



# FAN ADVISORY BOARD

## MEETING MINUTES

26<sup>th</sup> February 2024



Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
6pm-8.30pm  
Venue: L5 Boardroom, St James' Park.

### In attendance

#### NUFC/Other Attendees

Darren Eales (" <b>DE</b> ")	Newcastle United CEO
Peter Silverstone (" <b>PS</b> ")	Newcastle United CCO
John Devine	Newcastle United General Council
Yvette Thompson (" <b>YT</b> ")	Newcastle United - Director – Commercial Venue
Lee Marshall (" <b>LM</b> ")	Newcastle United – Head of Communications
Sarah Medcalf (" <b>SM</b> ")	Newcastle United - Head of Supporter Services
Matt Willis	Newcastle United Supporter Liaison Officer
Bethany Mackay	Newcastle United Trainee Solicitor
Levi Harris (" <b>LH</b> ")	Premier League – Senior Fan Engagement Manager
Ashley Brown	Head of Governance – Football Supporters Association (FSA)

#### Fan Advisory Board Attendees

Michael McCarthy (" <b>MM</b> ")	STH (Chair)
Rajat Nayyar (" <b>RN</b> ")	Member
Thomas Symonds	Young Person
Natalie Noyes (" <b>NN</b> ")	International
Paul Karter (" <b>PK</b> ")	NUST
Adam Stoker (" <b>AS</b> ")	NUST
Claire Wintrip	United with Pride
Joe Ayton (" <b>JA</b> ")	NUDSA

#### Apologies

Marion Williams	STH (Vice Chair)
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## AGENDA

1. WELCOME
2. PREMIER LEAGUE FAN ENGAGEMENT STANDARD (FES)
3. CEO INTRODUCTION
4. COMMERCIAL PRESENTATION
5. HERITAGE AND STADIUM
6. FAB COMMUNICATIONS
7. TICKETING
8. AOB



## **WELCOME**

Newcastle United welcomed Fan Advisory Board members to the inaugural FAB meeting at St. James' Park, with introductions made around the table.

Following his recent nomination by FAB members, Michael McCarthy (MM) chaired the meeting.

Attendees were joined by Levi Harris (LH), Senior Fan Engagement Manager at the Premier League (PL), and Ashley Brown, Head of Governance at the Football Supporters Association (FSA).

## **PREMIER LEAGUE FAN ENGAGEMENT STANDARD (FES)**

LH thanked the club and FAB for the invitation to attend on behalf of the Premier League.

He provided important context and background to fan engagement and specifically the Fan Advisory Board model, which is part of the PL's overarching Fan Engagement Standard (FES) unanimously voted for by all 20 PL clubs.

The FES is a framework for meaningful engagement between clubs and supporters. LH explained that in each season, clubs must report on the delivery of their FES commitments and are assessed by an independent panel.

Further discussion took place on annual reporting, finalising how clubs will be assessed and fan engagement training work being carried out by the PL to achieve best practice.

## **INTRODUCTION BY DARREN EALES, NUFC CEO**

Attendees were welcomed by the club's CEO, Darren Eales, who outlined the club's commitment to supporter engagement and the scope and significance of the new FAB.

A presentation was delivered referencing the club's established vision:

'We're going to build a results-driven, world class, sustainable organisation that consistently achieves top six status for men's and women's teams and wins major trophies, within the next five years.'

DE gave further context to the club's progress: "The club's revenue growth over the last two seasons and into this season has been incredible.



“Off the pitch, because we started from a low revenue base, we are still a long way behind the top six in the Premier League. Since we can only spend a percentage of revenue, we always look to spend the maximum we can on the team within Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR).

“This means it is vital that we look at ways to raise revenue streams, whether through matchday, St. James’ STACK, commercial partnerships, retail/merchandise, tours, hospitality and events.”

A topline overview of the club’s ongoing Stadium Feasibility Survey project was given, with an outline aim of “exploring the art of the possible” and ensuring a greater number of supporters could attend matches. The club stressed that its priority when commissioning the project was to remain at St. James’ Park but that no recommendations had yet been made.

DE: “The priority is to stay at St. James’ Park, but we know there are challenges around development. So we have employed experts to assess what is feasible from an engineering and financial perspective.”

A commitment was given to discussing the matter further with the FAB once a final report has been completed.

## QUESTIONS TO DE

AS “Is there a date to return Feasibility report results?”

The club anticipates it will receive an initial report in April 2024.

PK: “Is there a number in mind on ideal capacity? Will there be a point at which a (capacity) number will sway the club towards a move away from St. James’ Park, for example, if we can only get up to 60,000?”

DE: “The feasibility study will help us to answer key questions, including what an ideal capacity might be.”

## COMMERCIAL PRESENTATION BY PETER SILVERSTONE, NUFC CCO

A presentation to the FAB included an overview of the club’s growing commercial department, which has the aim of maximising commercial revenue, and the club’s local and global fanbase, in support of the club’s growth on and off the pitch.

