

CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB MEN'S FANS FORUM 2024-25, 1st MEETING MINUTES

Meeting held in the Vialli suite at 6.30pm on Tuesday 10th September 2024

Attendees	Club title/ group represented
Beckwith, Gary	Fan Advisory Board liaison
Beerman, Clayton	Home season ticket ("ST")
Brooker, John	UK away scheme
Clark, Dawn	Access
Clarkson, Megan	Club Senior Supporter Services Manager
Cornall, Michael	Club Head of Supporter Relations
Crowe, Laura	Female
Curteis, Sam	Club Supporter Liaison Officer
Daine, Nav	Regional Manager for Retail Operations at Levy
De-Morgan, Malakai	Chelsea Pride
Eldridge, Andy	Chelsea Supporters Club ("CSC")
Elmes, George	UK supporters club
Finkelstein, Daniel	Club Director
Forrest, Scott	16-21s
Gaj, Mohammed	Ethnically and culturally diverse
Gedalla, Brian	Member
Kasic, Allison	Overseas supporters club
Kirk, Duncan	Club Chelsea
Mcintosh, Aileen	LGBTQI+
Mills, Charlie	65 and over
Regan, Andy	Forum Chairman
Roddy, Tom	Club Director of Communications and Public Affairs
Smith, Graham	Club Head of Ticketing
Travers, Hannah	Club Disability Access Officer
Trenter, Peter	Chelsea Supporters Group ("CSG")
Williams, Ben	Chelsea Supporters Trust ("CST")

Apologies for absence

Baker, Chris	Club Head of Matchday Safety
Overstall, Keith	Club Head of Security
Wrighton, Leslie	Family stand

(Action points are underlined.)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the season and in particular new representatives. Representatives and Club staff introduced themselves. The Chairman told the Forum that our meetings are recorded and requested that all discussions remain confidential apart from what is published in the official minutes. Representatives were also asked to try and speak into the larger microphones so those joining online can hear clearly.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

There were no changes to the minutes. Matters arising from the last meeting were as follows:

Over the Line

The Club said it's reviewing the campaign alongside the Foundation to better connect it to the fans. There will be a presence for Over the Line for at least six matches this season.

Review of stewarding

The Club said queues are largely based on 50% of fans arriving in the last thirty minutes prior to kick off whereas turnstiles are open two hours before. Stewarding and searching are important for everyone's safety. We need more female stewards for our women's matches and are looking to increase these numbers but recruitment is challenging.

As regards stewards imposing consistency of behaviour, this is an issue covered in all steward briefings to ensure this. As regards attentiveness of stewards, if they are late, rude or cause any other difficulty three times, then they are not retained. Corporate fans being allowed through without checks has been looked at. In response to a question, the Club said most stewards are externally recruited.

Bag checks

We have reviewed the bag search issue and consulted with fan groups, not least about storing larger bags. In response to a question, the Club said not all turnstiles have the lay out just to have one check there.

The Club said there has been various consultation over recent months and we don't have an ideal location for storing larger bags. Fulham Broadway may not be accessible for everyone due to the stairs there. In certain circumstances, where fans have to bring a larger bag, we will consider those requests on an individual basis. The cost of storage, and whether that's passed are issues too.

Abuse suffered by LGBTQI+ representative

No further action was required after the representative provided more information.

Wembley match tickets

The Club said it will maintain the policy of only away match scheme members to purchase ten tickets at a time.

Carabao Cup Final tickets

The Club said all price ranges were available to fans at the start of sales. In response to a question, the Club said we don't digitalise our tickets at Wembley and some clubs have had problems when they have tried to do so. We had no issues with stadium entry at Wembley last time.

As regards the ticket App here, the first design was considered a couple of years ago and there is now another being looked at.

Choose your seat option

The Club said this option will be introduced alongside those who just want a best available option, but the choose your seat option will operate much more slowly so fans who choose that are likely to have less choice, in effect. It will go live once it's fully tested.

Hospitality tickets

The Club said Westview falls under hospitality so ticket management changed there. There was an issue originally of how many tickets could be purchased, and both members and other ST holders can buy four each. Westview tickets can be bought long in advance now.

Defibrillators

The Club said there are 13 always on site and St John's Ambulance bring others on a matchday. We have over four hundred matchday stewards, fire stewards and medical staff trained to use them. We were one of the first clubs to bring these in.

Academy match streaming

The Club said it has looked into the issues raised and we hope to have an update at the next meeting on this. We will broadcast U21s and U18s matches for 2024/25 where we have the rights.

"Say no to sexism" message

The Club said the final stewarding briefing last season was about the "Ask for Angela" campaign. We are always looking at ways to push this message.

AGENDA ITEMS

Current ticketing issues

The Chairman reiterated we are only looking at issues regarding the current process. Suggestions for next season can be discussed at the second meeting. For instance, points going to the purchaser on the exchange is an issue for next season.

A representative said it has become much harder to obtain an away ticket in the last few years. The chance of a Premier League away ticket in particular is difficult. The Club said it has discussed balloting with supporter groups and again that can be looked at in the next meeting.

