

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

Tuesday 26 March 2024, 1100 - 1230, 100 Parliament Street

### Women's Football Review Implementation Group Attendees - Meeting 1

#### Government

- The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (co-chair)
- The Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Minister for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society

#### Implementation Group members

- Mark Bullingham, CEO, The Football Association
- Baroness Sue Campbell, Director of Women's Football, The Football Association
- Nikki Doucet, CEO, NewCo
- Holly Murdoch, NewCo
- Clare Sumner, Chief Policy and Corporate Affairs Officer, The Premier League
- Maheta Molango, CEO, Professional Footballers Association
- Rick Parry, Chairman, The English Football League
- Ken Scott, CEO, Sports Grounds Safety Authority
- Patrick Brosnan, Sport England
- Robert Sullivan, CEO, Football Foundation
- Matthew Hopkinson, Deputy Director, Department for Education

#### Independent Representatives

- Karen Carney MBE, Former professional footballer and Chair of the Women's Football Review
- Jane Purdon, Director and Consultant in Football and Rugby
- Kelly Simmons OBE, Sport Consultant and Board Advisor
- Deborah Dilworth, Head of Women's Football, Football Supporters Association

#### Actions

- The Football Association (FA), NewCo and Professional Footballers Association (PFA) to convene to discuss both short-term and long-term solutions for funding union representation for the Women's Super League and Women's Championship - an update should be shared with the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Secretary of State no later than 7 June 2024.
- The FA, NewCo, Premier League, English Football League (EFL) and broadcasters should continue broadcast conversations, working collaboratively to identify a suitable dedicated or regular slot for women's football, as well as greater calendar collaboration across football. While not discussed at the meeting, as per the Government Response to the Review of Women's Football, there remains a question about recompensing the women's game for any financial loss due to the lack of a

dedicated or regular slot allocation, or lack of calendar collaboration that does not give enough consideration to the women's game.

- Department for Education and Sport England to continue discussions on access to funding for football pitches and facilities.

While the meeting did not cover the below points in detail, it is clear that the following areas require action from stakeholders:

- NewCo should confirm timescales for publication of results of their fan insight study.
- NewCo to show progress is being made to develop an effective marketing strategy.
- DfE to share update PE and sport premium figure for next academic year.
- DfE to share progress updates on new digital tool.
- Football Foundation to share finalised figure for facilities demand for women and girls.
- FA to share more information and detail of the structure of its own governance to ensure that women's football is appropriately represented from Board-level and down.
- FA to provide evidence as to how they are supporting the Women's National League.
- Government to meet with the Women's National League.
- Football authorities to share a macro-view of financial flows that impact the women's game.

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Introductory remarks from Secretary of State and Minister for Sport at DCMS, and Karen Carney MBE**

- The Secretary of State for DCMS welcomed members to the first meeting of the Women's Football Review Implementation Group.
- The Secretary of State thanked all members for their attendance and commitment to supporting the future of women's football, emphasising the importance of collective responsibility.
- The Secretary of State noted that, for the first meeting of the Implementation Group, the format would be for all ten strategic recommendations to be discussed in turn, with relevant attendees providing progress updates.
- Karen Carney MBE offered her thanks to the group for their continued support towards the delivery of the Review's recommendations and emphasised the importance of driving forward with progress.

### **Review Recommendation Discussion**

- The Secretary of State chaired the meeting and spoke to each of the Review's ten strategic recommendations in turn, highlighting the recommendation itself as well as noting the impact that progress would have.
- As each recommendation was discussed, the Secretary of State turned to the stakeholder responsible for delivery to receive a verbal update. All other attendees were then able to contribute through questions or comments. See below for a progress update on each recommendation.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The new entity tasked with running elite women's football should not settle for anything less than world leading standards for players, fans, staff, and everybody involved in the women's game.

- Since its establishment in November 2023, NewCo has been conducting a review of financial sustainability and developing a ten year business plan. NewCo has a strong focus on raising minimum standards for everyone involved in women's football.
- It was collectively acknowledged that investment in the women's game remains a challenge.
- The FA are conducting work to create a high performance environment for players, as well as a competition review for implementation ahead of the 25/26 season. The Women's FA Cup prize fund was almost doubled in November 2023. The fund currently sits at nearly £6 million.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The FA needs to fix the talent pathway in order to create generation after generation of world beating Lionesses.

- NewCo are working in collaboration with the FA to deliver the Professional Game Academy strategy. A review of the governance structure is in progress for implementation during the 24/25 season.
- The FA have established a working group on Governing Body Endorsements (GBE) across men's and women's football. The FA have made a number of changes to the 23/24 GBE criteria to give clubs access to an increased talent pool.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Both the Women's Super League and Women's Championship should become fully professional environments designed to attract, develop and sustain the best playing talent in the world.

