the club needs more options for discounted prices and to generate its revenue in a different way.

BM acknowledged MW's feedback but outlined Newcastle United is typically in the lower quartile for ticket pricing in the Premier League. BM accepted that because the price for a ten-year season ticket was set 14 years ago, the percentage price increase from a 2011/12 price to a 2025/26 price would be an anomaly compared to last season's 5% rise for standard adult season tickets. However, it is a necessary step to bring parity between season ticket holders in equivalent seats.

BM explained that we as a Club are exploring all incremental gains in order to continue our progression to compete at the highest level, as the 1% to 2% margins can make the difference.

PS referenced PSR and its influence on the club's transfer activity in June 2024 in particular. He explained that the club is tasked with doing all it can to be competitive, and that the club's ambitions (ownership and fans) are the same as other top clubs in the Premier League. He acknowledged that the club needs to meet those without impacting the loyalty of supporters.

PK understood the club's view but said supporters can only take it from one perspective. He explained that the rise in price could have a softer landing so that the longest-serving season ticket holders are retained.

AS suggested the club could also risk pricing out both a younger and working-class demographic that is potentially the most vocal.

TS agreed and raised the issue that although new ticketing system has allowed some fans to build up loyalty points that already have some it has left other younger fans the difficulty of building up loyalty points who have attended a lot of away games under the old system on another's season ticket. And this may be a contributing factor to the lack of atmosphere at away games. TS asked if we could work with the club to assist young people in this matter'.

PK added that "newer fans" may naturally spend more money. He acknowledged the need to expand the club's global fanbase, but believed the local, loyal, long-term fans still need to be thought of.

YT explained that the club communicated proactively and early with supporters on long-term deals to inform them that prices would be brought to a level of parity with other season ticket holders. This followed the conclusion of other similar long-term deals in 2022.

CW outlined a different perspective as a season ticket holder, having attended most matches in "worse times" but having had to pay full price as a result of not being enrolled on a long-term deal. CW highlighted the sensitivity/unfairness of having some season ticket holders, sitting next to each other, paying less than others.

PS acknowledged this point and highlighted that this was a challenge the club faces. Trying to ensure consistency and fairness for all fans sitting in the same areas. He cited that if the rise from a 2011/12 price to a 2025/26 price was made in stages, rather than on the conclusion of the deal, the club would be susceptible to complaints from others now paying full price who were sitting next to others who were paying less (as per CW's point).

PK acknowledged he was very fortunate to have paid the same price for his season ticket for the past 14 years. He accepted his sister behind him is paying 56% more as a result of not being on a ten-year deal, and asked if the prices could have 'met in the middle'. He asked if the club could make up any shortfall elsewhere.

YT explained that other similar deals had concluded in recent seasons and approach should be consistent. It would be unfair to do something different for the final group of supporters on a long-term deal.

SM added that the club had notified season ticket holders of the end of the long term deal a year in advance and is looking at potential payment plans to make sure payments are spread.

PS also outlined recent pricing changes in hospitality which were implemented to achieve parity for supporters in those areas, with the aim of being fair and consistent to all. Although PS noted that hospitality members and GA season ticket holders are different groups, the principle of consistency of pricing remains. Fans in the same seat, or the same area of the stadium, can/should expect to pay the same price as those sitting next to them. Whilst PSR is an ever-present consideration, as is the loyalty and support of our fans, the issue of price consistency across the stadium is also an important issue the club has to manage. It is not just about the club making up the shortfall elsewhere as PK had previously suggested.

PS suggested to PK that the only other potential solution to find a softer landing for those coming off the 10-year deal, which PS was clear he was not proposing or recommending, would be to consider wide-scale movement of fans into different areas of the stadium depending on their price preferences. PK acknowledged that this would not be a recommendation from him/FAB, or a popular option to

implement, given fans' desires to remain in "their" seats. PS acknowledged the Club's understanding of this sensitivity and hence it was not currently being considered or proposed.

A discussion followed on the disability ticketing process. There is currently no disability representative member of FAB at present, and as such the FAB considered it would be most appropriate to consider this issue once a new disability representative was appointed. The FAB advised that any discussion about disability ticketing should be discussed with the relevant supporters and supporter groups also.

CP raised the ballot process, referencing the following:

- At the time of the meeting there had been seven ballots so far this season. Almost all supporters who have applied for all seven ballots have won at least one, with a greater chance of success than general sale and the official resale platform.
- Of those successful in ballots, on average 10% of supporters are not proceeding to select their seats and conclude the purchase, even though you can select your seats.

CP confirmed the club would continue to monitor ballot success rates and subsequent purchases. As well as reviewing other comments and suggestions by the FAB and fellow supporters such as using the website. RN highlighted website functionality, specifically noting that the current colour scheme makes it challenging to see areas of ticket availability. The club agreed to take this feedback on board and review the functionality where possible.

AS requested that ballot success rate information is published to supporters and noted that Arsenal had published their comparable information that week. PS said this would be taken away to be discussed internally.'

