

Dons Trust Board (DTB)
Minutes of board meeting held at 7.30pm on 17 March, 2021
Meeting was held virtually and recorded via Microsoft Teams

DTB members

Jane Lonsdale (Chair)
Tim Hillyer
Xavier Wiggins
Hannah Kitcher
Charlie Talbot
Luke Mackenzie
Edward Leek
Niall Couper

In attendance

Joe Palmer (Club CEO)
Michele Little (DT Treasurer)
Matt Stockbridge (Observer)
Conor Daly (Minutes)

PART ONE – WITH FCB REPRESENTATIVES

1. **Introduction and Apologies**

No apologies were noted.

2. **Administrative Requests**

- Jane reminded the group to ensure that the appropriate stakeholders were to be included on communications concerning club matters
- Jane noted that a decision on the budget was to be delayed whilst the financing committee reviewed and updated
- It was stressed that proper protocol was to be observed on Microsoft Teams meetings with use of the chat functionality discouraged as they wouldn't be captured by the minutes.

3. **FCB Report**

Jane invited Joe to present the report, the main items of which were:

- Joe noted that the 21/22 season would commence on Saturday 7th August and that uncertainty remained regarding test events and COVID protocols
- Joe added that there had been no change regarding the update on the proposed squad salary cap
- It was noted that an internal communication had been sent updating staff of the new organisational structure; Joe and the club HR Consultant were working with the senior executive team at the club to develop plans and targets for next season

- Joe updated that an environmental impact report had been received from Stantec in relation to Broncos and that an application had been submitted to Merton Council. It was noted that the fan's consultation process had been agreed and launched as a single item SGM on 31st March
- Joe stated that the NHS vaccination centre was to open on Tuesday 23rd March. It was noted that the equipment to support the centre cannot easily be taken down and reassembled, contrary to previous advice. The club has taken the decision to bring forward the end date for the agreement to 31st July; two lounges were to be retained for hosting social events
- Joe said that the volunteering project was live and expressed his optimism at what it could contribute
- Joe updated up the catering contract
- Discussions with breweries were ongoing but more would be asked to tender.
- Joe updated on approaches regarding a film or documentary on the clubs story
- Concerning the Development Group; representations had been sent to Merton and Wandsworth Councils to ensure that the club was considered for future developments. It was also noted that Morden Park Playing Fields Community Trust had been engaged to discuss how the club might support the Trust's activities
- Lastly, Joe updated the group on work for a diagnostics centre at the stadium. The club had engaged Fortius, as its medical partner but would also work with individuals from St George's Hospital.

Questions and comments were invited and during a lengthy discussion, the following points were raised:

- Xavier asked whether the stadium naming rights for five league games applied to the current season and Joe confirmed that it would apply for next season instead
- Xavier added that it may be worth investigating the possibility of a performance-based commission-only sales team to help sell events and certain packages
- Charlie asked whether communication on rewards from Seedrs investments had been made and Joe confirmed that they had and that a new engraving machine would operate to begin work on some rewards
- Charlie followed up by asking why Joe felt the club was relatively underperforming on iFollow sales. Joe suspected that this due to a legacy approach of not actively pushing it with the club's fan base. Xavier asked whether a questionnaire to fans might be worthwhile and Joe supported this idea. Charlie asked whether the existing approach would continue for next season and Joe suggested that it would likely continue with the exception of Saturday 3pm kick-offs

- Hannah asked for an update on the status of sales of the front of shirt sponsorship package. It was understood that distribution of the opportunity to 500 companies had yielded no interest. Joe replied that the current price was correct given the exposure generated and that currently, sponsors had other priorities and wanted more certainty regarding playing in front of fans
- Hannah asked whether the club's conversion rate on checkout to purchases was adequate. Joe said that the club's performance compared favourably with eCommerce standards of around 1-3% and direct marketing at 0.1%, it was noted that there had been progress made since the launch of the new website but that this could be measured easily as a KPI
- Hannah asked how sales attributable to marketing was assessed and Joe confirmed that a cookie-based online tracker facilitated this assessment
- Hannah requested an update on the membership update and migration of DT members. Joe confirmed that Klaudia Wieczorek had worked on this and that full migration of data was to be completed by 29th March with DT membership live on SecuTix by the end of April. Hannah asked whether DT members would receive a communication regarding this, and Joe confirmed that he was happy to send one
- Luke asked for a ballpark figure on the revenue opportunity attached to the diagnostics centre.
- Luke asked Joe how follow-ups on ST sales had gone and Joe confirmed that this exercise had been completed
- Luke asked whether STs would be distributed in physical format this season and Joe confirmed that they would not be. Luke suggested sending a letter of thanks in lieu of a physical ticket. Jane noted there had been previous discussion about this and the costs for producing eg a commemorative season ticket were high
- Luke requested an update on sales figures for the programme. Joe confirmed that the first batch of physical programmes had sold 123 units
- In response to a question from Luke, Joe updated on the stadium naming rights
- Michele thanked Klaudia for her work on the data migration and asked whether Mike Berry could help on reviewing privacy and details related to opt-outs of sharing data at the club. Joe agreed to this but cautioned that there were other considerations around data management
- Charlie asked whether the football board idea was to be discussed as a separate item. Joe announced that he was looking at potential board members, two had been spoken to and meetings sought with another four. Joe added that work was ongoing to build on Nick Daws' existing recruitment platform; Mark Robinson needed to provide characteristics at a position level so that players could be identified. Luke asked who would ultimately make the final decision on new signings and Joe

