

# Saints Voice Panel – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020

## **In Attendance**

### **Saints Voice**

Michael Sadler  
Louise Burke  
James Whitworth  
Zoe Wilson  
Mark Chee  
Yasmin Wiseman  
Tara Doel  
Rosemarie Robinson  
Will Dawe  
Callum Ford  
Mark Middleton

### **Southampton Football Club**

Toby Steele                      Managing Director  
David Thomas                  Chief Commercial Officer  
John McWilliams              Director of Operations  
Anthony Cole-Johnson        Director of Sales  
John Russo                      Director of Catering Ops  
Matt Silvester                  Ticket Office Manager  
Khali Parsons                  Senior SR Manager  
Jack Walkling                  Head of CRM Data & Analytics  
Daniel Whittington            Senior SR Advisor  
Aaron Heskins                  SR Advisor

### **Apologies:**

Martin Semmens              Chief Executive Officer  
Tim Greenwell                Director of Legal & Risk  
Charlie Read                  Head of Marketing  
Mark Hannibal                Head of Venue Safety & Security  
Kelly Morse                    Saints Voice Panel Member  
Lisa Dootson-Gill              Saints Voice Panel Member

### **Minutes:**

Welcome  
Introductions of new staff members  
Update from previous meetings

## Sustainability

DT -

A lot of work has been undertaken over the last few months. As a Club we have established our purpose and vision and what we are looking to achieve. Starting to work through the strategic goals and individual work streams to help achieve that vision. Still very much a work in progress.

Internally, we have introduced a sustainability leadership group and will publish our commitment and plans.

We commit to leading by example, to help make Southampton a cleaner and more sustainable place to live now and for future generations. As a Club we have an important part to play in the culture of this city. But what are we aiming for? We have defined our vision as – having neutral environmental impact by 2030. A lot of companies are talking about being carbon neutral, and that is an element of this, but we see our carbon footprint as just one component of our environmental impact. The work streams we have developed focus on;

Waste management

Energy use

Water use

Carbon footprint

Education and Engagement

We really want to engage everybody connected with the club to do the right thing and help us have neutral environmental impact. Constructive for us to understand fully, where we are today so we can help define where we need to go tomorrow.

SV – Do we have an exact date to when this will be published?

DT – Aiming for the next couple of months.

SV – What part can fan's play?

DT – Our fans can help support us by focusing on changing behaviours. Education and engagement is key.

SV – Are we able to bring our own coffee cups to fixtures? Water bottles we have spoken about before – any possible plans to bring that forward?

DT – There are different issues and challenges around bottles and cups at a football match, but we are certainly open to initiatives.

TS – Transport is a focus. We are working with the council and looking to reduce the number of cars coming to the stadium on matchdays. Some research shows 61% travelling to our stadium is via car, which impacts the local area.

SV - A number of the panel have spoken before about subsidised bus travel.

TS – We have recently had a meeting with several bus companies to explore options. We are all really open to ideas to help get more people on public transport. Stats show an increase in car usage, so we need to work on an overall strategy to change behaviours and offer alternatives and solutions.

SV – Can understand why more people are driving, as train services are getting much worse!

### **Matchday Experience**

Fanzone

SV – Generally supporters have been really positive with their feedback. We wondered where you are looking to go with it and if you could provide any additional update. We were told that this season timings and space are going to be limited this year due to licensing, but understood this may change?

JR – Fanzone has done very well. We are creating more a static menu. We are still on a limited time in regards to licensing, but we get roughly 900 people in and out on a match.

We have a new executive chef in the building who is very keen to look at the offering and see how we can change it.

KP asked SV if they could share the feedback they have received.

SV – Key things that we have spoken about to supporters is nostalgia – remembering our history. Supporters have asked if there is any potential to add to the graphics with pictures of past memories/moments – similar to the walkway on the bridge?

SV – Seating is often wet through in this weather and unusable. Can they be covered in between matches?

SV – Food offering is seen as expensive and not ‘matchday’ food like hotdogs and burgers. Pizza is so large and expensive, can it be served by the slice?

