Dons Trust Board Meeting 13 November 2024

DTB in Attendance	Apologies	Also Present
Angus Fox (Chair)	Mark Lewis	Andrea Knox (Secretary) (Online)
James Macdonald (Vice Chair) (Online)	Anuk Teasdale	George Jones (Assistant Secretary)
Hannah Kitcher		Michele Little (Treasurer) (For Certain Items)
Graeme Price		David Growns (Women's Chair) (For Womens Update Only)
Kevin Rye (Online)		Sophia Axelsson (Women's GM) (For Womens Update Only)
Richard Shepherd		Reece Wheeler-Kelly (ProBoards Mod) (For ProBoards Update Only) (Online)
Alex Folkes (Online)		
James Longhurst		

1. **<u>Introduction</u>**

The meeting began at 6.05pm.
Angus welcomed everyone to the meeting. George said apologies had been received from Mark Lewis.

2. **<u>Women's Section Update</u>**

Angus welcomed Sophia and David to the meeting.

Angus asked for Sophia and David's views on the performance of the Women's section this season. David responded by explaining that on the pitch we are over performing. We have moved training grounds to Colets Health Centre after some issues with the training facilities at RPV. We are currently renting flood lights however to purchase the lights we need will be around £60k. As a result we are making enquiries about second-hand. We are struggling to get any funding due to the high level the women's team occupy in the pyramid. Sophia added that the facilities at Colets are much better than they were at RPV and the pitches are of a much higher standard. The board agreed that it is an impressive facility.

David added the integration of the girls section into the set up has been a great success and invited the board down to watch a girls section game on a Saturday morning at the Bank of England training ground.

Sophia added that she is struggling to attract volunteers to help on matchdays. She then added she does have a work experience intern working with her and whilst this has some challenges it is worth it to reduce her workload. The placement is an ongoing process until the person finds a paid position.

Graeme asked about coaching and suggested speaking to CC about getting some help finding coaches. Sophia said they have looked into various networks but are struggling to find people who can do it for free when other clubs pay coaches for comparable roles.

Kevin asked about the funding gap for the floodlights and wanted to know if we were stuck in the middle ground of not being professional but not being grassroots. Sophia said there is no central funding and there is nothing for setting up PGAs. For this season we have the requirement to have a development squad which we don't have due to the costs and there being no funding available for it. Kevin concluded that this is a failure of governance of the pyramid.

Graeme then asked if we have a list of people we could approach for a grant and suggested getting in touch with Peter Grant which David and Sophia agreed would be a great idea.

A discussion took place on how to use the lights if we move training grounds.

James Longhurst asked about challenges with crowds and asked are we doing it the right way. Sophia responded that she has discussed it with Marc (Jones) but that we do not have the same supporter demographic as the men's team. We do have some loyal overlap but every time we have surveyed our crowd it is 40% new people attending their first game at PL. Sophia said the small crowds at PL during the first couple of weeks of the season was due to the schools being out. She added that promotion used to go out through the foundation but that has not happened this season. She added a lot of people get cheap/free tickets then no show and it is a problem for all of Women's football. She adds that it is difficult to try and balance the pricing with charging the amount to make people value the product vs not alienating supporters. Graeme asked what league average pricing is, David responded that the average is £7 which is what we charge. David added the Women's games will now be advertised through DLAG alongside our other routes and Sophia mentioned we will also now be in the Merton Libraries newsletter.

James L asked what more support do they need from the club and the trust. Sophia responded that we are massively overachieving and said we need to help get some more support with the number of high budget teams trying to catch us up from lower divisions and said we will fall back.

Graeme asked how our supporter overlap is different from other clubs and is that a success from their marketing. Sophia said this is down to a lack of competition which allows them to market in a specific way and said that with the competition of Chelsea and Palace and London City Lionesses we will struggle. Graeme said it all comes down to marketing. David said our demographic is all families and that is what we play to. Sophia said we then need to turn them into return customers which is a challenge. Sophia added we need to perfect the family day out and look at improving the customer return rate.

Richard asked how attendances changed from a couple of years ago, Sophia said attendances were rising consistently until this season. Sophia said we have lost the link to the schools and that is the biggest problem for attracting crowds. This has now been fixed and we are seeing new people coming to RPV all the time.

James L asked how good is the data we are getting. Sophia responded we are not getting any data. Sophia added that she needs more time to be able to actually look into the data but it is something that she need more support in.

James L asked what does the vision look like over the next few years David then explained that the Women's board are writing a strategy document at the moment. They were offered the assistance of the same volunteer who wrote the overall club strategy document. James L offered to put them in touch. David and Sophia agreed this would be helpful. David added the next three years is about stabilising where we are before looking at if we want to achieve promotion. Sophia then explained that Watford are a current yo-yo club and that is something that we will need to decide if it is something we want to do. Charlton are mid-table in the championship and have a budget of £1.5m a year which is what it takes to spend to stay in the championship. David and Sophia both underlined that we will have to build when still in tier 3 to avoid making the same mistakes that Portsmouth have made this season. Sophia added that the pyramid is becoming a replica of the premier league.

