



Stockport County Supporters' Co-operative

Meeting with Martyn Henderson , COO, Independent Regulator for Football (shadow)

Date: 17th September 2025, 17:30

Location: Google Meet

1. Attendance and Apologies

In Attendance:

- Martyn Henderson
- John Giles
- John Bilsbury
- Paul Thompson
- Dave Marchbank
- Paul Dawson
- Cath Shanley

Apologies:

- Terry Arnold

Introductions

Martyn introduced himself to the board. Martyn is the COO for the Independent Football Regulator (IFR) (Shadow) appointed in January 2024 and a Bolton Wanderers fan.

Dave introduced the board to Martyn and gave an overview of the Co-operative and its work to date.

Martyn explained that he would give an update on IFR implementation and next steps and talk about what it means for fans. The meeting was informal and didn't involve any discussion on club affairs

Key points discussed during the meeting

Purpose of the IFR

- Created to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of English football.
- Covers: Premier League, Championship, League One, League Two, and National League.
- Excludes: grassroots football, women's football (for now), and competition matters (e.g. points deductions, FA Cup scheduling, match day experience).
- Aims to prevent financial collapses like Bury FC, protect club heritage, and enforce responsible ownership.

Licensing System

- From the 2027/28 season, every club in scope must hold an IFR licence.
- Licensing tests cover three key areas:
 - Financial resources – clubs must prove they can operate sustainably.
 - Non-financial resources – governance standards, competent leadership, transparent structures.
 - Fan engagement – clubs must regularly consult fans on key issues such as direction, business priorities, ticketing, and heritage.
- In extreme cases, failure to meet license requirements could result in sanctions or loss of licence.

Implementation Timeline

- 2025–26: Consultations on Owners & Directors Test, licensing regime, and fan engagement standards.
- 1 Nov 2025: IFR becomes legally independent, and will be headquartered in Manchester..
- 2026/27: Licensing phased in across clubs.
- 2027/28: Full IFR licensing regime in force.

Funding the Regulator

- Funded via a levy on clubs, which will be consulted on
- Expected that Premier League clubs will cover a larger proportion of the IFR's running costs.
- Principle: avoid burdening lower-league clubs with excessive costs while ensuring IFR remains independent and well-resourced.

Key Industry Challenges

- Wage inflation is the single biggest issue raised by clubs.
- Example: Charlton Athletic's wage bill rose by 50% in one year; similar pressures exist across EFL and National League.
- Many clubs admit that any redistribution of revenue would likely be spent on wages without safeguards.
- The IFR aims to encourage spending on infrastructure, youth development, or reserves instead of unsustainable wage growth.

Fan Engagement

- Clubs must demonstrate genuine two-way consultation, not just one-way communication.
- Evidence required: how fan views were considered in board decisions (e.g. ticket pricing, membership schemes, stadium redevelopment).
- Fans do not get a veto, but clubs must prove that consultation was meaningful and documented.
- Each club will have an IFR supervisor ('account manager') who will meet with fan groups as part of ensuring engagement meets with the IFR's expectations.
- The regulator will monitor fan engagement to ensure it is effective, transparent, and representative.

Scope & Boundaries

- The IFR's remit stops at the National League.
- National League North/South excluded.
- However, redistribution deals will consider grassroots and community football funding.
- The IFR does not interfere with sporting rules such as league structures, FA Cup formats, or points deductions.

What This Means for Supporters

- Fans gain statutory rights to be consulted on key decisions affecting their clubs.
- Supporters can escalate concerns to the IFR if clubs fail to engage properly.

- The regulator's independence and Manchester base provides regional credibility and accessibility.
- Ultimately, the IFR aims to make clubs more resilient, protect community heritage, and ensure supporters' voices shape football's future.

Meeting Conclusion

- Martyn concluded by saying how much he enjoys connecting with organisations like the County Supporters Co-operative and hearing concerns of fans and that the IFR wouldn't exist if it wasn't for fans campaigning for change and a better future in football and encouraged the board to be involved in any forthcoming consultations.
- The IFR will be working closely with the Football Supporters Association (FSA) who the Co-op are already closely aligned with. The IFR will have their own fan engagement in place to practice what they preach in this space. There will be a more formal mechanism for fans to feed into and be consulted themselves on how the IFR approach their functions.
- The Co-op should know who our dedicated IFR supervisor for Stockport County is in the coming months, so we'll be able to build a relationship with them.