



# BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

## Birmingham City Football Club Supporters Forum: August 2017

**Location:** City Room (17:45)

**BCFC Representatives:** Rachele Johnson (SLO), Roger Lloyd (Senior Finance Officer)

**Supporter Group Representatives:** Lynda Courts (Redditch Blues), Neil Barnett and Graham Eyres (BCFC Fan Forum), Chris Sinclair (Northside Blues), Bik Singh (Blues4All), Linda Goodman (Birmingham), Tony Routley (Central Blues Travel), Richard Stanley and Cliff Horrocks (Blues Trust), Nick Glynn (East Midlands), Rob Smitten (Yorkshire Bluenoses), Russell Dempsey (Joys and Sorrows), Sean Guiden (Irish Supporters), Adrian Howell and Steve Portman (Accessiblues).

**Unaffiliated Supporter Representatives (2017/18):** Returning from last season - Emma Willock, Ian Reddington and Andrew Orgill. New members – Jordan-Leanne Rushton, Richard Cox, Mark Smith and Ben Palfrey.

### **Agenda:**

1. Introductions/ Code of Conduct
2. Board/Ownership
3. Retail
4. Ticketing
5. Catering
6. Media and Communication
7. Match Days & Facilities
8. AOB

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## Introductions/Code of Conduct – Rachele Johnson

New season means new recruits for independent supporter representation – had a quick hello and introduction to the 2017/18 unaffiliated representatives.

Apologised for the hectic atmosphere – Tuesday evening match day is not an ideal time for the forums to be held as Heads of Department cannot attend due to match day responsibilities, the forum needs to be finished in enough time for kick-off and there is a lot of background noise!

Quickly touched upon the Supporter's Group Code of Conduct that had been issued to all groups in July. It was generally well-received by all groups and accepted – basic rules regarding representing yourself as a Club employee, bullying & harassment etc. The code was introduced simply to reiterate what the Club expects of its official supporter's groups and what the groups can expect from the Club in return.

Copies of the conduct are available by request – please email me if you would like a copy.

## Board/Ownership

Q. Why are the business side of the Club quiet once again? The person who took Panos' role seems to have little to no public presence, we really need to be knowing who owns us after the last debacle.

We don't feel it has been quiet. The closed season is always busy with pre-season friendlies, signings etc. and news has been released through the official media channels. There are some things that we would not release and make public (such as transfer information) as it would be detrimental to our efforts. An example, if a rival Club was to find out a target the price would instantly increase. Panos was particularly active on social media but that was his decision and were his personal views. Not all the owners/directors have that same personality and are as active on social media. Regarding knowing who owns the Club –Trillion Trophy Asia own roughly 70%, the rest being owned by shareholders.

Q. At the forum in May, it was pointed out that the supporters would like more communication from the Board. A commitment was made that this message would be conveyed to the Board. Has there been any response to that?

When statements are released by the Club via official media channels these are in theory direct communications from the Board. Harry Redknapp is also a spokesperson of the Club. It will be relayed to the Board that fans would like to see a direct representative of the Board/Owners on occasion.

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Q. Could you explain how the Financial Fair Play rules affect the Club and how close (or far away) the Club are from breaking any rules? Do the rules influence the amount of money the Club can spend on new players?

The Financial Fair Play rules are very complicated but over the last five seasons we have complied with the rules. The current rules are that an aggregate is taken over the last 3 years accounts. The rules inevitably influence the amount a Club can spend on players.

## Retail

Q. Any chance of improving the range for young kids in the Club shop?

Having spoken to Wayne – Head of Ticketing and Retail – we stock what sells. If demand is there we can supply. There is more of a junior range coming to the Club Shop however, it will never be as extensive as the men's.

Feedback has been given to Wayne regarding stock being available to order online but then 2 days later receiving correspondence that an item is out of stock.

Q. Why was our kit just a generic off-the-peg Adidas kit this season? You can go and buy the exact same shirt, without the sponsor or Blues logo, for around £16. This is seen by some fans as fairly insulting. Will they be doing much differently next year? It is part and parcel of the Adidas deal, they have a set number of silhouettes to choose from and the kit is selected from that. Watford and Nottingham Forest have the same silhouette as there is a small selection.

The main issue from fans is the price difference – this will be taken back to Wayne for feedback and further comment.

## Ticketing

Q. I'd like to know why the Club feel the need to charge £2 to collect your own ticket on match days.

The introduction of the collection fee is simply to encourage supporters to print their tickets at home. Supporters printing their tickets at home will reduce unnecessary queues which hold up supporters with genuine enquiries on a match day.

Q. Are we any nearer accepting mobile tickets?

Yes! We are close to being able to announce mobile tickets! Nick from East Mids advised that it already does work on Android and HTC however, the Club is still in the process of confirming the introduction of mobile tickets.

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Q. Can we have reciprocal agreements with Championship Clubs on away ticket prices. Can we aim for £20 not £25 as per the FSF's Twenty's Plenty campaign? I think we should be applauded for our Season Ticket prices, it would be great if we could lead the way on away ticket prices where possible too.

We currently have a reciprocal agreement with Ipswich and one with Reading. The problem we face is that ticket prices at St. Andrew's are competitive so there is a struggle getting other Clubs to agree.

Q. As many people work shifts or away from home, would the Club think of doing a 10 game Season Ticket where fans can choose when they want to go and receive a paper ticket on arrival to that specific game?

The closest thing we have right now is our Blues Loyalty membership which offers match tickets at a discounted rate. This has been asked before however, it would be difficult to monitor to ensure supporters don't just turn up to the big matches. It was suggested that supporters would be given the option to attend (for example) 2 Cat A matches, 3 Cat B & 5 Cat C or something along those lines. This will be taken to Wayne Cowen to see feasibility.

