

LONDON FA NORTH EAST REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Minutes of the North East Regional Committee Meeting of the London Football Association held online on Monday 9 May 2022 commencing at 7:15 pm

1 Present: Kevin Wilmot (Chair/ Acting Secretary – KW), Ian Yearwood (IY), Shahid Malji (SM), David Wolff (DW), Farooq Mohammed (FM), Hocine Tachoukaft (HT), Yashmin Harun (YHa), Louise Dorling (LD), Yasmin Hussain (YHu), Bobby Bernini (BB), James Middlehurst (LFA Chair – JM)

2 Apologies: Alf Brown (AB), Marcel Matthew (MM)

Not present: Aroz Miah (AM), Harry Whipple (HW), Imrul Gazi (IG), Karen Greene (KG), Louise McGing (LMG), Nahimul Islam (NI), Tosin Adeneye (TA)

2.1 KW asked if anyone present was prepared to take the minutes. There were no volunteers so KW took minutes of the meeting.

3 Minutes of last meeting

3.1 Agreed as a true record. Proposed by BB, seconded by IY. JM commented that the minutes were well written and a true reflection of a long and complicated meeting.

4 Matters arising

4.1 JM commented on item 5.1, which unintentionally slightly overstates the position he has reached. JM has written to Debbie Hewitt, FA Chair, to put the idea of a Code of Conduct carrying a penalty of disaffiliation for breaking it to the FA Board as it is a matter that is on the radar of the County FAs but the Football Association have not been looking at this and are not as far advanced as he would like them to be.

5 Election of Officers:

5.1 KW advised that he was the only person that had stood for Chair and MM is the only person standing for Vice Chair. Nobody has put themselves forward as Secretary. It was agreed that, as the positions of Chair and Vice Chair were unopposed, they could be voted in en bloc via a proposer, seconder and a show of hands. LD proposed, BB seconded and it was unanimously voted that KW be Chair and MM be Vice Chair. KW thanked those present for voting him in.

5.2 KW will recirculate the need for a Secretary in case anybody not present this evening wishes to stand and a vote can be held at the next meeting if needed.

6 Purpose of LFA Regions:

6.1 KW re-read the proposals of the Steering Group to the Board for the benefit of those that could not attend the last meeting.

6.2 DW asked if we could have some kind of report as to how the other Regions are progressing. KW advised that it is JM's intention to attend every Regional Meeting across London so asked if JM could provide an update. JM responded that the North East are ahead of the game as we are the only Region that have held a second meeting. JM agreed that the minutes of the Regional Meetings should be shared across the Regions.

6.3 JM advised that the minutes of the last meeting record his perspective of what the Regional Meetings are for but he is keen to hear what everyone else thinks. YHa expressed concern at the availability of facilities for the ever-growing popularity of women's and girls' football and that this is a particular problem in Hackney and space and facilities are going to be quite a concern. YHa queried if there is anything we can do as a region to progress the issue or to provide help or support. KW responded that one of the questions he will be asking later in this meeting is how we can get more involved in the local region and who we should be inviting to these meetings from the local communities in our catchment area and suggested that perhaps inviting somebody from Hackney Council would enable us to put our concerns across.

6.4 DW pointed out that the Annual General Meeting of the various Leagues and Competitions are required under the FA's Standard Code of Rules (SCOR) to commit to certain kick off times and that pitches are then allocated to teams for the specific kick off times. As a region, we need to have some input into the way that councils operate viz-a-viz the allocation of their pitches and their maintenance as there is much more that the County can do.

6.5 JM believes that YHa is highlighting a strategic problem in that we have run out of durable playing surfaces in London but there is a lack of a widespread awareness of this issue due to having two years of pitches not being used due to the pandemic followed by a season with an extremely mild winter. One wet winter is going to cause chaos and women's and girls' football are at the bottom of the chain being the last to the party. JM feels that the Football Foundation are being very obdurate about releasing funding for hybrid pitches, which is what we need in London.