It was explained that the club’s commercial department is split into the following four ‘verticals’:

**Brand, Marketing and Digital Media:** From a Brand perspective, this department will look at what Newcastle United (in conjunction with key city stakeholders) stands for now, and in the future. How do we want to represent our club and city to our local and global fanbase current and new. This will involve addressing the creative look, feel and branding of Newcastle United as well as the content we create for different global, digital platforms.



Areas include social media and content strategy, digital – including building an official Newcastle United app, building a new ecommerce platform and website. The department's aim is to identify the club's USP, create a brand strategy around this, creatively package this into a content and digital strategy that amplifies the club's relevance and importance both locally and globally.

**Commercial Venue/Venue Operations:** Tasked with ensuring St. James' Park is a world class venue for supporters and visitors. The team oversees ticketing, supporter services, stadium tours, hospitality and catering sales and development, as well as playing a key role in infrastructure projects such as St. James' STACK.

**Retail and Licensing** – Creating and licensing the best products and services for Newcastle United supporters and making them accessible across the globe. The Club is bringing retail operations back 'in-house', with a world class retail proposition to include a revamped club store(s) and a new ecommerce platform. Both platforms will look to sell a world-class range of products. adidas will contribute their best-in-class NUFC products and ranges but this department will also be tasked with creating and offering further best-in-class products that our fanbase wants to see and buy.

**Commercial Partnerships** - The team secures and manages brand partnerships, generates commercial opportunities for the club and team, including pre-season tours, and is tasked with creating world class non-football events.

As Chief Commercial Officer, PS gave insight into the significant growth of the commercial team at Newcastle United, outlining the high level of talent that is being attracted to Newcastle United.

A summary of key St. James' Park projects for the department was outlined, including the new fan zone, technological developments, and digital and retail marketing in preparation for the upcoming partnership with adidas. Commercial priorities were discussed, including plans for a temporary club store during the existing store's refurbishment, the eventual launch of a new club store ahead of the new season, the aim to secure a training kit partner, and development of additional tiers of commercial partnerships. The club is also reviewing options for pre-season in summer 2024.

Finally, PS outlined the importance of being a positive and supportive 'city partner', building on strong relationships with local authorities, universities, commercial networks, and the wider business community.

## QUESTIONS TO PS

RN: "Would the club look at training ground naming rights?"

PS: "Securing a training kit partner is a top priority for Commercial Partnerships. If we can attract global partners, they can help us to activate and attract new fans in previously unreached markets."

"Adidas, for example, is committing to supporting our growth globally and from a brand perspective, it will be a watershed moment for the club. Ultimately, that relationship, like all kit partnerships, relies on fans buying products locally and internationally."



TS: "What is the area with the biggest scope for growth?"

PS: "Our secondary partnerships have increased by over 90%, and we need to grow this again year on year. [Secondary partnerships are those partnerships that are not reliant on kit or property branding e.g., Sela and Noon. They are reliant on the reach and exposure of the club via media, digital and other engagement channels e.g., Fenwick, BetMGM and InPost]."

RN: "For FFP purposes, in terms of the income the club generates from the venue, is there a separate pot for women's and men's (matches at SJP)?"

DE stated that revenue in an FFP context generally relates to all income generated by the club.

JA: "Is there an option for an additional brand on the shirt (as with the Women's team)?"

The club outlined the different approaches across different countries and leagues but disclosed that PL rules mean this would not be possible. The rules currently allow for a front-of-shirt sponsor, sleeve sponsor and kit partner. Although the Women's team has a back of short sponsor this was not something that was available in the Premier League.

AS: "Is there any consideration for separate designs for men's and women's team shirts?"

The club outlined the manufacturing process and the costs associated with creating different shirts, as well as the additional expense of buying them. Kit designs for men's and women's teams will be the same in the near future.

PK "Are brands queueing up to be our partners?"

PS: "We still have to work hard to persuade potential partners, and there is a lot of 'outbound' activity to speak with brands, but clearly there has been increased interest in the last two years. But we have a lot of work to do on secondary partnerships, and growing globally is key."

AS: "Are naming rights being considered on the stadium?"

In line with commitments in the club's Fan Engagement Standard, the club would consult with the FAB and its wider fan base should relevant proposals be received in the future.

NN: "For international membership benefits, there has been a suggestion of varying tiers of options. Is this something that is being looked at? Would it be possible to be consulted on products?"

The club continues to review its membership proposition and carefully considers how it can resonate with different people in different territories, so that the right products and services are attractive to existing and new fans. The club invites feedback on what fans would like to see in stores and online.



## **HERITAGE AND STADIUM**

### **HALL OF FAME**

The FAB raised the possibility of Len White being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

The club provided a background to the Hall of Fame, which was introduced 12 years ago and is overseen by Newcastle United Foundation. The Hall of Fame includes inductees who have been recognised for their on-field achievements and/or who have made significant contributions to the club, city and community.

The club confirmed that Len was very much in consideration for upcoming Hall of Fame events, and that the club had recently had the privilege of hosting Len's family at a first team match at St. James' Park.

PK: "We have had interest in working with someone from the club on murals and statues? Who would that be directed at?"

The club's Supporter Services team will liaise with NUST.

