



## **Minutes of 2nd South Coast Regional Forum**

**1pm-4pm 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

**Stadium Suite, Checktrade Stadium, Crawley Town FC**

The second South Coast Regional forum was held at Checktrade stadium Crawley, on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

This forum was hosted by Crawley Town FC, Crawley Town Disabled Supporters Association and supported by Level Playing Field.

**Objectives of the Forum:** The forum provides the opportunity for fans, clubs, Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs) and other relevant stakeholders to network, share their experiences and share best practise.

### **Attendees**

**Barb Robinson, Chris Cheshire, Michael Wheeler and Susan Wheeler:** Crawley Town DSA

**Kieran Reynolds and Ruth Hopkins:** Level Playing Field

**Amy Fazackerley:** Crawley Town Community Foundation

**Paul Lucas, Angie Lucas, Mark Harpur and Will Beaney:** Southampton DSA:

**Sam Piggott, Steve Webb and Mel Clark:** Portsmouth DSA

**Allison McNeil and Colin Farmery:** Portsmouth FC

**Pam Wilkins:** Pompey Supporters Trust

**Alice Jeans:** AFC Bournemouth

**Elliot Batchelor:** Brighton and Hove Albion FC

Apologies were received from Reading FC and Southampton FC.

## Minutes

Meeting commenced at 1pm

**Kieran Reynolds (Level Playing Field (LPF))** opened the forum and introduced himself. He welcomed everyone and thanked Crawley Town FC (CTFC) for hosting. Kieran then introduced Barbara Robinson.

### **1: Introduction and welcome from Barbara Robinson.**

Barb welcomed attendees and explained her role. She is Chair of Crawley Town Disabled Supporters Association (DSA). As well as her role as DSA Chair, Barb is a volunteer at the club. She is the Matchday Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO) and Disability Liaison Officer (DLO). Attendees were then invited to introduce themselves.

### **2: Presentation by Ruth Hopkins, General Manager and Head of Access Development at Level Playing Field (LPF).**

Ruth gave a brief history of LPF and explained the roles of the LPF team. She explained how LPF was formed and LPF's current projects. Ruth also explained how LPF handle enquiries (almost 400 annually), complaints and act as a mediators. Ruth also oversees LPF's access audits and gave a brief explanation to the audience. LPF also provides Disability Awareness Training.

Ruth explained that accessibility is not just a legal obligation but also an important commercial and moral consideration. In particular she highlighted that:

- 50% of disabled people have never attended a live event.
- 1 in 4 families has a disabled person and 6 out of 10 people nationally knows a disabled person.
- In 2014, DWP estimated that disabled people in the UK had an annual spend in 2012 of £212 billion.

Ruth then highlighted various issues facing disabled supporters:

- A shortage of wheelchair accessible viewing areas.
- Insufficient/poorly identified easy access seating.
- Lack of facilities for Deaf and hard of hearing and blind and partially sighted supporters.
- Lack of accessible toilet facilities.
- Disparity between ticketing structure for disabled and non-disabled fans.

Ruth concluded by talking about LPF Weeks of Action campaign and some of the activities which took place. Weeks of Action was established in 2005 and next year's Weeks of Action will take place from 4<sup>th</sup> to 15 March 2017.

### **3: Presentation by Kieran Reynolds, Project Coordinator at Level Playing Field (LPF).**

Kieran gave an update of LPF's Working Together project which aims to improve the relationship, awareness and cooperation between disabled fans, clubs and non-disabled fans.

This has been done by supporting clubs and disabled fans to help them form pan-disability user-led Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs). The project also aims to establish relationships with existing DSAs, clubs and disabled fans and to raise awareness of disability by educating people about access and inclusion issues in football.

Kieran explained the benefits of establishing a DSA. He highlighted the opportunity for disabled supporters to have direct consultation with their clubs and how this can lead to the sharing of good practice amongst clubs, disabled supporters and the wider disabled community. He also spoke about the social benefits of DSA membership and why it is important that they represent a wide range of disabilities. Kieran said that 11 DSAs have been established since the project began in 2012.

Kieran also explained the benefits of establishing a Regional Forum and explained how they provide a medium where individual DSAs and club representatives can exchange views, policies and practice. So far LPF has supported the establishment of Regional Forums for Wales and the South Coast and is also continuing to support the South West Disabled Fans Experience forum (SWDFEF). Kieran is actively looking for more clubs/DSAs who are willing to host regional forums.

Kieran then outlined some of the project successes over the past year including the reestablishment of a DSA at Watford (December 2015), the establishment of DSAs at Crystal Palace (April 2016) and Gillingham (Set to launch late 2016) and the establishment of a Regional Forum for Wales (April 2016).

Kieran finished by reminding the DSAs present to complete their questionnaire by 10am on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October. The questionnaire was emailed to all DSAs. .

### **4: Presentation by Chris Cheshire, Crawley Town DSA.**

Chris explained that Crawley Town (CTFC) is a small club, and are young as a league club compared to those represented around the table. She gave a brief history on the improvements made at CTFC in recent years.

During the 2013/2014 season the former CEO, Michael Dunford, invited Chris to find out if there was sufficient interest from disabled fans in establishing a DSA. The response was positive. Crawley Town DSA was formed in October 2014 and has continued to work closely with the club to improve facilities for disabled fans. The DSA has around 35 members who pay a membership fee of £5 per season. The money is used to sponsor player(s) a home and away shirt and 2 member's names are drawn at the end of the season to receive one of the shirts. DSA members also attend 2 or 3 training sessions during the season. Last year, The DSA held a New Year's meal at the club which was well attended.