JR – The idea behind the Fanzone was introduce something different, burgers and hotdogs are available on the concourse. We do have options at lower price points including Nachos – pizzas have proved to be very popular and are great for sharing so they will stay on the menu.

SV – Vegetarian options have proven to be very good.

### *Virgin Media Loyalty Schemes*

SV – What are Virgin Media doing for fans now that the away fans are not being subsidised with £20 tickets in our away end?

DT – Let me tell you! Virgin Media have branded their support of Southampton Football Club under ‘Super Saints’ and you will see that around the stadium with matchday activity – opportunities to experience matchday hospitality in an exclusive box, vouchers for drinks and food given away at matches, free pies at the recent women’s match. They are also principle sponsor of the women’s first team and there is a lot of support around that, including subsidised tickets. At the West Ham fixture they gave away 25 framed signed shirts – you may have seen Franny driving around in the Saints Mobile. At the Portsmouth screening there were 600 free drinks. The single biggest initiative they have undertaken is the Craig David concert that was held here in our North Car Park. They gave away 100 pairs of tickets to Season Ticket Holders, so 200 tickets overall to gain access to that private gig.

SV – Do they have any plans to put any information out saying ‘this is what we have done’, so fans have this information?

DT – They do talk about this on their own channels, but don’t tend to shout about these things too much!

SV – Most feedback we have received, from most people, has been to say – what are they doing?!

DT – Perhaps we can be telling the stories to our supporters and promote this via our channels more. It is useful to understand that you want to hear more about their activity..

KP – Where you aware of any of the offers and giveaways?

SV – Good information goes out via the newsletters, although some don’t receive them and others don’t read all of them. Really good publicity for the women’s match though.

SV – When they were subsidising matches that hit a lot more people, so current initiatives can be completely missed by many so talking about these offers and giveaways might mean more fans get to benefit.

### **Stadium Connectivity**

SV – Some supporters are more concerned with this then others, last time we spoke you had identified an area where a control tower could be placed – is this progressing quickly now?

DT – Logistics around the physical space needed has been resolved, we are now in a negotiating stage with mobile phone providers. Getting at least 3 of the 4 main providers on board is essential.

We seem to give similar responses each time we speak, but we are inching forward.

SV – So that is the WIFI element – is this separate to the question we posed regarding the connectivity of Season Tickets?

JR – Second part of your question around ticketing loyalty schemes?

SV – Yes, we’ve asked before whether it was possible to add vouchers to the season ticket card, or upload money so we can use it in the store etc. Helping making it a little more slick then it currently is!

KP – Do you mean the capability of the Season Ticket cards?

SV – Yes.

ACJ –We know how people spend money is changing quite rapidly – people aren’t using cash so much anymore, even just from 2 years ago behaviours have changed dramatically. Our thinking now around card functionality and loyalty has shifted and we are working on solutions and progression.

1. Loyalty – really important to everybody within this football club, which can be cut so many different ways.
2. How we spend our money?

We are looking at the entire customer journey which is very complex. We have many different systems that all link together.

DT – one thing that is going to help develop this and glue it together, it the Mobile App we are currently working on. We are in a tender process to help initiate this sooner rather than later. We hope to have something in place for the beginning of next season.

When you can build something from the ground up, such as a new stadium, you can plan for better connectivity and a better customer journey. It is difficult playing catch up with technology and improving systems retrospectively, but we are committed to advancing connectivity and card functionality.

SV – Can we feed back to you on cashless stadiums, especially after the Spurs fixture?

DT – We are clear we want to involve our supporters in everything we can, and we are keen to look at examples from around the Premier League like Crystal Palace, Leicester. We want to make sure that our own fans are ready for the transition.

SV – We did feel in earlier conversation it would be a big step, but as time goes by everyone is far more used to going cashless even children.

TS – We have discussed it previously and this is something that will happen, the question being when. I know one of the key conversations we will have is around queue times, and how we can impact them with a cashless stadium. .

JR – On the concourse, it's around 50-50 cash-card.