MM outlined the FAB's request to be involved in major projects from the outset, citing any potential stadium developments specifically.

The club reiterated its commitment to discussing the upcoming feasibility report with the FAB.

### **WORKSHOPS AND WORKING GROUPS**

The club continues to run official workshop events both in person and using the Jugo digital platform to consult with supporters and generate qualitative feedback and ideas. For the 2023/24 season the club has committed to four workshops, with topics for the most recent three events chosen by supporters at an event attended by Darren Eales and Eddie Howe in November 2023.

So far, 200 supporters have attended each workshop and topics have included away ticketing and the ticket ballot process. The club thanks supporters sincerely for their participation and feedback and is reviewing improvements and developments that can be made for next season and beyond.

The club welcomes further FAB feedback.



## FAB COMMUNICATION

SM outlined the FAB 'Terms of Reference', 'Code of Conduct' and the plan to ensure concise, accurate discussion points were shared with the FAB members before being made visible to supporters within a 20-working day period.

After each meeting, SM said that recommendations and discussions would be communicated up to relevant members of the club's Senior Management Team (SMT) if they were unable to attend.

PK explained that fans were aware the first FAB meeting was taking place and that NUST would be approached for details.

To support efficient communication and to enable supporter groups to update their members, LM outlined the club had planned to issue a [summary](#) immediately following the meeting's conclusion. This would inform supporters of the broad topics covered and signpost that meeting minutes would follow. The wording was outlined before being agreed to by FAB members.

The club reiterated that some commercially sensitive information would likely be disclosed at FAB meetings to inform discussions and reminded members that this would need to be kept in the room in order to protect necessary privacy and confidentiality.

MM asked on behalf of the FAB if there were agreed ways for members to communicate or promote the FAB in the media.

LM encouraged the FAB's views and offered to support MM and members in identifying their preferred opportunities. Members were encouraged to raise media enquiries with the club so that support, relevant information and context could be provided as required.

MM asked how fans could get in touch with FAB.

It was agreed that a separate email address using the club's domain would be set up for the purpose of supporters communicating directly with the FAB. However, as a short-term measure, it was agreed that the club would collate initial emails via [supporter.services@nufc.co.uk](mailto:supporter.services@nufc.co.uk).

Members explained that they would discuss this before deciding who would be the first point of contact.

## TICKETING

### WORKSHOPS / WORKING GROUPS

AS outlined that some supporters did not feel that outcomes from ticketing Working Groups were being actioned, or that their views were being listened to.

SM explained that there can often be lengthy and complex work required behind the scenes (between views





being shared, agreeing a solution or new launch and then implementing change). SM offered reassurance that the club is continuing to listen to feedback and develop its processes for the benefit of as many supporters as possible.

AS asked if previous workshops on ticketing could be presented to the FAB.

SM explained that the next scheduled FAB meeting is in May but that regular communication between the club and FAB would take place in the meantime.

## SPOT CHECKS

FAB members asked about the safety of supporters who may be subject to ticket spot checks at away matches, referencing whether families could be separated and the distance of 'away' box offices to pick up a duplicate ticket.

The club explained that ticket spot checks (which help to protect those with legitimate access to tickets based on the well-supported loyalty points system) are reviewed by the club ahead of each match. A health and safety review is carried out in advance and intelligence is gathered on any relevant issues experienced by supporters in recent matches at the away stadium.

The club sends its own supporter services and stewarding team to each match. Although safety and security operations are ultimately managed by the host club and local authorities, the 'away' stewarding team is there to provide away fans with support and reassurance.

PK expressed a view in favour of ID checking generally. However, NUST representatives explained that the spot-checking process led to anxiety amongst some supporters due potential consequences (time and location to obtain a duplicate ticket) and a feeling that some supporters would feel "guilty until proven innocent". Instead, NUST proposed that some supporters could pick up their away tickets from the away match location with ID if notified 72 hours before the match.

MM said that he had seen empty seats at some away matches, despite tickets being sold out, and was keen to support efforts that ensured the full, loud away crowds that are synonymous with Newcastle United.

The club acknowledged the concerns raised. The club committed to listening to supporters' views on spot checking, and will consider the feedback from workshops, the FAB and wider sources and review how this can inform improvements.

## TICKETING PROCESSES AND PLANNING

A presentation on ticketing processes and planning has been delivered to all members.

This included:

- How the club caters for a wide range of supporters
- The level of support needed as demand increases
- The insight and analysis that drives changes and better functionality
- Access for season ticket holders and members
- The balloting process



- How the club combats bots, unauthorised third-party resellers and tout
- Changes made to improve the online queuing system
- Statistics on turnstile 'flow rates' and how turnstiles are checked and tested

MM requested an additional FAB meeting on ticketing should members decide that was needed.

Members noted that they wanted to encourage the club to be transparent on ticket numbers (i.e. how allocations are split between general admission [season ticket holders, members, general sale], corporate clients, players' families and friends, disabled/ambulant supporters).

The club thanked members for their views on ticketing and all topics discussed and committed to reviewing their feedback with a view to enhancing supporters' experiences.

## **MEETING ENDS**

Next scheduled FAB: May 2024.