confirmed that decisions would be taken together but that ultimately, without Mark's support, it was unlikely that a transfer would proceed

- Edward added a brief financial update. Edward concluded by saying that more work needed to be done on a final draft budget before it could be voted on
- Tim asked whether the current forecasts incorporated the rent expected from the vaccination hub and Charlie believed that the budget did include a fully functioning event space in July.

Actions: Joe to provide final figures on ST follow-up communication campaign. DTB to solicit Mike's input on privacy details relating to data migration.

4. **Communications Lead Proposal**

Jane noted the recommendation in Niall's paper to approve the proposal to recruit a communication lead post and decide the length of the appointment. Questions were invited on the proposal:

- Michele asked what the cost of the appointment was. Niall explained that the role was essential, and that the proposal had tried to divorce costs from needs, albeit the cost for the intended appointment was to be minimal. Joe added the proposal was to outline a review process enabling the DTB to review the appointment
- Michele asked what salary would be published in any potential job advert. Niall confirmed that one would not be advertised, the salary would be decided as part of the recruitment process
- Jane held a vote on running an open recruitment as a requirement subject to HR and legal advice:
 - For: Hannah, Xavier, Graham, Niall and Jane
 - Against: Tim, Ed, Charlie and Luke
- Hannah asked whether Joe knew of any internal candidates who would be disappointed if they were not invited to apply. Joe confirmed that he did not.
- Jane noted the latest IR35 tax rules impacted on recruitment and employment status. Joe agreed with this and suggested that the initial cost assessment had not considered this but per annum, the estimate was not far off
- Michele noted that it would be naïve not to expect applicants to want to know what the salary was. Michele added that the club needed to understand financial implications when hiring.
- Niall recognised that progress could only be made, via open recruitment, if the current role was made redundant. Jane agreed with

Michele that the position had to be budgeted for and requested further input from HR.

- Jane held a vote on the DTB being happy to promote the current Head of PR as Director of Communications with a three-month probation period and a review on open recruitment at the end of this period subject to HR and legal advice.
- For: Tim, Edward, Xavier, Charlie, Niall and Luke
- Against: Jane and Graham
- Abstention: Hannah

Actions: HR input to be sought on possibilities around making current Head of PR role redundant.

5. **'Sustain the Game' and Fair Game Proposals**

- Niall noted that several different bodies were looking to review the uneasy status quo but that a coalition of EFL clubs was missing
- A coalition of clubs called Fair Game has now been created – although unlikely to be formally launched for a few weeks
- Niall stressed the benefits of supporting Fair Game. These include: raising the salary cap issue again and readdressing the parachute payments not solely being distributed to the Championship
- It was noted that there were other policy areas covering tax breaks for clubs run on a sustainable basis, levies on agents' fees and the creation of a new regulatory body
- Niall explained that support for Fair Game had been garnered from Exeter City F.C., Newport Town F.C. and that two other football league clubs would likely join next week. Niall believed that a body of eight to ten clubs could come together and that the timing was good given the government's desire for a fan-led review of football governance
- Xavier was positive but noted that the subject was a departure from the board's agreed priorities. Xavier questioned the time allocation demanded and asked Niall whether he could drive the initiative, Niall confirmed that he could
- Tim stated that he was not aware of how far that this had progressed and that the subject had not been raised at the latest FSA board meeting. Tim counselled that provocative language like 'no-one has any faith' needed to be avoided

Jane invited comments on whether the initiative would become the eighth DTB objective driving the budget:

- Joe agreed the principles of the initiative and noted that the aims enjoyed strong support throughout League Two and a majority of League One clubs. Joe noted that the EFL were not lobbying actively

enough and required support, Joe believed that clubs that were run on a sustainable basis ought to be rewarded for it

- Jane noted that members of the DT were already involved, including Matt Breach and Nicole Hammond but that formal DTB involvement would require conviction
- Niall felt that the existing explanatory materials were of a high quality, following input from experts and that progress was contingent on owners and CEOs participating
- Joe urged caution that efforts did not detract from the EFL's work and that coordination would advance the aims of both groups. Joe added that the topic was rife with complexity and encouraged the group to focus on the main items

Jane asked whether there were any objections to the DTB supporting the FSA's 'Sustain the Game' initiative and 'Fair Game' and none were noted

6. **AOB**

- Luke informed the group that he had put together a list of follow-up questions ahead of the single issue SGM
- Jane added that there was not time to distribute these by paper to non-digital DT members and there was no disagreement with this proposal
- Joe announced that the publishers of Erik Samuelson's forthcoming book had asked whether it could be sold in the club shop. Tim suggested that at least one member of the DTB should read the book before a decision was made

Actions: Luke to send suggested responses to Joe and Xavier. Tim and/or others on the DTB to read Erik's upcoming book before making a recommendation on whether it should be sold in the club shop.