In response to loyalty point bands, the Club said it can't announce guaranteed bands for each set of tickets on sale. It constantly carries out checks to ensure the website isn't attacked, and sometimes asks purchasers to collect tickets in person.

The Club is reviewing in detail whether membership can be about more than ticketing given that relatively few attend matches regularly. Our stadium capacity has reduced from over 42,000 to 40,000 over recent seasons. There are usually tickets obtainable from Westview if fans are prepared to pay those prices. Last season we lost about two hundred more seats.

A representative said Inter prices for some fans were more than those for Manchester City. The Club said we tried new pricing for the friendly against Inter but still sold out.

As regards Westview, we switched to hospitality seats as the feedback had been that some would pay more for their ticket with better facilities. This is what our research showed. Roughly 1,200 in Westview are members' tickets per match. When it was general admission, the figure was about 1,800 per match there.

We lost the camera pit spaces for seats behind each goal a year ago as well as seats in the East Upper.

As regards balloting, the general feedback is not in favour but it is something we may explore in the future.

In response to a question, the Club said loyalty points sales don't happen for every away game as it would create a closed group otherwise. It gives everyone a chance to buy one for most matches. We could look at percentages at the next meeting – we are the only club with 60% provided to ST holders and 40% for members. The demand is huge for these.

When away tickets dropped to £30, our allocations were sold out for every match. We still have our away ST system but don't replace those who leave the group.

Touting

The Club said fake tickets are advertised for some matches where tickets haven't even gone on sale yet. Members tickets are the main problem for us. The touts growth area for us is those targeting access tickets, as there are two tickets for the price of one because personal assistants receive a ticket too.

If we go to balloting then touts will buy far more memberships. There was a major campaign a few years ago and two touts were imprisoned with others being fined. A lot of time and money went towards that. If tickets were only sold on points, those who are touting could be more easily identified.

We could make fans turn up hours before kick-off and scrutinise identification but that would be very unpopular. Some clubs ballot all away tickets. A representative said there is no ideal way of distributing away tickets. The Club said we probably have the fairest distribution system of all Premiership clubs.

Many turn up with fake tickets for each match. If you buy from an outside site or individual, they could well be fake tickets. The Club welcomes information about touted tickets from fans. We didn't move to print at home tickets for a long time due to concerns about copied tickets. One person turned up at the ticket office with just a number he'd paid for and expected a ticket. One individual bought lots of gift cards from the Megastore and sold them on supposedly as tickets.

The first European game sold out yesterday but if there are general sale games, it can be harder. For Leeds a few years ago we only sold to those with at least a certain number of points by the purchase date.

There is no advantage for a tout to sell a season ticket through the ticket exchange. Digital tickets have just presented new challenges for dealing with touting. For 2026-27 there is a Premiership rule stating 70% of ticketing has to be digital.

We don't speak to fans who sell on many tickets on the ticket exchange at present, as we don't want to act as judge and jury. For the European scheme, you can only miss one match. Any system in place has to have the purpose of stopping touting and helping another fan acquire that ticket.

Loyalty

It was questioned how the Club decides on loyalty. The Club said that there are ways to benefit fans other than just selling tickets. It's being substantially reviewed now with a sizable working group. Our databases only go back to around 2006 so there is no way to differentiate between a fan who attended since 1980 or 1990, for instance. We have allowed legitimate name changes for a long time as well.

The Club added that it is reviewing loyalty partly with the 120th anniversary in mind so we can try and reward loyalty. Rewards help grow membership internationally as well. A representative said the Club rewarded fans who went to Baku for the Europa final with a present, which was appreciated.

As regards ticketing, it was suggested that an average of loyalty points over a few seasons is taken for future sales. The Club said in that case someone who misses a season, perhaps due to illness, is penalised for ever. The maximum number of loyalty points last season was very high due to all the domestic cup matches.

ST holders often keep their ticket amongst friends so they can control who it's gone to.

A representative commented that there had been a lack of feedback with some ticketing/ App trials.

Virtual waiting room

The Club confirmed there is no advantage logging on before the tickets go on sale. It takes literally seconds to sell a ticket on the ticket exchange at times.

West Ham away

The Club said fans will be emailed their links next week. All away tickets will be digital for 2026-27. We are complying with how West Ham want the data for this match. West Ham will have its own version of our access control system but outside the firewall. We will be doing the distribution. Other clubs have a more manual system.

Vaping

In response to a question, the Club said it takes vaping seriously. The question was specifically about the family section but vaping happens all over the ground. It's difficult to police when a lot of fans are vaping in the stands and toilets. We will ensure it continues to be highlighted in steward briefings.

We opened up in the West Lower during the covid matches which helped, but we can't let huge numbers out to vape with a full stadium. The Club will review the repercussion aspects.

DJ/ volume

Two representatives said the volume is too loud and non-Chelsea songs played by the DJ recently are particularly not wanted. The Club responded that we had a DJ for Inter and Manchester City and responses weren't generally positive. It's not being continued at present. The FAB and "We are the Shed", plus other groups, are reviewing what they want music-wise. We are having an atmosphere group work on this too. The fact is fans all have very different strong views on this, including whether to play "Free from desire". We have to try new aspects at times.