Q. If an employee of the Club wishes to travel on a supporters group coach to an away match, can the supporters group purchase tickets for them?

If, for example, a match day employee or a box holder who won't have a Client Reference Number wishes to attend an away match – they aren't able to be part of the group booking as they have no Client Reference Number. This feedback will be passed to Wayne and Aamir.

Q. The disabled supporters club received a reduced rate for the End of Season Awards – would the Club be willing to reduce the price of tickets for the Supporters Groups? The disabled supporter's group was funded by external sources. This feedback will be passed onto Ian Dutton (Head of Commercial) regarding the possibility of discounts to these types of events for official supporter's groups. It was commented on that the event isn't priced for fans and this should be considered. Again, the feedback will be passed onto Ian Dutton.

Q. Why were only some people emailed their away loyalty status – we don't want to have to phone up to find out!

As far as the Club were aware, all supporters with a valid, registered email address should have received an email. Several attendees advised that they hadn't received theirs.

Feedback being given to Wayne regarding this and will request another email to be sent out advising of supporters away statuses.

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Q. £10 charge to have a match ticket printed if you forget your season ticket is a joke, how much is a bit of card. Lost season ticket charges at £20 is also a bit steep. As with the collection fee, this has been introduced as a deterrent and to improve customer service on a match day as with above – queues on a match day could be avoided. An example of this was someone who called up before the Bristol match to ask for a reprint, when they were advised of the charge they said they'd have a better look for it. It was suggested that £10 and £20 is too expensive for forgotten and lost Season Tickets. The feedback will be taken to Wayne.

## Catering

Q. Usual request to be able to pay by Chip and Pin or Contactless at the kiosks. Sharon Byrne, Head of Retail Catering, advised that it would require around 100 new tills and connections. It is a high expense and will not be introduced this season. It was noted that there was an increase in prices – it is between 10 and 20 pence on products and this was after a price freeze for a few years.

## Media and Communication

Q. Blues TV should not only have the live matches but the full match should stay on the site for a whole year so you can watch it whenever you want if you miss it or want to re-watch it.

Live matches have never been archived, even on Blues Player before. The extended highlights will be archived and can be viewed at any time.

Q. Is the text commentary that was on Blues Wall no longer available? If not, what will be replacing it?

The live blog was part of EFL digital contract. To have live text commentary as part of the new match day centre would have cost a five-figure sum which couldn't be justified due to the manpower needed on a match day.

We do appreciate it was very popular and we are looking at introducing the live Twitter feed as a blog.

Q. Blues TV states that live streaming is only available outside UK and Ireland. Over recent years televised BCFC matches have been few and far between therefore being based in the ROI we miss out. As a recognised Supporters Group could we pay for one subscription for the Club?

This is not a feasible option. One subscribed supporter could give out log in details to many supporters. This would also mean we would have to do this for all supporters groups – in numbers that could mean 20 subscriptions for hundreds of people.

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Q. The Club's YouTube channel was excellent last year but a 21 second post-match interview with Harry was pitiful. Yes, the Club wants to direct people to paid services but will they put off the majority given the realistic idea most fans will engage with free services?

The 21 seconds available was a taster of what Blues TV can offer, it wasn't the full in-depth interview. This isn't to say that in the future we won't review what's available for free and what's available for subscribers.

Q. The new website is good but it only shows the top 3 stories unless you go via each of the filters in the news drop down. This makes it easy to miss things if more than 3 items are posted in one day.

If you click on News, there are the 12 most recent stories available. Will pass feedback onto Media regarding the possibility of more than 3 top stories on home page.

## Match Day and Facilities

Q. A clamp down on vaping that goes on would be nice, at times I realise how it used to be back in the day when the steam trains came by the Railway End.

We had brand new signs made with "No Smoking or Vaping" which have been posted around the ground. It is on the big screen before the match and at half time. It is in the ground regulations and the stewards are all briefed on this every match day. If you see anyone smoking or vaping – please report to a steward immediately.

Q. Can we suggest having the flags back on the Main Stand?

This will be passed onto Maintenance and Ops to see if this is possible and the crest on the back of the Gil Merrick.

Q. What are the plans for trialling and introducing safe standing? I remember the last time it was dismissed out of hand by the Safety Officer however, momentum is shifting on this and I would be keen to know how Blues are going to engage positively in this development.

As per the last time this was asked – St. Andrew's is an all-seater stadium and will stay this way until legislation changes. Only then will it be considered – it would require extensive building work. A follow-up will be sent to the Safety Officer.



Q. Last season West Midlands Police met with supporters of BCFC and AVFC to discuss arrangements for derby games. Are there plans for similar meetings this season?

Yes, there will be another meeting with West Midlands Police regarding derbies and important matches. Will announce a date as soon as possible when Police confirm.

## **AOB**

Q. How is Blues looking to engage and embrace the people who live closest to the ground? I am thinking particularly of people living near to St. Andrew's who are from an ethnic minority background, as we are severely underrepresented in the stands. There have been some projects and initiatives in the past, it would be great to see how successful they have been and what plans are for the future.

We have a Ticket Incentive scheme that rewards schools/charities with 50% back of the ticket cost.

A few examples of these are:

Newcastle in March – Regents Park Primary School had 100 tickets.

Bolton (Aug 15<sup>th</sup>) – Alum Rock Football Academy which aims to get children mainly from a BAME background attending football matches came to St. Andrew's.

Blues4All had a meeting with a local Hindu temple to discuss how more of their members could attend football matches at St. Andrew's.

Blues4All were also nominated for a Fans for Diversity award with the FSF.

It was brought to our attention that the lights at Morrisons are still active when the road closure is in force and that this is causing severe traffic at Morrisons.

This will be forwarded to our Operations Manager to discuss with the council.