

BRISTOL CITY SUPPORTERS SOCIETY LIMITED
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1 NOVEMBER 2019 TO 31 OCTOBER 2020

Business Review

This report briefly summarises the activities for the Club & Trust.

The Supporters Club & Trust is the main recognised supporter group involved in all aspects of interest for supporters alongside specific groups for seniors and disabled supporters. We actively use our website, social media, internet forums and online survey tools. Our fans forum www.otib.co.uk has 17,000+ members (5,500 have posted 10 or more times and 256 OTIB Supporters who pay £5 annually to help fund the site). In addition, our own CRM based membership database has over 9,000 names on it. We continue to meet regularly with Bristol City Football Club and Ashton Gate Limited officials, Avon & Somerset police representatives, the Supporter Liaison Officer and other community groups.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought with it many restrictions, not least non-attendance by fans at matches and various forms of travel restrictions and lockdowns across the country. This, of course, had a dramatic affect and impacted the activities of the Supporters Club & Trust. Throughout this time the board has met monthly via Zoom and continued to plan for future activities when the restrictions will be lifted.

Along with many fans, we were particularly unhappy with the way season ticket refund options were communicated for the 2019/20 season, with the actual option to receive a cash refund being hidden away in the small print of other options to leave your money in the football club. Even then, the time period to claim this refund was just a few days, so we campaigned to persuade the football club to continue to accept claims for refunds after that deadline.

Many fans had purchased season tickets for the 2020/21 just before lockdown occurred. We ran a survey, which was responded to by over 2,000 fans. Fans, many hit by financial hardship, were looking for refunds, which we supported in our call for the football club to consider this. The survey also dealt with the difficult subject of the football club taking advantage of the taxpayer funded furlough scheme. Subsequent to the survey the football club announced that they were using the furlough scheme, that staff not furloughed had accepted a temporary salary reduction and that players had deferred a percentage of their wages for three months.

We were quick to praise the football club for announcing a fair and simple approach to refunds should they not be able to allow fans into the ground who had paid for a 2020/21 season ticket. At this point, nobody knew for sure how long the restrictions were due to last. The announcement was that all current 2020/21 season ticket holders would receive a pro-rata refund for each home game played behind closed doors. Games would be televised via Robins TV at £10 per match for those wishing to pay separately for them.

The survey also asked for a view on which of a list of charities the Club & Trust should support at this time and based on the responses a decision was taken to support all four. Initial donations of £500 each were made (in one case spread, at the organisation's request, over 10 months) to Refresh Bedminster, Feed the Homeless Bristol, Victoria Park Baptist Church Foodbank and the Trussell Trust.

We ran the voting process and paid for the end of season player and supporter awards as usual, presented behind closed doors at Ashton Gate before the game with Preston. No fans were able to attend due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Famara Diedhiou won the 2019/20 Player of the Year award and the golden boot with 14 goals in all competitions. Han Noah Massengo won the Young Player of the Year and City's first win away to Cardiff City in 17 years was voted fans' Champagne Moment of the Year, with Josh Brownhill's strike the difference that day in November.

Our position on managerial appointments is that we never comment on the choices made and always unwaveringly support whoever is chosen to manage the team. We did, however, comment on the process and length of time it took to appoint Dean Holden. The football club publicised a rigorous and wide-ranging recruitment process, only to take 6 weeks to finally appoint an internal candidate.

The Atyeo statue hosts 442 name plaques on the plinth. Of the 42 final spaces available, 7 remain unallocated.

We are indebted to James Thomas for picking up the day-to-day accounts management and Mike Adams as Membership Secretary. Katrina Watts, Jon Watts and Marie Day work tirelessly in many aspects, but particularly running the Supporters Bar. Organisations like this cannot possibly exist without people like this giving their time so generously.

We changed bank accounts, which has helped us streamline our payment processes for expenses and our online membership system, which produces electronic membership cards for members, and ensures a continuous cycle of renewal of member subscriptions. Jon Darch continues to be busy leading the national campaign for the introduction of safe standing or “seats incorporating barriers”, to use the latest official term. This edges ever closer and we fully support the campaign to make this happen.

Looking forward

We will seek to ensure that football is accessible and enjoyable for all fans. We will campaign on initiatives that are important to fans like safe standing, the club’s heritage and access to the players and decision makers. We will continue to raise money for various initiatives, and we will strive to be a professionally run organisation and solution focussed. Ultimately, we will do everything possible within the reach of a volunteer organisation to “make your voice heard”.