

## ***Supporter Open Meeting***

**Venue:** The Royal George Hotel Bar

**Time:** 7pm

**Panel:** Steve McCarthy (Blues Trust)

Paul Smith (Blues Collective)

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Delivering his opening address, Blues Trust chairman Steve McCarthy started the supporter meeting by saying that Saturday (the 8-0 defeat to Bournemouth) was a turning point for the Club. He continued to suggest that there are “severe mitigating circumstances” behind the defeat, and that the Club is currently being strangled due to the poor governance of its parent company Birmingham International Holdings.

There was unanimous approval for the appointment of Gary Rowett as the Club’s new manager, having earlier in the day given his first press conference as Blues boss. Steve said that nobody wants a repeat situation that developed under Lee Clark, where the manager has limited funding available to strengthen the playing squad, leaving his hands tied.

Steve added that BIHL had procrastinated over the sale of the Club for over 18 months, supplying persistent mixed messages to the supporters. He continued on to say that nobody really knows what BIHL look like: they are faceless to the Birmingham City supporters.

Supporters acknowledged the positive involvement of Panos Pavlakis following the departure of Peter Pannu, but speculated that he and BIHL are more focussed on their Hong Kong Stock Exchange listing as opposed to the issues currently surrounding the BCFC.

But why give Panos an easy ride? Steve said Panos is attempting to improve communication with the supporters, however many seem sceptical that he still has allegiances to the likes of Carson Yeung and Peter Pannu.

From Panos, we require a clear statement outlining his and BIHL’s intentions for the Club moving forward. We require reassurances over finances and the apparent ongoing sale of the Club.

Discussing positive action moving forward, a number of suggestions were debated. It was agreed that the main target had to be BIHL, as opposed to the Club itself along with any of its operational staff. It was emphasised that there are many different ways of getting across supporters’ frustrations, without needlessly hurting the very people that have worked so tirelessly to ensure we still have a Club to support today.

Action against the Football League also received support, who in turn need to increase pressure on BIHL for answers. As for how we approach and target the Football League, it was acknowledged that there are many Club’s with similar circumstances. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Carson Yeung still holds some control in the BIHL Boardroom, neither is there evidence to suggest that he does not.

It took the Football League a single hour to issue a statement on BCFC following Carson Yeung's sentencing back in March, convinced that there was no shadow directorship at the Club. The likes of Coventry, Sheffield United and Leeds United have all been faced with similar but varying circumstances: many argued that only way to make the Football League listen is to protest jointly. Should we take supporters to the Football League headquarters in Preston? Is it a realistic option at present?

Despite the recent student protests, many questioned how to go about highlighting our plight in Hong Kong. Would anyone question the fact that BIHL/BCFC are losing circa £12million each year? One supporter had recently visited Hong Kong and noted that money laundering is rife, having left the country completely disillusioned. So how do we combat this? The general consensus was that we at least have to try, if nothing else.

More broadly, how can us as supporters go about changing the Fit and Proper Directors test? Many agreed that simply holding up placards and banners would not achieve the changes that we along with many other Club's need. There are 250,000 Birmingham City supporters listed – we all need to stand united and look at what drives us, not what divides us.

Following Labour's recent manifesto announcement vowing to introduce more supporter involvement in the running of football clubs, perhaps canvassing MP's for support is also a viable option. Both MP's and Birmingham City Council have a duty to us as local residents to campaign on our behalf. But would MP's be willing to get involved? Perhaps it is not a big enough issue for them to secure votes.

In doing so, utilising the help and support of Supporters' Direct is crucial. If protesting outside the Football League is to be a viable option, then SD's expertise would surely be needed. So too would there be a need for widespread press coverage, both in the local and national media, despite the lack of support to date. There was unanimous agreement that the local media could and should be doing much more to highlight the Club's plight, asking difficult questions of BIHL, seeking reassurances and answers.

But as for Birmingham City Council, supporters are disgruntled at their lack of intervention and support. More pressure is needed on councillors in order to achieve change.

In summary, three main strategies were agreed upon, broadly focussing locally, nationally and internationally. Locally, we need to continue to highlight our plight in the media. Nationally, we need to target the Football League, the Council and MP's both in Birmingham and in Westminster. Internationally, we need to get our issues highlighted on a greater scale in Hong Kong.

A meeting to update supporters will be arranged for four weeks' time, details of which will follow.