## **Catering**

SV – A lot of feedback received have been positive around improvements, although it stills feels hit and miss. What has changed since we last met and do figures show that we are moving forward?

JR – We have reduced the menu down again now as the complexity was creating logistical challenges and further slowing down service.

We have introduced some 'Queue Busters' that are working on moving fans to shorter or quicker queues, although it has proved difficult to encourage fans to move to a different unit. We have also been working with licensing to see if it is possible to extend the period that supporters can purchase food and drink.

We have a more comprehensive training programme. We are seeing a lot of students/university students come back from their holidays which means less agency staff on the concourse. Having so many agency staff on the concourse is no ideal/want we want, but unfortunately there are times throughout the year when this is unavoidable.

You will hopefully see over the next matches, that the service is quicker and slicker.

SV – Have beer tokens helped alleviate queues?

JR – they have helped when we are incredibly busy, but still find they are underused. What are looking to do is change some of the betting and smaller food kiosks and we look to turn these into speed express kiosks. At half time these outlets will be strictly redemption/for beer tokens.

KP – what have you, or your fellow fans, seen that is good or working well?

SV – Supporters will always talk about the time that it takes to get served.

SV – A few of us have noticed the system has changed – the new buddy system where one staff member takes change and the other gets food/drink. Is working well and supporters are more receptive to this and can see that you are making changes. It is still slow but in places has improved.

SV - You still have to get in there early to make sure you are guaranteed to get your refreshments within the time and get back to your seat before the second half starts.

SV – Personally haven't seen queue busters – do they have specific uniforms on to help supporters identify them?

JR – They are in bright yellow hi-vis, currently don't say 'Queue Busters' but they do have 'Happy to Help' on the back.

SV – Another specific point that has been brought up – is hot drinks and lids that don't seem to fit the cups.

JR – A problem with the manufacturer –the company that produce the drinks no longer make suitable lids. We are in the process of outsourcing the lids and you will see these on the concourse soon.

We did source new lids, but they were not recyclable, so that was an issue for us. Other lids cracked too easily.

*Discussion around previous issues with lids. Post meeting confirmation that issue has been resolved and all lids have been replaced.*

### **Supporter Journey Images**

SV – We were asked to speak to supporters and provide feedback and images of what we feel are our most iconic moments. Do you have any updates to where we are with these and how they may be used?

KP – That was with our Marketing Team, and I don't have any update on where the project is. Your feedback and ideas were shared with the relevant staff, and were really helpful.

SV – Might just be us, but we still feel a little unwell seeing Van Dijk on the bridge coming to the match.....

SV – It created a wave of enthusiasm amongst supporters and just wanted to see where it was going. A suggestion that came around from it, was if any local school children/local community can get involved.

KP –We will endeavour to get an update to you regarding images and branding along the supporter journey.

## **Ticketing Strategy**

SV – Is there any feedback following previous meetings on Disabled Ticketing Strategy, or anything further we can assist with?

ACJ – Our piece of work has looked at the supporter experience and how we can ensure what we offer is right for all fans. A major aspect is around understanding different challenges and barriers and how what we offer can support disabled fans.

What we offer is incredible, and we don't always highlight our facilities and services as we should, and I have to praise our teams for the work that goes into this area.

We are looking at what we do really well, and what we can improve on. Your feedback in meetings alongside Level Playing Field and the Saints Disabled Supporters Association was incredibly useful in helping us to shape our strategy moving forwards.

## **PL Equality Standard**

SV – We were also invited to an Equality Standard meeting around the same time. Is there an update on that?

KP – We are currently working towards achieving the Advanced Level of the Premier League Equality Standard. A part of that is assessors coming into our club and understanding how we have embedded equality across the entire organisation both internally and externally. Inviting fans to be interviewed gives assessors the opportunity to gauge where we are.

We have a further visit in March and we are submitting our evidence ahead of the final assessment.

## **Away Allocation**

SV – We would like to speak about the away allocation. Why we are taking smaller allocations, and what are your decisions based on?