Joe left the meeting.

PART TWO – DTB & SECRETARIAT ONLY

7. **DTB Meetings**

- Jane noted that the current agendas of the board had been discussed with the Secretariat and it was proposed that with the current workload the DTB would meet more regularly having additional single item / DTB only sessions. Xavier reiterated that these meetings needed to be short in order to be effective

8. **DTB Coordination**

- The board discussed ways to improve its ways of working and improving a positive culture.
- Jane noted that negativity had been seeping out across various external elements of the board's work and that the board needed to ensure that it was pulling in the same direction and remaining positive and to avoid a finger pointing and blame culture when everyone wanted to see things improve
- Xavier backed up this sentiment, noting that DLAG volunteers were only able to deliver as much as they did by all coordinating closely, even where there were differences of opinion. Xavier encouraged the DTB to try to improve the narrative on social media platforms and ProBoards
- DTB members outlined individual issues and concerns and how to improve communication so everyone was up to date when so much was going on autonomously
- Jane and Xavier noted the opportunity to raise concerns on a weekly basis with Joe via their 1:1 meeting and that there needed to be feedback from those meetings that Jane and Xavier would formalise (recognising this added to the workload).

Actions: Jane to revert with next steps on a reformed communication plan for the Friday meetings with Joe. DTB to send list of issues to Xavier for him to raise with Joe. Xavier to review use of some form of repository to help improve information sharing around the Friday meeting. DTB to send Jane suggested improvements for how the board operates

9. **DTB Meetings**

- Jane noted that there was a backlog of minutes being reviewed due to the high number of meetings that had been held recently. Jane asked for all DTB members to submit comments on draft minutes that had been shared by the end of 18 March

Actions: DTB members to submit comments on draft minutes by end of 18 March

10. **Roles and Responsibilities of Communications Secretariat Support**

- Hannah suggested that this item was moved to next month's meeting

Actions: Agenda item to be added to next month's meeting

11. **WiSH Update**

- Niall noted that there had been one application, Peter Leng and sought the DTB's approval to appoint Peter
- Jane asked whether it was worth advertising again for additional applicants so there was a wider field of candidates. Niall said that ordinarily he would agree but that Peter was a high-quality candidate who had performed well at interview. It was noted that Peter's role would be to perform the DT function on WiSH including unification of branding, social media interaction and communications
- No objections were raised to Peter's appointment

12. **Update on Foundation Trustees**

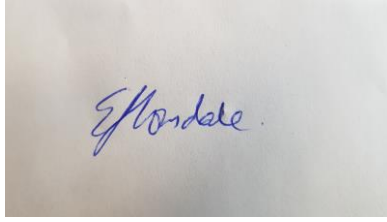
- Jane noted that Mick Buckley had stated his desire to step down as trustee of the AFCW Foundation. It was noted that there was a proposal to have a number of 'break glass in emergency' representatives with Sophie Hosking and Alex Mitchell as DT representatives, however both wanted to sit as independents
- Jane added that an advert to replace Erik as Chair of Trustees had been posted and that there was a recognition that this was his last club role
- Xavier raised the issue of the response to the advert for a Chair of Trustees. Jane suggested advertising it more widely including with an organisation that seeks to identify female board members for organisations. Niall suggested that the Community Stakeholder Group could also be a good source of candidates

Actions: Jane to confirm whether Alex and Sophie are DT members when they sit as DT representatives

13. **AOB**

- Jane thanked Charlie for helping with the second leg of the inclusivity campaign from the Diversity & Inclusion Working Group. Jane added that a transgender fan was writing a piece for the DT's website ahead of Transgender Visibility Day; it was noted that the piece included positive commentary on the individual's experience at club events
- Charlie noted that he intended to stream the upcoming F.A. Youth Cup game and that kick-off was 18.00
- Edward suggested that as the budget wasn't yet ready, the next budget could be taken to the Finance Committee and made available to DTB members that were interested. Michele added that the next meeting was at 20.00 on Wednesday 14th April

The meeting concluded at 11.20pm.

A rectangular area containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature appears to be "E. W. O. S. D. A. T. E." written in a cursive style.

Signed on behalf of the DT Board