- The FA and NewCo have demonstrated initial progress on professionalising the women's game, with the objective to fully professionalise the game for the 25/26 season. However, funding remains an issue if this is to be realised.
- The FA are commencing work to provide gold standard physical and mental health provisions for players, as well as further uplifts for elite player training facilities by the 24/25 season. The FA are reviewing their maternity policies with amendments expected ahead of the 24/25 season.
- A short-term solution for the funding of union representation for Women's Championship players has not been found. NewCo, the FA and the PFA are in discussion about funding long-term for the WSL and WC, when NewCo is more established. NewCo are conducting a review into welfare provisions needed for WSL and WC players.
- DCMS has established a Board of Women's Sport to bring together leaders from across women's sport to look at growth opportunities. The first Board meeting was on 26 March 2024.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The FA should urgently address the lack of diversity across the women's game - in both on and off-pitch roles.

- The FA will be introducing a new staff reporting system, mandatory reporting of

diversity data and are in the process developing ED&I programmes.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The FA, Premier League, EFL and broadcasters should work together to carve out a new dedicated broadcast slot for women's football.

- Since the Implementation Group, the women's professional game has extended its Barclay's Women's Super League broadcast rights partnership with Sky Sports and BBC Sport into the 24/25 season.
- Discussion acknowledged the challenges facing the women's game around scheduling and recognised this was a complex issue across football. While the FA, NewCo, Premier League, EFL and broadcasters have not carved out a dedicated or suitable regular broadcast slot for women's football, they (FA, NewCo, Premier League and EFL) have agreed to continue conversations on scheduling and calendar collaboration and stressed their commitment to work with the women's game.
- While not discussed at the meeting, as per the Government Response to the Review of Women's Football, there remains a question about recompensing the women's game for any financial loss due to the lack of a dedicated or suitable regular slot allocation, or lack of calendar collaboration that does not give enough consideration to the women's game. Working towards better calendar collaboration across football and a solution for the women's game should form part of these ongoing discussions.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Clubs must provide better value and support their fans - the FA should raise minimum standards to enforce this.

- The Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) is in the process of extending its licensing scheme to all grounds in the WSL. A planned transition process is in place for the 24/25 season, with full licensing for WSL grounds by the 25/26 season.
- The FA are looking to support clubs to improve minimum standards for fan engagement.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Government must deliver on recent commitments around equal access to school sports for girls.

- The Department for Education will publish PE guidance in spring 2024 that illustrates the practical steps taken by schools to provide two hours of PE and equal access for girls and boys. The Department for Education will also be announcing schools PE and sport premium funding for the 24/25 academic year shortly.
- The Department for Education is developing a new digital tool to improve the monitoring of school compliance on spending of the PE and sport premium. The new tool will be piloted this summer and mandatory by summer 2025.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Everyone involved in funding grassroots facilities must come together to increase investment in order to accommodate meaningful access for women and girls.

- The Football Foundation (FF) are in the process of assessing the additional demand generated across football in recent years and the projected growth of the game, in order to establish the facilities and investment required to meet that demand. An update is expected in June 2024.
- Sport England are working with the FF and the other funding partners (the FA and

Premier League) to explore unlocking further funding.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** The FA, Premier League and Football Foundation should work together to make sure that women and girls are benefitting from funding flowing into facilities across the pyramid.

- The FA and FF (via the Premier League Stadium Fund) are developing a facilities strategy for Tiers 3 to 5 of the women's game, to bring greater alignment with the men's National League System (Step 1 to 6). The NewCo will develop their own facilities strategy for WSL and WC clubs so that the longer-term aspirations are clear.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** The FA should leverage the handover of administration of the top two tiers of women's football to even more acutely focus on grassroots clubs and the Women's National League.

- The entire management committee of the Women's National League resigned last August. Government will be meeting with the Women's National League to discuss immediate concerns and progress.
- The FA and NewCo have both established working groups to ensure their strategies remain aligned.

#### **AOB and closing remarks**

- The Secretary of State closed the discussion by thanking all attendees for their contributions and progress so far.
- The Secretary of State surmised that, for the future sustainability of women's football, NewCo needs to have sufficient funding and investment plans and suitable governance structures in place. It was highlighted that, at present, there are challenges and blocks which need to be addressed to achieve this.
- The Secretary of State stated it as necessary for all members of the Implementation Group to work as one for the future success of the women's game. All members of the Implementation Group emphasised their commitment to women's football and will continue to drive and share progress.
- The Secretary of State laid out the actions that should be progressed at pace. It was emphasised that immediate action needs to be taken to address funding flows and investment, governance structures, union representation and broadcast rights.
- The Secretary of State committed to sharing minutes on gov.uk, continued stakeholder engagement in advance of the next Implementation Group meeting, and to remain chair of the Women's Football Review Implementation Group meeting in July 2024.