It looks to us that you are taking smaller allocations for away matches, and it doesn't feel right. It looks like you are taking the easy financial option and not the one that is best for fans, it doesn't make sense. Fans are not given the opportunity to buy tickets.

In regard to teams visiting St. Marys, it seems like we are giving larger allocations or giving them lots of late options. Are we able to be more authoritative with other Clubs? Block 43 in the Northam only goes on sale a week or so before a game, and then its empty and you see on MOTD that it looks like we have a terrible fan base.

MS – To explain the journey that happens and how it works....We have to make a decision at least 30 days before the fixture, although most teams push for an earlier decision. We will be offered different options by the away team – the first myth I would like to address is that we keep taking the 'lowest allocation' – we have not taken the lowest allocation offered so far this season except Chelsea who only offer 2 options.

We look at a number of factors before making a decision.

We look at form, this is a major factor – if we are coming off a couple of wins or defeats, this makes a huge difference to the number of our fans purchasing away tickets.

We will look at previous visits to that venue. Of all the matches we have had this season, Crystal Palace is the only fixture that we have taken a lower allocation than last season, every other match has been the same or higher.

We look at the demand around other fixtures during that time period, how often we have played there recently, are they recently back in the Premier League and therefore a more popular venue. We will look at previous years fixture, and what has happened around similar times of the year – for example how sales performed for a January midweek fixture the last couple of years. We look at the time of day, whether the kick-off is a 3pm or 7.45pm for example as these really effect sales, as well as whether or not we are on TV.

They are some of the factors we look into, and for us it's not about taking the lowest allocation, it's about taking what's right. We would love to have as many fans there as possible, but the reality is the demand isn't always there. We keep an eye on Twitter and what supporters post, and a lot of the people posting negatively about sales and allocations attend away matches infrequently.

This season there have been 6 games where we haven't taken the full allocation, and every one of those up until Liverpool has made it to general sale or previous booking history only. This means that all Season Ticket Holders and Members had the opportunity to buy and most didn't.

We have tried this season to go on sale before we have to make the decision on allocation size, like we did for Crystal Palace for example. This gives us an opportunity to gauge sales against expectations and previous examples. We have to sell in the order dictated by the away club, and I would encourage people to purchase during their window to give us a better understanding of demand where possible.

Staying with Crystal Palace as an example, and as a fixture we received criticism for –we sold only 399 on the first day of sale, in comparison to 1020 on the first day last time we went there. We had just come off the back of some really disappointing results against Newcastle and West Ham and fans simply were not buying at that time. Fast forward a little and our sudden and welcome change in form meant supporters began asking why there was such a small allocation and expressing disappointment at not being able to purchase a ticket.

We were able to secure some more tickets further down the line, but even they didn't sell as quickly as the feedback would have suggested.

I hope that explains how we look at this in a little more detail and shows that a lot of thought goes into each decision.

SV – What is the difference with the blocks and how many more could you take – just trying to understand the liability behind it, like how many more tickets can you take at a time?

MS – It varies with different Clubs. With Crystal Palace it was another 890 more tickets. Some teams like Chelsea only give two options, so a decision has to be made between 1500 or 3000.

ACJ – I hope that helps you see the process we go through. Some other points following recent feedback from some supporters -

Regarding empty seats in the Northam for home matches, Block 43 was returned very late by Watford and Norwich. We wanted to see those seats filled by Saints fans and encourage attendance

by more or new people so went out with an offer for those 2 matches. This was successful and we felt better than a number of empty seats in that key area, driving supporter for the team.

Ticket pricing for FA Cup matches is now set by the home team, not an agreement between the two. We wanted to reward our Season Ticket Holders by offering a great price of £10 per ticket. The rules state we have to replicate the pricing for away fans, and therefore had to offer £10 to Spurs Season Ticket Holders. It turns out all their tickets were taken up by Season Ticket Holders, so they all got their seats for a tenner.

A decision was made by us to do the right thing by our supporters and thank them for sticking with us through a difficult period in time and then come and watch a great game of football, didn't quite land well with some fans who thought we had given a great offer to Spurs fans and not rewarded our own. A real shame.