AWAY TICKETS UPDATE

CP gave an update on away ticketing and random ID checks. In the first four away games, 5% collected with wrong ID and 52% of tickets were left uncollected.

Of those tickets that were uncollected, 67% scanned the original ticket but didn't present themselves to box office.

There was discussion around how supporters are selected for ID checks. These are selected from a list of supporters by a random number generator.

YT informed the group that the club has better data than before but needs more insight on the 52% of people not scanning in. The club are contacting those fans and it's the same with season tickets. The club is conducting due diligence, noting it and there should be no reason to see empty seats in the stadiums due to the resale, refund and ticket transfer models now in operation.

BM highlighted that Chris' team are at every away game to support and it's a change that the club has made to support fans.

Matt Willis highlighted that he is wholly involved in discussing with stewards, they attend a briefing at each away game for home game and away fans.

AS raised point that some supporters had raised their concerns about people with large amounts of loyalty points losing all their points for a first offence in relation to away ticket usage. PS responded that it is difficult/not possible to have a mixed approach to this topic/consequence. Fans know the rules and consequences and therefore should not risk losing their points by passing on their tickets. The club needs to be consistent to all supporters.

YT explained this will continue to be reviewed using data. CP addressed ticket touting and current process. Currently, if alerted, the club will hear through socials or suspicious buying patterns and the club will block tickets and do ID check down the line, putting a case forward and then ban or punish.

Home tickets

This season, 52,000 bot attacks from SeatGeek have been identified and prevented. There are currently 750 ongoing cases from last season and this season where supporters are being monitored for ticket touting. These are monitored by being alerted by other supporters that they are reselling or irregular buying patterns. 43 people have been banned so far this season for selling-on tickets for home games, this includes season ticket holders and members.

MM agreed that its important people know this information about these sites and has seen £400 resale tickets, with fans thinking club is doing nothing about it, however as noted by YT the club are taking action against this, and this should be communicated to supporters.

PS acknowledged the comments but stated there is always more work to be done in this area.

PS/YT noted that the club continues to share insight with other clubs. Reassuring but we are taking action. The club are doing tests to buy tickets ourselves.

AS asked how to find people who tout the tickets?

YT explained the problem is people use reselling ineffectively and buy from these sites.

PK acknowledged that some fans are desperate and will pay the money to get them, however the club strongly recommend that fans do not engage with these ticket touting websites to obtain tickets.

YT reaffirmed that if a supporter ends up under investigation when a ticket goes red, the supporter will lose money, and they won't get their money back. The club will then know who they are because the tickets go red, with the report coming to the club which would lead to consequences to the original ticket holder/purchasing supporter as noted below.

AS asked if this will lead to empty seats where people aren't at fault?

CP explained the current process. If a fan comes to a home game and the ticket, they purchased from a third-party site has been touted, the club will therefore cancel the ticket once it has been identified as sold by a tout. After cancelling the ticket, we would then allow the supporter the chance to buy the ticket at face value so they become the legal buyer of that ticket. Once they have bought the ticket the club provide them with information on how they can attempt to claim their money back from where they originally bought the ticket from. CP added this is only possible once and therefore if the same seat has been resold on multiple times, then we can't resell them the seat they have purchased as someone else has now purchased this legitimately. We will still provide information to these people on how they can claim their money back.

The banning punishment is that the season ticket is cancelled, and membership cancelled indefinitely.

MM said it would be disincentive if people know about the investigations.

PS reassured that the club do say it often but perhaps it is not sufficiently publicised that we've banned people. It is explained that supporters will lose money and not be allowed in, but the message can get lost when fans see others being successful getting around the rules.

VENUE – STADIUM DEVELOPMENT AND ATMOSPHERE

BM referred back to a previous stadium infrastructure presentation. Planners, architects, project managers are all working away on the two options and scenarios previously discussed. Executives from the club are aiming to go to board in the new year with conclusions from the above and will present this to shareholders before making a final decision.

AS then highlighted the new operational change that it was great to see injury time now on the boards.

BM explained that Vanguardia will look at the stadium sound, who do a lot of acousticians and sound monitoring.

The club are also looking at sound quality of tracks used on matchday.

MM suggested no fireworks or light shows or fire and wanting to keep matchdays authentic and organic.

COMMERCIAL – MERCHANDISE WORKING GROUP

NN proposed setting up FAB working groups, to be supported by relevant decisionmakers at NUFC, with respect to ticketing, memberships, merchandise/retail, sustainability, and EDI, given the time constraints of addressing these matters in depth during formal FAB meetings.

SM informed the group that the club can bring new EDI Lead to the next FAB meeting.

PS said the club can arrange time with the Head of Merchandise to discuss any ideas from NN. Can do the same for other areas such as sustainability with input from NN or the wider FAB. NN subsequently met with the NUFC Retail & Licensing team and Memberships team at St. James' Park.

AOB

MW will be representing the FAB at a Premier League meeting on the Fan Engagement Standard.

Commitment from PS that an update on the club's branding workshops and activity will be coming towards the end of the year.