In 2015, Crawley Town DSA and CTFC worked together to launch an Audio Descriptive Commentary (ADC) service which has been a great success. The service has a number of regular users and is also available for away fans.

Chris regularly attends away matches and spoke about the difficulties she has had finding relevant information online. She has been working with the CTFC media manager to make the clubs website more user friendly. Barb sends out an email to all visiting clubs Supporters Liaison officers (SLO). A ground guide with live links to transport information and timetables is now on the Club's website.

The link can be found here: <http://www.crawleytownfc.com/club/visit-us/>

The DSA has produced an Access Video for disabled fans to help them plan their visit. This was shown on the television screen.

The link to the video can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEabEE8ynWA&feature=youtu.be>

An Access Audit of the clubs Stadium was provided by the Crawley Access Officer who also delivered Disability Awareness Training for all staff. Chris helped with the training and the feedback was positive.

Chris spoke about wheelchair user areas in the ground and easy access seats. Delegates were able to see them during the stadium tour at the end of the meeting.

Chris said that "We're unable to make provision for wheelchairs in our Executive/Director seating area and are limited on the number of elevated positions we can offer due to the design of the stadium"

Chris then spoke about the variable experiences she has had at away matches. She recently wrote a detailed letter to a club about her poor experience. Her main issue that day was the poor position and sightline, compared to a previous visit. She was sited at pitch level which was obscured by advertising hoarding and match day stewards. She had previously watched the match from an elevated platform and had a positive experience. The club has not responded yet and Ruth offered support.

A link to the Crawley Town Disabled Supporters Page can be found here:

<http://www.crawleytownfc.com/fans/disabled-supporters/>

#### **5: Presentation by Amy Fazackerley, Crawley Town Community Foundation (CTCF) Community Development Manager.**

Amy introduced herself and explained her role. She has a sports degree and a long standing interest in supporting and empowering disabled people. Amy works closely with schools and clubs in the local community.

Amy spoke about Crawley Capers, a project that provides young people on the autism spectrum an opportunity to participate in football activity at Checktrade Stadium. The project is a partnership between Crawley Town FC Community Sports Foundation and Autism Sussex

Alongside football, children participate in arts and crafts activities with a volunteer from Autism Sussex in the Stadium Pod overlooking the pitch. The two-hour session encourages participation from children with Autism and family members to help develop social skills and positive play within a family group. Emphasis is placed on fostering independence and self-determination. Working in partnership with CTFC provides Capers users a safe base to play football, take part in art sessions, develop social engagement and for parents to network with each other.

Some of the children involved have had the opportunity to be mascots at CTFC home matches. Amy said that the project is due to relaunch in two weeks' time. She then showed attendees an ITV news story about the project.

The link to the Crawley Capers ITV News story can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vy33KA3SiE>

Following on from the success of Capers, CTCF is now planning to launch a new project for people with mental ill health.

More information about Crawley Capers can be found here:

<http://www.crawleytownfc.com/news/article/2016-17/crawley-town-3256497.aspx>

## **6: Presentation by Sam Piggott, Portsmouth DSA.**

Sam spoke about access improvements at Portsmouth FC since the last forum. There are now more accessible toilets for home fans, new painted spaces in the Fratton End and the Victory Suite is now accessible. Sam acknowledged that it has been more difficult to improve facilities for away fans but is continuing to push the club. Bi-Weekly social meetings are organised for members and these take place at the club.

In April 2016, Portsmouth DSA organised an inclusion day which was attended by over 300 people. Attendees were treated to first team player appearances, taster sessions for powerchair football, walking football, boccia and the premiere of Portsmouth's new virtual tour. The event was supported by Pompey in the Community. Bi-Weekly social meetings are organized for members and these take place at the club.

## **7: Presentation by Paul Lucas, Southampton DSA.**

Paul spoke briefly about the history of Southampton DSA. The DSA was founded in 2010. They currently has 265 members and membership is free. News updates are sent by online newsletter when necessary. There are currently 15 members actively involved in the running of the DSA.

Paul spoke about a new changing places facility at St Mary's Stadium which is opening soon. Changing Places are toilets with a changing bench, hoist and extra space for people to be supported to meet their personal needs. (More details on [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)).

Southampton DSA's annual open day took place in August 2016 at St Mary's Stadium and was attended by over 300 people. Attendees had the opportunity to have their photograph taken with the FA Cup and meet former Southampton Players. There was also live music, a Caricaturist, face painting, a bouncy Castle, and the Saints Foundation will set up an inflatable goal. £2,000 worth of prizes were donated by various organisations for a prize draw to raise funds for the DSA.

## **8: Open Table discussion**

**Sam** asked if clubs are expected to provide accessible travel on their own supporters coaches for away matches. This prompted a lively discussion from the group. Ruth said that LPF are not legal experts but have been advised that where a club is providing away travel, they should ensure it is available and accessible to disabled people.

**Kieran** spoke to delegates about the future of the forum, highlighting the importance of the forum becoming self-sustainable to ensure that it effectively represents the DSAs and clubs involved. Kieran suggested that an organising committee should be established to take over the running of future forums and proposed that the three DSAs in attendance organise the 2017 South Coast Regional Forum. Kieran agreed to draft a terms of reference document. He also reassured delegates that LPF will continue to attend future forums and continue to support the forum in an advisory role. The terms of reference document will be sent to all three DSAs for their approval.

**Barb** then thanked everyone for their contributions and invited the group to a short tour of the Checkatrade stadium.

**Meeting closed at 4pm. Attendees were offered a stadium tour.**

**Next forum to take place in Autumn 2017, date and venue TBC.**