On the flip side, Spurs set a higher price and we didn't have an input in that. Which is why we subsidised the travel instead, to ensure we gave value to our fans.

SV – Do they tell you beforehand?

MS – They do, and we did ask them to review, but there was no movement.

MS- We do try to negotiate better terms or more suitable allocations with away Clubs and some are more able to accommodate than others depending on their stadiums, their policies. Sheffield United, Aston Villa and Burnley were all willing to allow us to have better flexibility – same with Palace.

SV – Could we have an information sheet published explaining all you've just said? We know it's not going to be as exciting as something player related, but it might help fans to understand better.

SV – Further question - how much risk are you willing to take? How often do we take a risk, and do we have a threshold? 30k in the grand scheme of things, doesn't appear to be a huge financial risk for the club?

ACJ – There is a perception that 30k here, 20k there, is not a problem. But we have to operate effectively and responsibly. Each time we 'lose' money on decisions we make we are less able to achieve elsewhere.

SV – Isn't an extra 500 fans at an away fixture worth the extra risk? Won't that help us in the end?

SV – Correct me if I'm wrong, it's just to my understanding that the multi-million pounds spent on players and ticketing revenue are almost two separate business's, that run coherently? Because surely it's a totally different ball game spending £20 million on Danny Ings, and spending £20k on a new lounge for example?

TS – If we were to say we have wasted £600,000 on tickets that weren't sold, some would say that's fine and others would be critical of us for running the club in a bad way. Everything we do – such as offering match tickets for £10 each at short notice – will have fans thinking that's a great way of getting people to matches, and others saying it is unfair. We can't always get it right, but we have to make the best judgements we can with the information at hand. It's not in our best interests to have too few fans at matches, or to be wasteful of our resources.

*Discussion around separate ticketing meeting.*

## Communications

SV – Following the 9-0 defeat to Leicester the communication from the Club disappeared. It was a blackout. We as supporters felt shut out, left alone, our feelings not considered. Then we had a scarf appear which felt wrong and really poor timing. We were all hurting! What was the rationale behind the silence?

DT – Ultimately, it's what Ralph requested. It was an unprecedented event, and nobody really knew how to react. Ralph's biggest concern was how players responded to the defeat, and how we were going to pull through and pull together and react in a positive way. It was really tough for everyone. We knew how our fans must have been feeling, but in that moment we had to prioritise our players above all else. After a week, we started to reengage and get back into full flow pretty soon straight after.

SV – Do you think that was the right decision?

DT – impossible to know. We do it again? Maybe not, but we really hope we don't even have to think about it. We soon came to a tipping point, and we got through and we are in a different place.

TS – In terms of the scarf, that was one of a large number of different options that we had to do something for fans and internally we spoke at length about doing something that recognised fans support, but that was so hard to do

In hindsight, we wouldn't do that again. But if we had a spectacular result against Everton would the scarves have felt like a great move.

DT – We wanted the players to come out to a sea of red and white to carry us forward.

SV – We feel that the point was missed, that fans are as important as players, and we will always be there. We were going through a rough patch before Leicester and it was just felt as though shutting down completely was the wrong thing to do, almost nothing coming out of the club.

DT – At that time we did what we thought was best and what Ralph wanted for the team. We had to trust in his judgment.

KP – It is really helpful to understand how that looked and felt from the outside, from yourselves and your wider networks.

SV – Moving on, competition winners are they going to be published/start being placed on the website again?

JW – You can always contact us regarding winners for any competition. We have also now added a page to display the Predict The Score winners, we will share the link if you haven't already seen it.

SV – There were some fantastic prizes around Christmas and it would have been great to share the winners. It would have been a nice story too when positivity was missing!

JW – We will certainly take that forward and look to see how we can share this in the future.

## **Flares and Reporting**

SV – Wanted to raise the concern of flares making their way into the stadium. How do they get in and what happens to people that set them off?