6.6 JM believes that the proper solution is to get involved with the councils and open a dialogue with them. If a local authority makes a pitch available at 9:30am but the away side cannot get across from the other side of London, then they haven't really helped to solve the problem. There is also the issue of how much play a grass pitch can take as they only take around a third of the hours play time than a hybrid would provide and a hybrid pitch requires no planning permission, unlike 3G pitches. There is going to be a large rise in female participation following the Women's Euros this summer and JM is really worried that all these people are going to come to the party and have nowhere to play as happened post-2012 Olympics. JM added that women's safety and travel will become a big agenda and it would be very helpful to him if he could have evidence from the Region of, for example, girls being unable to get onto pitches for training or matches or being asked to play at unsociable hours, especially in winter. JM can then present this evidence to the FA to whom he has made a strong verbal case but been asked for evidence to back his argument up.

6.7 DW raised an issue about some 3G/4G pitches in London which are available but cannot be used because the owners of these pitches refuse to pay the additional money to have them officially accredited by UEFA and without that accreditation it is illegal to play organised competitive football on them. DW asked if YHa, in her role as the LFA's representative at the FA, can get the FA to persuade the owners of these facilities to accredit them properly. YHa asked for an example and DW mentioned East Barnet School and Hatfield University and offered to send her some more examples. KW felt that YHu and KG may have some ready made examples as well.

6.8 YHu joined the meeting at this point and KW asked if she had any examples she can pass on to JM. YHu advised that she has just had a meeting at the West Ham United Academy to discuss the low levels of participation at Wildcat Centres in Newham and a main issue is facilities. In YHu's local area, Redbridge, there is an amazing facility at Frenford. YHu also goes into schools as part of the Let's Girls Play campaign to deliver after-school football sessions and hand out leaflets and this has been a big success. However, Newham are struggling because they have nowhere to offer the girls

to play and YHu has given them feedback around making use of schools and fields within the borough. JM stated that he found this useful as the Football Foundation has a levelling off programme which, to them, means utilising the spaces in the north of England but being able to demonstrate that the more impoverished areas of London, such as Newham, are unable to promote football because there is nowhere to play and show that football is taking off in neighbouring areas where there are facilities is a very powerful argument he can use that a levelling off agenda is needed in London. JM requested that YHu sends him what she just said in email form.

6.9 KW recalled the example that MM gave at the last meeting of a girl's team based in Clapham who play their home matches at Regents Park because there is nowhere closer for them to play. KW stated that the novelty of travelling that far to play home matches must eventually wear off and interest may wane as a result.

6.10 BB raised the issue that the Hackney & Leyton Sunday League have 60 teams but are only allowed to have 25 pitches so every Sunday every week they have teams that are not able to play. The council is blaming Covid and the lack of pitch maintenance during that time. LD added that the Regents Park Youth League also has more teams than pitches available at Regents Park. JM noted that Regents Park has the one hybrid pitch in London and it would revolutionise the amount of playing time available if we could get these installed in parklands such as Clapham Common and Wandsworth Common but the funding for these are not currently on the Football Foundation's agenda and this is a continuing battle for him.

6.11 HT is concerned about health & safety issues around the pitches and asked is it for the League or the LFA to do something about it. KW felt that it would depend on the type of health & safety issue and accountability can be pretty widespread depending upon the individual circumstance of each case. YHa pointed out that the referee would carry out a pitch inspection and has to make a decision based on the health & safety of the players taking part. DW raised the issue of foreign articles on the pitch, such as dog mess or glass and stated it is the council's responsibility, where it is a council pitch, to ensure the pitch surfaces are fit for purpose from a H&S viewpoint. KW expressed concern that there may be a reluctance to call a game off because of the lack of availability of pitches and the difficulty in finding a new date to play a game can lead to risks with player safety being taken.