The Club added that the response to having a DJ is different for women's matches here. As regards volume, it's difficult to standardise sound throughout the ground because of our PA system. We want to be innovative throughout the Club where possible. We know the balance between long-term fans and younger fans is important as a factor.

Maintenance checks

In response to a question, the Club said it welcomes feedback if hand dryers aren't working or there are any maintenance issues generally. They can be dealt with quickly. Cleaners check the dryers as well.

The Club responded to a suggestion to have mental health assistance adverts in the toilets by stating the subject has been raised by the DSA and is being addressed.

End of season handbook/ DVD

In response to these not being produced, the Club said it looks at cost and take up. Neither are available now and there has been no handbook for a few years. If such items were provided on request only, the cost of production would be huge proportionally. Goals are available on the App and generally on social media. We can look at what Chelsea media provides for highlights at the end of each season.

The Club was asked about programme subscriptions and responded that take up wasn't high which pushed the cost up. It was run externally.

Shirt requests

A representative said having fans with a bunch of signs requesting shirts at the front can be a health and safety issue. Shirts could be provided to charities instead, for instance. The only way to stop this would be for players not to hand these over. With the women's team and other matches at Kingsmeadow, one corner of the ground presents a particular problem. The Club will take this up with match day safety. It has been an access supporter issue as well with fans pushing past disabled fans to get to the front. The issue is being looked at by the Premier League as well.

The Club would appreciate supporter groups communicating the health and safety risks to their members.

FAB update

The Club said we try to have FAB meetings close to our meeting dates here. Yesterday at the FAB Danny and Jason, along with other executives, were there. Marketing and branding presented the CFC LDN campaign. This branding will be developed for the UK and worldwide. We discussed the 120th anniversary plans, with ideas from the Club and FAB members put forward. Casper looked at commercial developments, with a lot of new deals announced in recent months, which obviously helps revenue and developing the Club.

A representative asked why the new branding hasn't been clearly explained to fans regarding CFC LDN. Also the Club badge has changed, with the third strip not having the full badge. The Club said that this was looked at in detail yesterday at the FAB. At times in our history we have only had the lion as our symbol on shirts and merchandise. The branding team was clear there will be no major change to the crest but the presentation and formats will be a bit different. There are a lot of elements in the new brand, including supplementary colours that have a historical link to the Club. There has been significant research on this to incorporate our heritage.

The FAB representative said the FAB has confirmed a meet and greet at the Tea Bar for most home matches. It has had a lot of interaction with fans and that will develop as the season progresses. There will be a two hour slot, as happened before the Manchester City match for instance.

We also have a lot of subgroups including on atmosphere and on heritage. We are looking towards the 120th anniversary and welcome ideas. One possibility is a quiz in the West Stand hall. We envisage celebrations being over a year. In response to a question, the Club is looking at the possibility of banners in the ground to help celebrate.

The Club added that it wants more communication between the FAB and fans this season. FAB members were behind the recent survey which was useful and feeds into the Club's decision-making. There will also be a replacement FAB representative added soon.

The Club said that the website, programme and match day WhatsApp channel inform fans not only about FAB meet and greets but also all relevant match day information. Supporter groups are welcome to ask their members what they suggest for the anniversary celebrations.

In response to a question, the Club said we are limited to 5,000 for training sessions here and when tickets are free, many tend not to turn up. As regards Cobham, it's very difficult to arrange any reasonable numbers there to watch training.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Stadium

The Chairman commented that we don't add this to the main agenda generally, though requested, if there is no significant update. Nothing will happen without the CPO's consent so there are no major developments. Jason has been very involved in this. The CPO is kept informed of all aspects.

Substitute announcements on the big screens

The Club will check that these are still shown, further to a representative's comment.

Wi-fi

In response to a question, the Club said it's aware Wi-fi is not ideal and is being looked at.

Astana away

A representative said the only flight out is at six in the morning and asked if a bag drop and travel to and from the airport can be looked at. The Club said we may not have official travel for that match but can still look at other aspects. The cost of the flight could be too great. We

are obtaining costs for all the matches and are unlikely to run travel to Germany for 1,500 away fans. Greece is more likely. We always look at bag drop issues amongst other aspects.

As regards the match location, this is not fixed yet and we will announce as soon as it's confirmed.

Game clashes

It was raised that Barrow is the same date as the Under 21s, and that men's and women's first team matches clash next month. The Club said these issues are looked at but it doesn't mean authorities provide helpful dates. The men's and women's match clashes are particularly disappointing for both fans and also staff who have a lot of matches to manage.

We had the clash with the Chelsea-Arsenal home women's match last season moving to the Friday to accommodate a home men's cup match. We have to move to Sundays when we have Conference League matches this season, which adds extra stresses.

Clearlake

In response to a question of whether Clearlake wants to sell, the Club said it has no comment to make apart from the fact that we have a long-term strategy and excellent executive team so focus on expanding the Club. There is no point in speculating.

The meeting finished at 8.05pm.