

Trust Statement – 28th April 25

FAO Members of Parliament

Shrimpers Trust welcomes the second reading of the Football Governance Bill in House of Commons

Today marks an important step in the journey towards an urgently needed football regulator, with the second reading of the Football Governance Bill taking place in the House of Commons. We'd like to thank all parties who have worked tirelessly to ensure that this bill has continued on the path towards becoming law, across a change in government. We urge those parties to continue to work together to progress this legislation and encourage them to listen to the fans as the game's primary stakeholder, rather than be swayed by out-of-touch figures with vested interests at the top of the game.

We're exceptionally lucky that Southend United was saved, and that it has a new ownership which wants to engage with the fanbase and the community and put the club on a sustainable footing. However, we wouldn't want the club to fall into the hands of another Ron Martin after the current ownership departs, and we certainly don't want to see what happened to our club befall other clubs. We therefore call on all politicians to rise to the challenge of ensuring that the regulator is fair, has teeth, and exists to enshrine the fan as a key tenant in the footballing landscape.

We strongly encourage MPs to read our paper, "Dereliction and Decline", which details the key issues in a near-catastrophic period of mismanagement and neglect in Southend United's recent history, that almost cost the local community a 119-year-old institution. We have outlined our thoughts on what we perceive to be the main issues for the regulator to address, based on our own experience:

Stadia

A protracted new stadium development caused numerous issues for Southend United, before the plans were abandoned in 2024 by the club's new owners. The project began with the then-club owner selling the club's stadium and training ground to himself, and, over time, morphed to involve a convoluted network of the previous club owner's "group companies", third parties and asset-based lending that still clouds the club's financial future today.

A football regulator must consider the complex tapestry of stadium developments and fully understand the difference between a reasonable leveraged position, and the exploitation of all of a club's bricks and mortar assets.

Disposal of a home ground and relocation should require regulator support, mandatory fan consultation, and a mandatory local authority response in the consultation period. Whilst the separation of physical assets (stadia, training grounds) and football business is now commonplace up and down the football pyramid, we must ensure that the process is exclusively for the benefit of the club and its community and not used as a speculative loophole where clubs and/or their assets are saddled with excessive and exploitative financial burdens.

We would welcome discussion at committee stage, as to how this might look inside within a regulatory framework.

Owners and Directors Tests

It is abundantly clear that our previous owner would have been disqualified under the new tests proposed in the Football Governance Bill, and this is a welcome and long-overdue change.

The regulator should offer assurances that unscrupulous owners will bear the burden of punitive any sanctions in the future. As a fanbase that suffered multiple points deductions, we are concerned that some “punishments” affect supporters and footballing staff, whilst the owners who caused the issues in the first-place fly under the radar.

We acknowledge the mechanisms that will be used for owners to be forced to sell their shares, and we ask that supporters’ trusts be given a default right to purchase these first. This would ensure that the club defaults to its primary stakeholder, in the event of owner disqualification, and reduces the risk of the club passing from the hands of one bad owner to another through a distressed sale. We would also welcome an increased frequency of the Owners and Directors tests, ideally to an annual rhythm.

Financial Redistribution

We call for fairer and wider distribution of annual broadcasting revenue.

Currently 95% of the £3.2bn annual broadcast revenue stays with 26 clubs (the 20 Premier League clubs, and those clubs who get parachute payments as a result of relegation to the Championship).

Giving fairer distributions to well-run clubs could see them invest in better stadia and training facilities, professional women's teams, stronger academies and vital community programmes. We believe, in the first instance, that increased revenues should be made available to all clubs for compliance and transparency within the regulatory framework. Not all clubs will have the ability to find the extra capacity needed for this, and investment in building robust frameworks inside clubs across the pyramid, perhaps via a “compliance action plan”, will only strengthen the regulator and the faith placed in it by clubs and fans.

We would like to put on record our thanks to the Minister for Sport, Stephanie Peacock MP, for her recent visit to Southend United and for her commitment to ensuring clubs like ours are given the opportunity to feed into these final stages of the bill. We thank our local MPs David Burton Sampson and Bayo Alaba for their time and passion in supporting Southend fans, and the MPs who represent our exiled fans, who have put forward support related to this bill. Finally, we would like to thank Anna Firth and Stewart Andrew MP, for their work in ensuring that Shrimpers Trust and its membership was heard and supported in the previous incarnation of this bill.

We have also valued the support and kinship of numerous supporters’ trusts across the country who have found/find themselves suffering from similar issues, the primary objective of the regulator of which is to overcome.

This is a landmark piece of legislation, that aims to enrich and enhance the national game. One that ensures that communities like ours, no longer have to suffer the indignity of unscrupulous owners and that we can focus on the important role football plays in society. We welcome and encourage its smooth passage and ask that our above points be discussed at committee stage.

The Shrimpers Trust Board.