

Minutes of meeting of Shadow Board, April 22, 2023

Present: James Errington, Derek Daniels, Matty Davies, Mellony Shepard, Dan Pearson, Len South, Gill Shepherd, Paul Mayfield

Club representatives: Gavin Baldwin, Shaun Lockwood, Liam Hoden

Apologies: Patrick Queen, Lizzie Robinson

1. Minutes from the previous meeting (March 24, 2023)
 - a. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.
 - b. A new process for the creation and signing-off of minutes was agreed in order to speed up the publication on the Rovers website. Minutes will be produced as soon as possible following the end of a meeting and be sent to members so the sign-off period takes a matter of days, rather than waiting until the following meeting.
2. Election process for Shadow Board membership
 - a. DD said he had received no negative feedback from members of the Supporters' Board regarding the proposal for an election process that had been presented
 - b. LS questioned how the 20 nominations required to stand as a candidate would be recorded. DD said a record should be kept by the prospective candidate that could be checked.
 - c. LS asked whether an individual could nominate more than one prospective candidate. DD confirmed that would be possible.
 - d. GB asked as there is no current official representation from the Viking Supporters' Cooperative, would one of the upcoming vacancies need to be filled by VSC representation. SL said yes and that feedback would be sought from the VSC but DD's status as a committee member of the VSC could potentially see him take the role of the organisation's representative on the Shadow Board
 - e. DD confirmed that three seats would be available for election in the 2023 election period. Two seats are currently vacant while the seat of MD would be up for renewal.
3. Recent statements from Doncaster Rovers
 - a. A number of questions were presented to GB in advance by DD in relation to the statement regarding Terry Bramall's pledge of additional funds for the 2023/24 playing budget. As part of those discussions it was confirmed
 - i. TB is the sole funder of the club.

- ii. The chairman has the decision on the future of any manager or head coach, but would seek advice from HoF and discuss with TB, GB.
 - iii. HOF salary does not come from playing budget, neither does any compensation from managerial dismissals.
- b. Further discussions then took place regarding the ownership of the club and the the history of the ownership structure and responsibilities of directors, chairman and CEO during the past 20 years.
- c. Discussions regarding financing of the club and TB's long-term future and succession planning also took place.
- d. GB said TB had spoken with the head of football operations and chief financial officer plus taken advice from EFL experts before determining the extent of the investment he would make into the playing budget.
- e. SL pointed out it was said in the previous Shadow Board meeting in March that GB had stated he would be engaging in conversations with TB regarding the funding of the first team, which ultimately led to the pledge from TB, so this wasn't an unforeseen direction of travel.
- f. DD spoke to the head of football operations over the phone and put questions to him.
 - i. JC and the recruitment team are already looking at players for next season
 - ii. JC said he is able to spend money on transfer fees but that would come out of the playing budget
- g. GB said TB has guaranteed the playing budget, which separates it from the overall Club Doncaster budget. This means three things, firstly the CD budget can be allocated to the stadium (not supporting playing budget as it has this year due to the overspend on football), secondly if there is a shortfall in the CD budget, it does not impact the playing budget, thirdly if there is a surplus on the CD budget it opens up a wider conversation about how those funds will be used (eg playing/stadium infrastructure/fan engagement/reduce losses to TB).
- h. SL explained the example of season ticket revenue not impacting the playing budget this season. Any shortfall on the ST budget would be covered by TB as a backstop, but it would be up to SL to be creative to generate revenues first, but any funds exceeding the budget could be used for whatever is deemed most essential around the club.
- i. GS asked if the prospective success or failure of the football operation was simply about money. GB says stats consistently show that clubs tend to finish where their playing budget is ranked in their respective division.
- j. MD asked whether the medical department was up to standard. GB said all departments would be reviewed following the end of the season.