JMC – We have a challenge with flares, more so with visiting supporters. They are so small now, and even with our searching they can be hidden.

In the away section we have advanced Panomera CCTV, and if a flare is let off we can view in minute details where that has happened. It is a criminal offence and is treated as such. You may not see immediate response or action, but behind the scenes and with Police the footage is being reviewed, supporters identified and followed, and a plan to remove that person or persons at a safe and low key point in the match.

If a flare is thrown on the pitch, as part of new Premier League and fire safety regulations, a fire steward can no longer go on the pitch and remove it, they have to let it burn out to completion and players have to move to the centre circle.

Please rest assured it is dealt with robustly and to the full extent of the law. There are posters around the stadium to help educate people on the dangers of flares in a stadium environment.

SV – Can we have Club feedback on the use of the 60060 SFCReport service?

KP – Depends on your perception of successful. We don't have a high number of reports, which would indicate we don't have a widespread problem. We have increased the visibility of the number – big screen video, matchday programme, posters by units and in toilets, website, crowd facing boards. Have you all seen this somewhere?

SV – Yeah absolutely, we can see it, but then again I guess we are aware of it.

KP – If we deemed visibility of the number a measure of success, then yes it is successful. Although not used in high numbers, we do get reports through and have been able to address some issues around the stadium. We do however still receive complaints after a matchday which would have been helpful on the day.

## **Matchday Experience Focus Group**

SV - Regarding the group we had last year, have you taken that further, do you now have a clear plan of action in regards to what you want to do/plan on having any further dialogue with supporters around the subjects suggested.

KP – The matchday atmosphere meetings that you had with Teri and Kate – a lot of the stuff that came out of those meetings was really helpful and we have moved forward with some of the ideas. That has already had a positive effect, but we need some further time to embed those ideas and develop others. We also have a lot of data from our matchday experience surveys that we can use with your feedback moving forwards.

DT – We really start to plan for next season around now, so we will discuss with the wider team about these elements and get you involved further in the coming weeks.

## Away Fans in Saints End

SV – The Club posted a vlog with Kenzie speaking to fans in our end at Liverpool that were Liverpool fans. This was received very badly. Supporters were understandably very unhappy.

KP – Absolutely that part of the video should not have made it to the site, and we apologise. We hold our hands up to that and we removed it.

The fact is that ticket misuse is a problem, and we did add this to the agenda for discussion although we may have to take that forward to another meeting.

ACJ – it slipped through, it became apparent, we removed it. It won't happen again. Our supporters sold tickets to Liverpool fans and this is wrong. We know it's happening, and we deal with the fans that we become aware of, but there are many more going to extraordinary lengths.

MS – On Liverpool alone, we stopped 20 people from entering on home tickets that we became aware of beforehand.

KP – We do genuinely look forward to having those further conversations around ticket misuse and how we can understand it better from your perspective. We take steps to stop it, but the fact that a Saints fan can buy an away ticket for £30 and then sell it on for over £200 means it will be attractive to some. It is not only morally wrong, it is illegal.

SV – Just to be clear, if there is clearly an away fan next to any of us at a future match, can any fan use the 60060 SFCReport number to highlight this?

KP – Yes, as long as you provide us with as much detail as possible including the exact seats and why you think they are an away fan, and a description of them. This will help us look at who bought the tickets and seek to address the issue.

*Further discussion around away supporters in home section.*

KP Thanks all for attending and for valuable input.

20.15 - END OF MEETING.

## Action Points

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Share date for publication of commitment and plans around sustainability	Sustainability Leadership Group	End of April 2020
Investigate seat coverings for Fanzone	Saints Events	End of March 2020
Discuss potential for stories highlighting Virgin Media fan engagement	Sponsorship & Media	Initial conversation by end of Feb 2020
Provide update on Supporter Journey images	Marketing	During off season
Arrange meeting to share Ticketing Strategy with SV	Ticketing/Sales	Booked 9 <sup>th</sup> March 2020
Matchday Experience Focus group with SV and other groups	Matchday Events	Before end of 19/20 season