

Home Secretary praises 'true' football fans and urges respect at games

The Home Secretary Priti Patel has visited Brentford's Gtech Community Stadium to see the valuable work that football clubs, the police and sport bodies are doing to prevent antisocial behaviour and increase fans' enjoyment of the game after disorder at matches last season.

The Home Office is working closely with the police and football bodies to ensure the matchday enjoyment of the majority of fans and families is not ruined by the selfishness of a few who invaded football pitches, threw flares, and abused players and fans at matches in England and Wales last season.

The Home Secretary met officials from the Premier League and Brentford Football Club, which came top of a recent Premier League survey for matchday fan experience, and saw the new safe standing areas within the Gtech Community Stadium for fans, toured the control room and spoke with the security team about the valuable work they do to ensure match days are positive experiences for spectators.

She also spoke with staff members who work on programmes such as Premier League Kicks, which has been working in local communities to inspire thousands of young people. Premier League Kicks started in 2006 – with Brentford one of 4 pilot clubs – and has a long history of using the power of football and the value of sports participation to help youngsters in some of the country's most high-need areas.

The Home Secretary urged football fans across England and Wales to respect others' enjoyment of the game, and the law, or risk receiving a football banning order (FBO) preventing them from attending home and away matches, including potentially the World Cup in Qatar, if they attack or abuse other fans, staff, players or managers.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

There is no place for the ugly scenes we saw at some matches in England and Wales last season and it is good to see the positive work being done by clubs like Brentford to ensure our stadia are safe places for families and children to enjoy the beautiful game.

I am determined not to let a small minority ruin matches for true fans as the football season gets under way and we are working closely with the police and the football authorities to tackle antisocial and criminal behaviour.

I wholeheartedly support the extra measures all football bodies and clubs are bringing to keep fans safe and would encourage police and the courts to make full use of Football Banning Order legislation

which we have recently extended to online abuse and will be shortly bringing in to root out class A drugs at matches.

FBOs are a preventative behavioural order designed to prevent violence, disorder and harm and are imposed by a court, following an application or on conviction for a football-related offence.

Nearly 1,400 troublemakers have already been targeted by FBOs and banned by the courts.

In the last 12 months the government has significantly expanded the scope of FBOs in order to crack down on disorder by:

- adding football-related online hate crime to the list of offences for which a FBO can be imposed on conviction so that those who are convicted of online racism and other hate crimes connected to football can be banned from stadia, in the same way that violent offenders are barred from grounds
- committing to add football-related class A drugs crimes to the list of offences for which a FBO can be imposed on conviction, sending a strong signal to those who use class A drugs in and around football matches that their behaviour will not be tolerated and that they will no longer be able to attend games

In addition, FBOs have recently been extended to the women's domestic game, showing that regardless of which games fans are attending, violence and hate will not be tolerated.

Recently the Football Association (FA), Premier League and English Football League (EFL) announced they were introducing new measures and stronger sanctions across the game to tackle the increased antisocial and criminal behaviours seen at football grounds last season and to underline the importance of a safe matchday environment. The football bodies are making it clear such acts are dangerous, illegal and have severe consequences.

From the start of season 2022 to 2023, all offenders will be reported by clubs to the police and prosecution could result in a permanent criminal record, which may affect their employment and education, and could result in a prison sentence. The FA will also be enforcing a tougher charging and sanctioning policy for clubs, which will reinforce these measures.

Furthermore, anyone who enters the pitch, and those carrying or using pyrotechnics or smoke bombs, will now receive an automatic club ban. These bans could also be extended to accompanying parents or guardians of children who take part in these activities.

Premier League Chief Executive, Richard Masters, said:

Everyone should feel safe and able to enjoy a football match. In coming together with clubs and partners across football, we are making clear the type of incidents we saw last season must stop. If

we don't take collective and sustained action, it may only be a matter of time before someone is seriously injured, or worse.

The new measures introduced at the start of this season are a strong response to a significant increase in fan behaviour issues, but we know it is the minority who have behaved unacceptably and unlawfully.

Premier League football should be a fantastic experience for everyone and we don't want matches to be marred by these sorts of events.

Culture Secretary, Nadine Dorries, said:

We are on the side of football fans and understand the passion and emotion that comes with supporting a team.

As the new season gets into full swing we want to remind people we will not tolerate antisocial behaviour and have strengthened the powers under our football banning order legislation to tackle drug use and hate crimes.

Together with the work being done by the football authorities, we are helping root out those who seek to disrupt match days so proper fans can enjoy a fantastic football experience.