6.12 LD asked if it was worth KW making contact with the people not present tonight to ask if they have chosen not to come or whether they feel there is something else the Region can do that would be more appropriate. JM advised that he is happy to work with KW on this as he emailed everyone this morning and feels it is unacceptable for people to not offer any apologies when not turning up so he will follow this up by making contact with those who have not attended. KW will forward the list of absentees to JM. DW suggested it might be useful to have a mouth to mouth conversation with those council members that we don't know to brief them around what the London FA is about and would be quite happy to do this himself as a Life Vice President but JM stated he has contact numbers and will follow this up himself.

6.13 KW advised that one of our remits is to forge closer links with leagues, clubs, referee societies and other relevant stakeholders in our area. We may require a list of useful contacts and decide who and when we want to start inviting people to our meetings. KW has suggested somebody from Hackney Council to discuss both the lack of facilities for women and girls in the borough and also the lack of pitches at Hackney Marshes. The issue raised at Regents Park would come under the Royal Parks and JM has links to them but JM replied that the Football Foundation are the issue and not the Royal Parks who would gladly see an increase in hybrid pitches. JM suggested that he would be happy to speak with the local authorities, both the good ones and the bad ones, in one to one

meetings outside of the Regional Meeting to make the case to take to the Football Foundation. KW will send JM contact details for key local authority staff in Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest.

6.14 JM has met with the Chairs of Essex, Middlesex and Surrey FAs who all have the same issues around lack of pitches and lack of planning permission to build pitches. JM will be writing to the Area Manager, Chris Pringle, to ask for a meeting around this issue.

6.15 KW reiterated FM's point at the last meeting that we need to develop a method for letting the football people in the communities we cover know that we exist, who we are and how they can contact us. KW advised that the old Division had held one forum for its local footballing communities and were planning more when Covid struck and maybe this is an idea that could be revisited. KW feels that a challenge for us as a Region is how we go about obtaining the information from the communities we serve as to what the issues are they feel are important or relevant which they may want to discuss with us as a conduit to letting the Board know what's needed.

6.16 YHa stated that the biggest thing she hears from the local community is that they don't receive any support from the London FA, not just monetary support but in terms of asking for someone to be there for a presentation but nobody turning up. YHa feels that some form of visibility at some of the tournaments or matches in the area would raise our profile. They don't know what we do so it would be really good to start building that relationship. KW is happy to be the point of contact in the local area if anyone wants to speak to the London FA and doesn't want to go via the office.

6.17 FM feels the local community see the LFA as a faceless organisation and inaccessible. He expanded on his point from the last meeting that there needs to be some form of communication plan which will need resource, effort, time and budget. We then need to think about how we engage directly with the grassroots clubs in simple terms who the LFA are, who the council members are, who represents each Region and how/why they should engage with us. FM feels we need to move away from a top down approach to a bottom up one and the communication plan works towards this. FM added that once the plan is in place it is important to think about how we sustain it and not get complacent. KW reiterated his point from the last meeting that, before we can commence the piece of work FM is proposing, we need to know where the boundaries are between Regions, particularly the NW/NE and SW/SE boundaries, so that we know the leagues, clubs, organisations that fall within our boundary and can target the right people.

6.18 DW pointed out that the clubs have to affiliate with the London FA so they already know of our existence. They also have access to the LFA website which contains so much information but after this point is where we fall down as we have to go out to the clubs and leagues and be more accessible to them. We should be asking the clubs what we can do for them, not what can they do for us. BB suggested a meeting with the secretaries of all the leagues within our Region to introduce ourselves and ask how we can help them. KW felt that was a good idea and, although some leagues will span more than one Region, there's no reason why we can't meet with them if some of their clubs are in the North East.

6.19 JM agreed with FM's point that we are perceived to be faceless and inaccessible and, following all the affiliation problems there have been, are not perceived to be a good administrator. We need to get the administration to work and have a good affiliation process. Alongside this we need an interactive communication process that works and not just stick information on a message board and tell people to go and look at it. Simultaneously, we need to be asking the clubs what they would like from us.