Angus asked about crowds in the championship, Sophia said last season our crowds outnumbered some championship crowds and added that even big clubs only have a small group of their fans support their women's team.

Alex asked about the opportunity to sell merchandise to fans at games. James L suggested that having improved data would help solve a lot of these issues when it comes to tracking customer journey. Sophia again repeated the issue with workload. We do not sell merchandise at RPV because we don't have any money to risk spending on merchandise to sell. Sophia said if we want to be ambitious and stay where we are or push forward we will need more support and resources. James L said the first step is the strategy document. David G said that is right and the strategy will need to show the costs for standing still as well as pushing forward which allows the club to decide what the expectation for the Women's section is.

Graeme asked about the cup run revenue, David G said we lost in the first round after getting the most difficult draw possible.

Angus asked if Sophia and David would come back in the future. Both agreed and invited the board to speak to them whenever they want.

James L accepted the invites to a girls section game.

Angus said he was enjoying the live streams of games.

The board thanked Sophia and David for attending before Sophia and David left the meeting at 6.58pm.

3. **Meet the DTB**

Those present took a break from the board meeting to take part in the meet the DTB which began at 7pm and concluded at 8pm.

4. **ProBoards Replacement Update**

Reece entered the meeting.

The board thanked Reece for his efforts moderating ProBoards.

George and Reece then outlined the work they had done on evaluating ProBoards and looking into a potential replacement.

Reece then gave an analytical report which showed the underperformance of ProBoards as a platform and explained the behind the scenes difficulties with using it.

George then introduced the replacement platform would be called “The Dons Trust Community Hub” and would be hosted on discord. Whilst the platform itself would be free George explained there would be a year one cost of $210 and an annual cost of $120 to fund analytical and moderation tools that would greatly increase the usability of the new platform.

George then outlined some of the features of the new platform which included keeping a version of meet the DTB, and general discussion but also more general discussion areas and the opportunity to host meetings and community events in the space.

George said the new platform would be ready for Beta testing by the end of the month and be ready to go fully live on new year's day.

A discussion then took place on how to manage the new platform.

A vote was held to move to Discord and start decommissioning ProBoards, The vote passed unanimously.

The board thanked Reece for his time and for attending tonight’s meeting despite being on holiday. Reece then left the meeting.

5. **Update on Recruitment of new PLC Chair**

James Macdonald provided an update on the latest on the recruitment of a new PLC Chair. James informed the board that he and Angus had had meetings with EiSG yesterday. There have been just under 150 candidates with unsuccessful candidates notified.

There is a 5 person shortlist with a range of backgrounds

Angus added that EiSG have done a lot of great work to put together the shortlist.

Hannah asked about the makeup of the interview panel.

Alex said it is a good balanced shortlist in terms of experience and background but noted the lack of demographic diversity. He said we need longer than an hour for interviews. Alex agreed with Hannah that it is important to have a range of people on the interview including people who will challenge the candidates.

James L said we should be careful not to make people do too much work when they are applying for an unpaid role. He suggested doing a final interview without presentation, the board agreed.

Kevin said it is important part to stress test the candidates given what they are likely to face whilst doing their role.

Hannah added that they will be the public facing part of the board, and we need to make sure it is someone is not going to step on toes or leave too soon.

Next steps
Final interview (Online)
Final day for a couple of candidates is in person to meet CC and James W to allow the DTB to make the final decision between two/three candidates.

James M will write a short piece to publish to the membership.

6. **Ratification of Email Decisions**

Angus informed the board that he had been told by James W that a possible sponsorship deal had not progressed, so a vote about it was no longer needed.

7. Approval of Previous Minutes

The board unanimously approved the minutes from the full October meeting, the closed session in October and the summary from the meeting held on Friday.

8. Flood Update

The service lift is working. Other lifts will be working soon. Beyond that no further update.

9. DTB Actions List and PLC Questions and Actions List

A discussion took place on the suitability of joint sponsorship/supplier agreements. Graeme added it requires a deeper level of due diligence.

A discussion took place on how to deal with any questions that come up at the AGM.

10. Plough Lane Bond Update and Dons Trust Finance Update

Michele provided an update on the PLBs with around £35k still to respond and thinks we will have to repay a little over £1.4m

Michele introduced the DTBs Q1 management accounts which shows the rise in membership revenue.

Graeme discussed how to spend money, including whether to ask the club to hire a paid membership person, bonds, buying back equity, turnstiles and academy. James L suggested giving the academy the same amount of increase as was given to the Women's team. Hannah raised the issue of tech support for meetings. James suggested venue hire costs. Michele added the cost of Zoom and other tools such as Mailchimp is still high. George responded that it was hoped that the new Discord platform will replace Zoom. James L added that we will be able to get rid of Mailchimp soon.

Graeme asked should we have a reserve policy, Michele will look into it.

It was unanimously agreed to provide the women's team the additional £30k funding.

The board will look to draw up a list of extra spending items.