- k. GB spoke at length about the nature of the departmental budgets handled by the head of football operations.
 - l. GS asked if there were concerns that the current atmosphere at the club would impact the ability to attract players this summer.
 - m. LS asked if DS was appointed due a friendship with JC. GB said they did not know each other prior to the appointment process but JC fully advocated DS for the role. LS asked if there was too much focus on stats. SL said a strategy is required to override any knee-jerk reactions to form and performances, statistics have to play some part in that and this teams such as Brentford follow this approach.
 - n. The communication of the board and head coach was discussed at length
 - o. PM asked about winners of the club lottery waiting a long time for their payments. GB said head of finance Richard Poole said all payments should now be up to date and explained why there had been delays due to a move to bank transfer as the method. DD said there had been an issue regarding communication with the finance department.
 - p. GS asked whether there is a role to be had for the Shadow Board in regard to communications. DD said JE a Shadow Board Twitter account would become active on announcing the election process. DD also pointed to a podcast interview with DP. JE said he had previously had conversations with individuals via direct messages in order to spread messages. SL said having minutes live quicker will help with communications as it demonstrates the actions that are taking place as they are happening. GB said the club should be making greater effort to communicate more about the impact on decision-making that the Shadow Board is having. Wider communications of the club were discussed at length.
 - q. SL discussed the new catering contract and its offshoots including a new brewery deal, food items, changes to kiosks.
 - r. DD asked whether overperformance in cup competitions against budget would ensure more cash being added to the playing budget. GB said budgeted performances had been lowered for the 23/24 season. GB said the money would be made available to the football department and discussions would be had to where that would be used.
 - s. DD asked whether the club would be due fees for the movement or performance of former players this summer. GB said there are agreements which remain active.
4. Away ticket sales policy for next season
- a. JE said he had first raised the issue following the final game of the 2016/17 season at Hartlepool United when Rovers had the potential to win the league. He said the issue was particularly problematic for the game at Harrogate in the 22/23 season.

- b. JE explained the research he had undertaken on the sales policies of other clubs in League One and League Two for away fixtures, particularly for those with limited allocations and high demand. JE collated the information and provided it to members via email.
- c. JE explained the season ticket holder priority method which Rovers currently use is used by the majority of League Two clubs. The majority of League One clubs use a priority points method.
- d. JE said box office manager Tracy Bawden had researched whether a priority scheme was possible through the club's current ticketing system and found that it was. The cost of adding such a scheme is currently being investigated.
- e. JE said the hope was that a priority points system could be implemented in the closed season for use from the start of the 23/24 campaign.
- f. LS asked how the system would work. JE gave an example of supporters receiving ten points per league match ticket purchased, home or away. Season ticket holders would therefore start the season with 230 points based on having tickets for each of the 23 home games. SL gave an example of Shrewsbury, where supporters receiving one point per home ticket purchased and two points per away ticket purchased, with season ticket holders starting with 23 points
- g. LS asked how it would be determined how many points were required for each stage of the sales process for a match. SL said the club would assess the situation for each game based on the ticket allocation and how the points were spread across the fanbase.
- h. JE said his recommendation would be for a two season rolling method as this would allow those who attend the majority of away matches to be high on the priority list even if they do not attend the majority of home games.
- i. SL said there would inevitably still be issues with any sales
- j. MD asked if there were any plans to extend box office opening hours. SL said one thing being considered was combining the club shop and box office to give more flexibility. SL did say the majority of sales were now done online.
- k. SL added that a cashless system for catering was being considered for the new season.

5. AOB

- a. The statement on abuse of staff
 - i. A discussion was had on the issues which led to the club issuing a statement regarding the abuse of employees by supporters.
 - ii. GB said it had nothing to do with criticism of performances and results.

- iii. SL said the club was determined not to stoke division between the club and fans
- b. SL discussed meeting with the individual behind Twitter account Sustainable Reds regarding the protest at the Grimsby match.
 - i. SL said there has never been an attempt by the club to stop supporters bringing flags and banners into the stadium. The only checks have been over fire safety certification and the only instructions given have been to move the banners if they were blocking gangways.
 - ii. SL said the protest at the Grimsby game included the throwing of tennis balls onto the pitch, which would bring a FA sanction and this was suggested by Sustainable Reds.
 - iii. SL explained the process which would be taken in response to the infringement.
- c. LS asked about the fire alarms repeatedly sounding on the Grimsby matchday
 - i. SL explained the fire alarms had been activated due to Grimsby supporters letting off pyrotechnics inside the concourse and the smoke from those spreading across the internal parts of the stadium.
- d. MS asked if there would be matchday programmes for the 23/24 season
 - i. GB said yes
- e. PM asked if partially reserved seating in the south stand would alleviate problems in that area
 - i. SL said it is difficult to police small areas of reserved seating in an area where there was wider unreserved seating
- f. PM asked about the lack of communication over the kit sponsors' lunch which was to be held on May 3
 - i. GB said chief commercial officer Jon Warburton had been planning the event for a long period but would be reminded of the need for more timely communication

Meeting closed