

Premier League Disability Advisory Group

Meeting held at Vicarage Road Stadium Watford Football Club
14th November 2019

Guest and Premier League Attendees :-

Prof Derek Fraser	Independent Football Ombudsman	
Dave Messenger	Supporter Liaison and Disability Officer	Watford-FC
Peter Kay	Premier League Consultant	

DSA Attendees :-

David Butler	DAG Chair	
	DSA Chair	Watford
Chas Banks	DSA Chair	Manchester United
Alex Pandolfo	DSA Committee	Manchester City
Steve Daniels	DSA Chair	Wolves
Andy Mather	DSA Chair	Southampton
David Smith	DSA Chair	Crystal Palace
Cathy Bayford	DSA Co-Chair	West Ham
Trevor Bright	DSA Co-Chair	West Ham
Kevin Holden	DSA Chair	Burnley
Carol White	DSA Membership Secretary	Burnley
Sandra Fixter	DSA Chair	Leicester
Judith	DSA Secretary	Leicester
Phil Dewick	DSA Chair	Sheffield United
Janet Ireland	SUDS Secretary	Sheffield United
Kevin James	DSA Vice Chair	Norwich
Anne Hyde	DSA Secretary	Arsenal
Joanne Mckibbens	DSA Chair	Aston Villa
Sonia Kingscott	DSA Vice Chair	Aston Villa
Karl Lindsay	DSA Committee	Liverpool

Apologies

Amy Wilson	DSA Chair	Everton
Peter Carr	DSA Chair	Tottenham
Stephen Miller	DSA Secretary	Newcastle

Apologies from DSA Chairs but who have sent deputies

Tom Hutchinson	Vice Chair	Liverpool
Mark Barber	DSA Secretary	Manchester City
Anthony Joy	DSA Chair	Arsenal
Ben Iles		

The Summary of Main Topics, Comments and Actions Points

Points arising from the Minutes of the last meeting

1) ASG key areas DJB has informed PL and SGSA Refer to LPF for joint approach

2) Disabled Hospitality places calculation regarding Table 4 - DJB responded to SGSA - Meeting decision these should not to be counted as qualifying for Table 4 requirements - therefore no change – SGSA agreed with our position.

3).Promotion and relegation proposals

Proposal from the floor:- Relegated Premier League clubs

Premier League clubs relegated in the future should be subjected to an extensive audit against their ASG commitment. If they are found not to be fully compliant, the outstanding compliance work must be costed and this sum “ring fenced” and withheld from their first year parachute payment.

All Proposals discussed at the meeting were sent to PL. Unlikely all 20 clubs would unanimously agree to any changes! No reason not to table them.

4) AccessAble – No links supplied

5) Away Questionnaire set up for the 2019 – 2020 season.

David Butler - Chair’s Report -Please find this at the end of this document.

Agenda

1) Stadia status

Each club gave an update of the status of their Stadium identifying improvements for the 2019-20 season and the situation regarding compliance with the ASGs.

2) Safety issues identified

Not meeting ASGs is one level of concern but the issue of disabled supporter safety is paramount. Such concerns habitually occur at the away end of the stadium where the away fans PERSISTENTLY STAND throughout the game.

Away disabled supporters visiting the Norwich stadium have no protection against crowd surge or incursion. With Ben and Kevin’s support I challenged the club and followed the procedure I discussed with the Sports Ground Safety Authority, and informed the club that I would refer this complaint, offering photographic evidence, to the Local Council Safety Advisory Group who issue the stadium certificate. If they did not adequately resolve this issue I would refer it to the SGSA who have the authority to impose conditions on a Stadium Certificate.

Action: DJB to follow up with Ben, Kevin, Norwich City and the SGSA.

DJB asked that if DSAs become aware of other such safety concerns to inform him with accompanying evidence – particularly photos or videos of incidents to take appropriate action.

3) DAG position on safe standing

The meeting agreed unanimously to support safe standing on the basis that the barriers required in these areas – illustrated by the installation at Wolves – would add an additional obstacle to

incursions into the disabled areas particularly at pitch side thereby improving the safety of those disabled fans.

One caveat, where standing areas are adjacent to disabled sections sight lines must not be compromised.

Action: DJB to respond to SGSA and the research group commissioned.

4) ASG revision situation - Level Playing Field interaction

It was agreed that DJB continue the dialogue with LPF regarding a joint approach to revising the ASGs to include our agreed priority enhancements.

An addition - I will add Chas's observation that the wheelchair surface area must be level. I'll add, as explained by Chas, it is for "Health and Safety" reasons – that usually catches the eye of authority!

5) Constitution – Vote required - draft already circulated for discussion

Suggestions for a modifications were put forward from the floor and agreed unanimously –

Action: DJB to revise and circulate for comment before adopting and publishing on our website.

6) Any Other Business

Away ticket selling arrangement at clubs regarding standing in front few rows

Discussion re enforcement of sight lines and effective stewarding by clubs.

Continuity and quality of stewarding needs attention across all clubs.

Neutral zones

Burnley - experiment with a designated neutral zone for disabled fans. Meeting would appreciate feedback when implemented.

Away questionnaire

Back in place by popular demand at the end of last season but not being used. DJB encouraged its use to gain input from away fans which if they identify genuine concerns these can be then be discussed with your club management for implementing solutions. Particularly input from the newly promoted club stadiums.

Action: - All

Flashing imagery and light shows

Discussion around the Advertising Safety Standards and standards / procedures to protect vulnerable fans.

ASG Audits

DJB considered that all ASG Audits should be in the public domain so that they can be challenged on identified shortfalls. Unlikely to occur.