7 LFA update:

7.1 JM informed the meeting that, after the issue of the lack of pitches, the next item on his agenda is Referees. JM has asked Paul Bickerton to arrange for Roger Fox, Director and former Referees Committee Chair, and Derrell David, Referees Development Officer, to prepare a paper to be discussed by the Board at the beginning of June. JM's great fear is that the breakdown in societal behaviour, combined with the FA pinching LFA referees, combined with the fact that the new training regime for referees can be compared to passing your driving test by just doing the theory part, means that we are beginning to lose referees at a rate and we need more.

7.2 JM stated we have a problem with the FA as they took our budgets away during Covid and are being a little bit tight-fisted about giving them back. JM has informed Paul that, in writing the LFA Plan for next year, he should write it for the things that he wants to deliver and if the FA come up short financially he should use the reserves to invest in the future.

7.3 JM has had a conversation with the new FA Chair, Debbie Hewitt, to try to stop the FA's Technical Department from making any untested changes to the affiliation process this year so that we can have some form of clean process for the first time under his tenure and the office staff don't have to spend 3-4 months cleaning up the mess created by the FA.

7.4 JM would like to get the matter of communications, as raised by FM, sorted out by September in terms of having something that we can build on during the football season.

7.5 Lots of people have been telling JM that they are unhappy with the coaching programmes the FA currently have in place and this is an issue which will form part of his priority list. However, at the moment, having places to play, having enough referees and improving administration are the things that need dealing with now to ensure that football doesn't grind to a halt midway through winter. JM is sure that the number of participants is going to increase next season and these are the issues that will enable us to anticipate and deal with this.

8 Correspondence:

8.1 KW advised that there has been no correspondence received since the last meeting.

9 Standing Committee Reports:

9.1 KW reported back from the Cups & Competitions Committee. We are in the middle of cup final season at the moment and have been very successful so far. We have 8 finals left to play, 1 Adult final, 1 Vets final, 2 boys youth finals and 4 girls youth finals. KW noted that some of the dates have changed and, recently, there was an issue with those changes not getting communicated. JM will be discussing with Paul when he can as to why some of the changes were not communicated to the Board and Council. JM questioned why there is an expectation that such changes are communicated by Paul, rather than Jamaal. KW replied that Jamaal keeps the Cups Committee up to date and that JM and Paul are copied into that correspondence and it is the expectation of the Cups Committee Chair, Ian Wallis, that Paul will then circulate these changes to the wider audience as he has all the email addresses. JM will discuss further with Paul.

9.2 KW advised that the next Cups Committee meeting will look at proposed rule amendments for next season. KW pointed out that anybody can put forward a proposal to change existing cups competition rules and it doesn't have to just come from the Cups Committee. DW pointed out that the FA's Standard Code of Rules are set in stone and cannot be amended at county level. KW agreed

but advised that any of our own localised Rules can be proposed for amendment where anyone feels there may be a need to do so.

9.3 KW will be raising at the next Cups Committee meeting what he perceives to be a lack of marketing around the cup finals through the website and the LFA social media channels.

9.4 BB advised that the main concern of the Referee's Committee is the lack of Referees and also the lack of Observers. The fees for Observers have gone up but it is a struggle to get enough Observers out and about for the Referees to get the required number of assessments in. KW noted that a lot of the current list of LFA Observers are practising Referees, rather than retired ones, so cannot take up observing duties on the days when they have their own matches to officiate. The next Referees Committee is on Wednesday of this week but BB is unable to attend.

9.5 LD reported back from the Judicial Committee. The last couple of meetings have been focussing on the new Regional Panels. London FA have joined the new South Regional Panel along with Hampshire, Surrey and Kent. Other counties have chosen not to join and carry on doing their own judicial. The benefit of the new Regional Panel is that our Investigation Officers have more people that they can call on to sit on a Panel Hearing and this has proved really useful for them. LD added that one downside is that people on the London FA had to choose whether or not to apply for the Regional Panels and the FA are not accepting any more applications, so there have been people in London who chose not to join for whatever reason and, perhaps now their circumstances have changed or they are clearer about what's going on, they are now finding that they can't join. It was supposed to be an 18 month trial period but LD suspects it will become a permanent arrangement.

