

Summary of the meeting of the Constitution Review Group (CRG) of Wimbledon Football Club Supporters Society Ltd held at The Fans Stadium Kingsmeadow on Monday 26th September 2005 at 7.30 pm

Present: David Cox (DC) (Chair)
Mark Davis (MD) (Secretary)

Apologies: Dave Boyle (DB)
Roger Cassells (RC)
Ray Downham (RD)
Sean Fox (SF)

The low turnout for the meeting was discussed. MD noted that approximately one week's notice had been given, which was less notice than desirable. Most absent members had notified MD of their absence in advance and it was hoped that attendance would improve in the future. Nonetheless, it was considered that the Constitution Review process may need to be revised to take into account that participation in CRG meetings was likely to be intermittent. (**Action: DC to advise the Board of this issue.**)

In view of the relatively low level of member interest in the Constitution, the discussion turned to how to involve members in aspects of the Constitution which would be of most interest to them and how to move this process along with a limited resource base and less dependent upon plenary CRG meetings.

In the short term, it was considered that news items should be written for the website and the matchday programme bringing the Constitution Review to members' attention. (**Action: DC to write news items for OS and article for programme.**)

In order to take the review further forward, two separate workstreams were identified which could be undertaken with a relatively modest resource base for the time being. One of these would be to produce amendments to the Constitution which were of a technical nature; the other would be to produce a short consultation document presenting the main issues of principle on which members could respond.

Technical Issues and Mark-up

MD would take forward the technical work. This would involve marking up the existing Constitution to reflect technical and drafting issues. Whilst the approach to be taken on many of the technical issues was reasonably straightforward, there would no doubt be a number of issues where various options would need to be considered. This would be indicated by way of footnotes. (**Action: MD, by November.**)

In producing the mark-up, MD would also highlight those sections of the Constitution which would need to be debated more fully as matters of principle and those sections which might be 'hollowed out' of the Constitution into free-standing policy documents. It was noted that any such policy documents would need to be in place by the time the revised Constitution were to come into force.

During the course of the meeting, DC spoke to DB by telephone to ascertain whether there was a more up-to-date model Constitution document for the CRG to work from and what assistance Supporters Direct might provide in this exercise. DC reported back as follows:

- There is not an updated model Constitution document (although individual Trusts have made their own modifications);
- There is not a compendium of stand-alone policy documents to draw from, although there are a few (such as Election Rules);
- Exeter is undertaking a Constitution Review exercise (**Action: DC to write to Exeter to find out about lessons learned**);
- DB would be happy to review revised provisions produced by the DT and to send these on to the Co-operative Union for review.

Consultation on Matters of Principle

The approach previously mooted was akin to a White Paper, i.e. for CRG members to produce worked-up proposals on individual matters of principle to take to the Board and to members. It would be difficult for DC and MD to manage this workload between them. In any case, it was likely that a group of two people would be in danger of reaching agreement on issues which would not find favour with, or stand up to scrutiny by, a wider group. Two courses of action were considered:

- First, for the sake of argument, a "benign dictatorship" option. DC and MD could decide between them what was best for the Society, draft it, write up an explanation and present it to the Board and members in turn. It was inevitable that any such solution would have little or no legitimacy either with the Board or with members and was contrary to the ethos of the DT. This approach was rapidly discarded;
- A consultation approach more akin to a Green Paper. A short consultation document (e.g. an A5 booklet of around a dozen pages) would be produced for distribution to all members. The document would present key issues, indicate in broad terms some possible solutions and invite members to respond on questions. Specific proposals would then be drawn up following consultation.

DC and MD leaned towards the latter approach. The associated timetable might be along the lines of:

- Produce and distribute consultation document by end November;
- Workshops with members in January (broken up into small, themed discussion groups rather than a large meeting – Kingsmeadow would not necessarily be the only venue);
- Written consultation responses by end January;
- Produce findings by end February and move thereafter to recommendations and drafting.

The consultation document would not address the technical amendments (except to note that this work was under way) nor would it contain fully worked-up proposals on the matters of principle. However, it would give an overview of the Constitution and the review exercise and then, for around half a dozen topics, set out briefly the issues, risks, some possible solutions, questions for members. Key issues might be presented under the headings of:

- Powers of the Board versus members (see minutes of 5th September CRG meeting);
- Process for fundamental issues (i.e. issues too important to be agreed at a regularly convened SGM);
- Multi-layered Board (i.e. individuals being on more than one Board);
- Membership issues (e.g. provisions for freezing membership in certain circumstances);
- Board and elections;
- Miscellaneous.

It was considered that issues pertaining to corporate governance of AFCW were probably better addressed in a stand-alone policy document rather than in the DT Constitution. Nonetheless, this issue was of sufficient importance to the DT and of sufficient concern to members that the consultation document would need to say something about this.

As well as consulting members directly, other stakeholders could also be consulted. These might include Supporters Direct and WISA. Individual members of the CRG would be at liberty to respond to the consultation in their own right. The role of the DT Board as a consultee would need to be considered further, i.e. the extent to which the Board would approve the consultation document in the first place and/or respond to the document formally, once issued.

To make the consultation easier, it was agreed that it would be helpful to set up a dedicated e-mail address, i.e. constitution@thedonstrust.org.

It was agreed to discuss the proposal for a revised process with the Board prior to finalising it (**Action: DC to request as an agenda item for the next DTB meeting**). The revised process would not be given extensive publicity until there was additional confidence that the process was workable. In the meantime, DC would produce a skeleton of what a consultation document might look like, for review by CRG members.