There appears to be a wide variation of auditing standards and ASG interpretation occurring. There appears to be no set format or extensiveness of coverage regarding ASG auditing standards. There needs to be at the very least a standard core directed by the PL or the EHRC. Part of any audit should be mandated to be conducted during an actual match.

Away stewards and police spotters to accompany away fans

Discussion - Identify persistent trouble makers from seat positions for later action.

Waiting lists for able and disabled supporters

Discussion - transfer between the two waiting lists – No club had any procedure in place to cope with this situation. Suggested that each case had to be reviewed and dealt with as fairly as possible.

DJB closed the meeting at 4pm thanking everyone for attending.

Dave Messenger, Watford-FC – Supporter Liaison and Disability Officer, then conducted a visit to the Sensory Room.

David Butler - PL DAG Chair's Report – 14th November 2019

I originally wrote - I have been disappointed with lack of progress on safety issues and the revision of the Accessible Stadia Guidelines. I knew the task would be like turning a super tanker but didn't realise how difficult it would be to find the steering wheel.

But that changed last week.

Norwich stadium is one of the worst for disabled away supporter safety, as seen from Chas's photo. With Ben and Kevin's support I challenged the club and followed the procedure I agreed with Sports Ground Safety Authority and informed the club that I would refer the complaint that there was no protection for away disabled supporters from crowd incursion, with photographic evidence, to the Local Council Safety Advisory Group who issue the stadium certificate.

If they did not resolve this issue I would refer it to the SGSA who can impose conditions on the Stadium certificates to make it safe for disabled supporters.

Norwich have now informed me that they are putting in barriers to protect the away disabled supporters. Lets see what happens. We can make a difference. Challenges must be evidence based.

At our last meeting we agreed the top priority changes to the Accessible Stadia Guidelines that dealt with safety issues, ambulant requirements, away supporters facilities and sight line concerns - as a reminder you will find a copy of them in the meeting book.

Revising the Accessible Stadia Guidelines is essential as we cannot enforce the improvements we know are needed without an update developed via the Sports Ground Safety Authority - they also know that it needs updating - An email to me stated :-

“SGSA recognises that the current version of the accessible stadium guidance document and supporting supplementary guidance is in need of review and update”

When I met with SGSA Martin Henderson, the CEO, he recommended a coordinated approach with Level Playing Field. After a LPF meeting and many emails I am hoping we are now making progress – Owain Davies CEO has now responded positively -

30th October - Many thanks for your email and I very much appreciate the detailed comments which are most helpful.

I am planning to raise these with our board at the next board meeting and, of course, a spirit of cooperation is always sensible. I think there is no doubt that there are clearly some issues that need to be acted on and a positive dialogue between our two organisations is important.

Why is it important? - Look at the statistics -

Accessible Stadia Guidelines 2003 - Extract –

There is a correlation between age and disability. Over half the population over 75 has some kind of disability.

Another Extract -

“The majority of people with disabilities are ambulant disabled people”.

Premier League 2018 - Ticketing and Matchday Guidance – Extract regarding ambulant supporters.

“The ASG suggests various criteria to consider in relation to amenity seating, such as access routes, the provision of arm and backrests, sightlines and additional legroom. It doesn’t contain an agreed definition for enhanced amenity seating or easy access seating and no design criteria or exact measures for seat location or distribution are included.”

This omission and hence lack of clarity is not acceptable.

We also identified Safety issues - no barrier or handrail specification and no away proportionate disabled facilities, no definition of “elevated” all of these topics are omitted in the current ASGs. We need greater clarity concerning sight lines which particularly affected the away supporters.

Without those revisions in place we cannot hold the clubs to account and demand enforcement of the changes which we know will see a significant improvement in the match day experience of our disabled supporters

I will follow up with LPF after their Board Meeting. I have asked if I could attend in the future and present our case.

I continue to re-iterate that our overall objective is to ensure that all Premier League stadia are fully compliant with the Sports Ground Safety Authority's (SGSA) Accessible Stadia Guidelines while at the same time trying to update and improve them.

At the last meeting we discussed various issues around all clubs having had a two year period to comply. Such a period, it was clarified, could be split if they were promoted, relegated and then returned to the Premier League. Two clubs, Norwich and Aston Villa have completed this loop and therefore must now comply by the beginning of next season. We will observe very carefully their progress and support their DSA's involvement in the commitment to the necessary changes.

My view is that clubs that have exhausted their two year period, collected tens of millions in parachute payments, without becoming compliant must not be allowed to return to the Premier League unless they fully comply! Probably not realistic, but perhaps the EHRC have the power!

As an example - Fulham has gone through the loop - and has received over £96m with another £49m to come via parachute payments – AND still they are not fully compliant.

Governance of the Disability Advisory Group.

From a governance point of view it is important we agree our formal constitution at this meeting and then have re-election of Officers on the terms of the approved Constitution at the next meeting. We'll discuss and vote on that later.

As I have emphasised before, it is natural that our individual focus is upon our own stadium and improving the lot of our home fans however I would ask you all to be equally concerned for the away section of your ground to ensure the visitors have a safe and enjoyable match day experience.

I definitely spend more time on the away end issues here at Watford!

After all - our own members are visiting each other's grounds. Let's not be too critical unless our own away end is compliant!

I would like to say how very proud I am of what we have achieved to date, we are a voice that is listened to because we are genuine in our quest to improve the lot of disabled football supporters, that is our only goal, we are transparent and we have no hidden agendas and we are not political.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for the tremendous help and support I've received since the group was formed.

Much appreciated