9.6 LD advised that the Judicial Committee have been raising concerns about how the new Regional Panel can maintain a Panel membership that matches the demographic of the people that used to come before LFA Panels as the make up of London is very different to that of Surrey or Hampshire. It is an issue that hasn't yet been addressed directly but, overall, LD feels the new Regional Panels have been working well.

9.7 IY asked if there is any feedback with how discipline has gone this year in terms of referees. LD responded that it has been highlighted at serious case level (dealt with by the FA National Panel) that far more cases of abuse towards referees are being heard. IY asked if there was a particular reason for this. KW responded that it isn't particularly a refereeing issue but more of a societal problem at the moment where anti-social public disorder has generally been on the up across the country since the end of the pandemic lockdown and it needs a national approach to tackle it.

9.8 DW has noted that there seems to be long delays in the judicial process being heard. In his own League, a case that took place in early October was only dealt with in March. LD responded that there are a vast number of cases. At a recent meeting, Carl and Sufi were saying that they have 75 cases that they are trying to investigate. It was also noted that when a case goes to the FA's Serious Cases Panel, it is still the responsibility of the County Investigation Officers to do the investigative work and this means they are overrun with cases.

9.9 DW noted that a lot of the emailed paperwork he receives for cases is duplicated and asked if there was a way of cutting down the amount of information without reducing the content. LD agreed to take this back to the next Judicial Committee meeting.

9.10 KW acknowledged that IAG is not, technically, a standing committee but is aware that there has been a recent meeting and asked YHa if she could provide some feedback. YHa stated that they discussed disability in football, women and girls and the Race Equality Plan. In terms of women and

girl's football, there has been a 31% increase in teams since 1 July (104 teams). Women's Euros legacy grants of £23k for 23 teams have been, or are about to be, approved. The FA have invested £8k into Wildcats for ages 5-14. Good progress is being made which is why YHa feels we need to be mindful about ensuring we have the facilities going forward to cater for the increase in participation.

9.11 YHa is not able to say too much about the Race Equality Plan at this time but it should be launching quite soon.

9.12 There are 530 disabled players showing on WGS and 52 affiliated teams. There are 15 recreational programmes being set up under the LFA Disability Plan and we are looking to engage five more centres.

9.13 No report from the Regulations & Sanctions Committee as AM was not present at the meeting.

10 Any Other Business:

10.1 KW has been contacted by Dalton Grant around giving a demonstration on work he's been doing around mindfulness and athleticism in football. KW asked if we should consider inviting him to present at the next Regional Meeting or if this is something for the full Council. JM stated that he recalled Dalton spoke very well when we held the Divisional Form at Leyton Orient FC and suggested that it would be an interesting topic for KW to ask Paul Bickerton about.

11 Date of next meeting:

11.1 YHu stated that Monday is the most difficult day of the week but KW acknowledged that it is the preferred day for the majority. As a compromise, YHu suggested that if we have a later start on a Monday, e.g. 7:30pm, she can finish her coaching session early at 8pm and catch the majority of the meeting. This was agreed.

11.2 KW suggested at the last meeting that we alternate between in person and online. FM made a good point at the last meeting that you tend to have a different type of conversation in a face-to-face meeting than you do online. IY feels that we had a good discussion online this evening and it depends on what the topic is as to which type of meeting we should have. KW feels that we also need to await JM's discussion with those that haven't attended tonight to see how they feel about it. JM added that if the majority of feedback is for an online meeting, he would rather have the input of everyone online rather than push for an in person meeting and have only half the voices present, stating that it is important to broaden communication rather than accidentally narrow it.

11.3 Agreed that the next meeting date will be Monday 19 September 2021 at 7:30pm with format to be determined in due course.

Meeting ended at 9:05pm