

Trust Statement – 4th September 2023

On Monday 4th September 2023, representatives from the Shrimpers Trust met with Stuart Andrew MP, the Minister for Sport, and Anna Firth, MP for Southend West, to discuss the current situation at Southend United Football Club.

The date is significant, for not only did the Members of Parliament agree to a meeting on the first day back from the UK Parliamentary summer recess, but it also marks one month until our football club appears in the High Court for a Winding-Up Petition served by HMRC that was marked as 'final' at the most recent adjournment.

We were able to have a frank conversation about what steps we need to take now and what steps the Government is taking to ensure unfit owners, like Ron Martin, are not able to own or mismanage football clubs moving forwards. We are grateful for the time both MPs gave us.

Within the next few months, the UK Government is expected to consider how to implement the recommendations set out in February's White Paper: 'A Sustainable Future - Reforming Club Football Governance', which aims to introduce an independent regulator for professional clubs within the English football pyramid.

Our club is on the brink of extinction, and we are exploring every possible avenue to save it. It is our belief that Southend United FC represents an opportunity for an active case study in the implementation of an independent regulator, whilst consideration should also be given as to the potential for accessing central Government funding.

We were given the chance to present our belief that the club has been the embodiment of the outdated 'Martin Model' of football club ownership. Ron Martin owns a controlling stake of 70% in our club, with other shareholders and directors powerless to hold him to account over his actions.

During his tenure, the club has become indebted to numerous creditors, has regularly failed to make payments to staff and HMRC and has failed to file accounts on time. Since 2009 the football department has suffered numerous transfer and registration embargoes, significantly hampering their ability to recruit new players.

The most recent embargo has been in place for almost an entire calendar year, with the indignity of a ten-point deduction imposed last month as a result of an ongoing outstanding debt to HMRC which, in one fell swoop, took the most hardworking, loyal and likeable team the club has employed for some time from the play-off places to the foot of the National League table.

The 'Martin Model' means the club's owner, who has been guilty of a failure to plan, to engage and to be held accountable for his role in Southend United's demise, suffers little. Our dedicated staff and squad, and the fans who continue to back the team in significant numbers at home and away, are punished with no legislation to support them.

We need to move on from the 'Martin Model' of football club ownership. The UK Government White Paper offers the prospect of a brighter future through its core principles of improved governance, a revised Owners & Directors Test, by protecting heritage and community assets and by reflecting fans' interests. We believe the White Paper can help us to make that important step.

We will also continue to explore, alongside other key stakeholders, whether there are any funding mechanisms - such as those utilised by the Bury FC Supporters Society - the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport can offer to help us take proactive and preventative steps now, rather than reactive steps after a 117-year-old community asset has been destroyed.

Last month, in the High Court, Judge Prentis was reported as declaring: "*If this were not a football club, with the particular attachment to its fans, I would be winding them up today.*" Our club must not be put in that position again.

The Shrimpers Trust Board.