

# Statement on the Fan Led Review of Football Governance

Mr Speaker, with your permission, I would like to make a statement setting out the Government's response to the Independent Fan Led Review of Football Governance. This is further to my Written Statement issued earlier today. The Government's response has been provided in hard copy to the Vote Office. I will also be placing a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

At the start, I want to thank my Honourable Friend, the Member for Chatham and Aylesford, and the entire panel for their diligent work on the Review – and indeed colleagues from across the House and all stakeholders who have debated these matters at length over a number of years.

Most importantly Mr Speaker, I want to thank the dozens of clubs and thousands of football fans from across the country who contributed to the Review. They sit at the heart of the Review and our response to it.

Football is a defining part of our national identity, and has been a central part of British life for over a century.

English football has had some extraordinary success. Our Premier League has grown to become the most watched sports league in the world.

However, good governance of our clubs has not kept pace with this expansion and development.

The football pyramid itself has come under threat in recent times, with clubs risking collapse.

Many fans have felt alienated from their own clubs.

It is obvious that reform is needed to keep our national game alive and thriving.

This Government has already taken strong action to support the reform of football.

This includes financial support to help clubs through the pandemic, and amendments to competition law to provide financial stability to English football.

But, we also committed to undertaking a review of football governance in our manifesto, a review led by fans and for fans, a review to protect the future of professional football in this country.

In late November, the independent 'Fan Led Review of Football Governance' published its Report.

I am today pleased to announce the publication of the Government's response

to that report.

Our response acknowledges the clear case for reform, and sets out our approach to move forward. It marks a significant step in protecting our national game.

Today I am confirming that the Government will introduce an independent regulator for football, in law, as part of a wider plan for reform.

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

An independent regulator is just one of 10 strategic recommendations set out in the Report. I am pleased to say that the Government will endorse all of the Review's strategic recommendations.

Some of these are for government to implement; and some are for the football authorities to take forward. And we expect them to take action too.

As well as surveying thousands of fans directly, the Review benefited from over 100 hours of engagement involving representatives of over 130 clubs. This all built a clear picture of the challenges in the game.

The Review, and our response, are for them. For the fans who make our national game what it is – and without whom, football would be nothing.

To coincide with the response, we are also publishing the findings of a Government-commissioned study by academics and football finance experts Kieran Maguire and Christina Philippou.

Their analysis confirms that there is a widespread issue of fragile finances across English football clubs, and that action is needed to secure the sustainability of the game.

The sum total of our plans amount to significant reform. In our response, we are committing to publish a white paper in the summer which will set out further details of the implementation of this reform.

Through a new financial regulation regime, the regulator will usher in a new era of financial competency and sustainability for our clubs.

We also recognise that who runs our football clubs goes hand in hand with how they are run.

And so, the regulator will establish new owner's and director's tests – replacing the three existing tests – to ensure that only good custodians and qualified directors can run these vital community assets.

The strengthened test will include a new integrity test.

Recent events have shown the importance of us having confidence in the custodians of our football clubs.

Fans have a crucial role to play in the future of football in this country,

and for that reason we believe fans should be properly consulted by their clubs in taking key decisions.

And therefore the regulator will set a licence condition setting out a minimum level of fan engagement to ensure clubs are meaningfully engaging fans.

We also acknowledge the crucial role that football clubs play in the identity of this country, and particularly in the communities that are so intrinsically linked with their local team.

The stadium, colours and badge are an integral part of this.

Therefore, we believe they should have additional protections – including a mechanism for fans to consent before any changes are made to these key items.

Mr Speaker, our manifesto commitment was instigated by the financial jeopardy that many clubs were being pushed into.

The long term health of professional football in this country is dependent on fairer distributions throughout the football pyramid.

That is why we agree that the Premier League should strengthen its support across the football pyramid.

We expect further action from the football authorities on this important recommendation – and if they don't come to an agreement on financial flows through the pyramid, we reserve the right for the regulator to have powers in this area.

Football also needs to ensure there is a clear and supportive pathway for players. That is why we agree with the recommendation that the welfare of players exiting the game needs to be better protected. I have asked the football authorities to act with urgency on this matter.

Taking forward these recommendations and securing the future of football is a key priority of this Government.

But this is a priority that stretches beyond Government.

The Review contains actions specifically for the Football Association, the Premier League, the English Football League, and the Professional Footballers' Association, on which we expect to see action – without waiting for government legislation.

## **WOMEN'S GAME AND LISTED EVENTS**

Mr Speaker, the majority of the Review looked at issues related to the men's game.

Women's football has gone from strength to strength over the last few years, with a record-number of tickets sold for this year's European Women's Championship to be hosted here in England.

This Government has shown that we are right behind women's sport in every aspect and so we will launch a dedicated review of women's football in this country.

As well as the women's football review; I am also pleased to confirm that the FIFA Women's World Cup and UEFA European Women's Championship Finals will be added to the listed events regime.

As a result, the tournaments will continue to be available to free-to-air television broadcasters; hopefully inspiring the next generation of Lucy Bronzes and Ellen Whites.

## **SUMMARY**

Mr Speaker, the changes we have set out represent a real turning point for football, and will have a considerable impact on clubs.

It is crucial that we get this right, to give confidence to fans and future investors going forward.

That is why we will set out further details on how reforms will be implemented in a White Paper in the summer, and we are committed to legislate to make football reform a reality. We will implement the reforms as soon as possible.

We are paving the way for a more sustainable, accountable and responsible future for football; one that ensures fans are front and centre of our national game.

I commend this statement to the House.