11. Restricted Action Process and Comms

Angus expressed a desire to really push forward and try to push voting numbers until Monday evening. Kev will help James L write a couple of articles including for the club and SLP.

James L suggested trying to get an idea of what additional safeguards would help encourage people to vote in favour.

Kevin discussed the benefits of having multiple different comms methods.

A discussion took place on the layout of the proxy form and the timelines.

12. Theme Groups

a. Community

No update

b. Member Services

Richard gave a brief update discussing moving away from smart survey due to issues with not being able to re-register for smart survey after opt-ing out. George offered to help.

Richard raised the option of asking people to re-join a mailing every six months.

Kevin said all of these issues comes from the fact we use multiple different systems.

Angus said mail list confirmation could be part of the membership sign up.

A discussion took place on international membership.

c. Engagement

Angus informed the board that a theme group meeting took place with John Lynch and a US based fan to discuss setting up more international fan groups. The fan spoken to does not want to lead but wants to try to increase the benefits of international DT membership. Angus added that the member felt that the membership offering to those outside the UK should be a different offering to those who come regularly to matches in person.

The member had some ideas around how to improve international membership offering. It was agreed to set up a working group.

John Lynch was keen to promote the international members day with a large number of international supporters ‘groups attending the game. It was agreed this could be a target date of international membership offerings. Richard suggested doing more to promote us being in London and have a host for international fans.

Angus raised that they have made an issue of the cost of watching games overseas.

d. <u>Fundraising</u>

Graeme will circulate the meeting notes.

There is a meeting scheduled for the 19th to discuss with the club the sort of things they want on the club website such as legacies and donations for the club.

Richard asked if we have any targets. Graeme said they need to have mechanics first before setting targets.

e. <u>Culture and Mission and Oversight</u>

Richard provided an update on the risk register including, the risk of a constitution update failing, loss of DTB volunteers, equity vote failing, uncontested elections.

Richard asked everyone to review the risk register and come up with ideas of things to add and to consider what preventative measures could be added.

Hannah asked for podcasts to be added to the risk register.

13. <u>George Secretariat Proposal</u>

George introduced the paper they had submitted for a new structure for the secretariat. The paper suggested having a lead secretary with five assistant secretaries each with a specific remit (Legal, Analysis, Project Management, Comms and Youth Engagement). The proposed structure would greatly reduce workload for board members and the secretariat as well as reducing the boards risks during handover periods between boards and would improve the boards output and help further improve engagement and accountability with members.

George and Michele left the room.

Minutes from this point until stated were completed by Hannah

The Board discussed the Secretary role and George’s proposal.

James M was concerned that there is insufficient oversight by PLC Board for example asking ‘have you considered this or that?’

James M and Graeme, both PLC board members, emphasised that there is a need for a legal Company Secretary and one who is properly paid. As a £9-10m company, the responsibilities of Directors are growing and therefore the PLC needs to be mandated to have a legal Company Secretary.

It was discussed that the DTB needs independent legal advice, especially as the world is all about litigation e.g. Subject Access Requests (SAR’s).

Alex Folkes asked whether we were realistically going to be able to be able to recruit for five Sub-Secretaries, as outlined in George’s proposal.

He said that we need to show we’re heading off problems at the pass for the future.

The DTB agreed that there is a lot in the proposal that they like but need to put more structure in place. The Board will also urge George to ask for help when needed.

A further discussion took place.

George and Michele re-entered the room and George took over writing minutes.

The DTB then voted on the following:

“The DTB mandates the PLC Board to strengthen the PLC Secretariat, with the initial guidance that this should be a paid Company Secretary with legal expertise. The DTB will accept the option to explore alternative suggestions put forward by the PLC, which aim to improve overall governance and processes.”

The meeting was adjourned at 11pm.

The meeting reconvened at 6pm Thursday. All those present on the previous day were again present apart from Michele and Andrea.

A further discussion took place on the structure of the secretariat for both the PLC and DT.

The conclusion was that the Dons Trust would adjust our secretariat to align more closely with our needs as a community benefit society oversight of the strategy for AFC

Wimbledon and would recommend that the PLC Board strengthen their secretariat structure too.

It was also agreed that Dave Boyle would be invited to help review the Dons Trust secretariat Structure considering the paper George had presented.

It was agreed that during the interim George would be made Acting Secretary of the Dons Trust.

After this was approved George asked for permission to appoint an Acting Assistant Secretary. A further discussion took place on suitable candidates following the discussion it was agreed to offer the position to Reece Wheeler-Kelly. (Following the meeting Reece accepted the position)

14. **Constitution Review**

Pushed to next meeting

15. **New Board Induction Day**

To be discussed over email

16. **Sponsorship Discussion**

Pushed to next meeting

17. **Ways of Working**

Pushed to next meeting

18. **Final comments of final board meeting before new board begin onboarding**

To be discussed over email

19. **AOB**

Anything urgent to be discussed over email, everything else pushed to next meeting.

Meeting Closed at 7.20pm Thursday 14th November.
Total meeting time: 6 hours, 20 minutes.

George Jones
Acting Secretary