



Minutes

MEETING:	Watford Supporters Board Meeting
DATE & TIME:	19/03/2026 – 18:30 – 20:30
ATTENDEES:	<u>Supporters Board Representatives</u> Alex King (Chair) Nick Trigg (Secretary) Steve Cutmore James Bateson Reza Bitaraf Flis Irving David Butler MBE – <i>Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Representative</i> Steve Temple – <i>Watford Supporters Trust Representative</i> <u>Watford FC Representatives</u> Kevin Affleck – Head of Communications (<i>Reports Directly to Chairman on Delivery of The Club's FEP</i>) Dave Newman – Head of Ticketing and Supporter Services Chris Hall – Supporter Liaison Officer Rick Green – Head of Safety and Security Dave Messenger – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Lead <u>Other</u> Jane Hughes – Football Supporters' Association (FSA) Rep (Joined Online)
LOCATION:	Vicarage Road Stadium



Summary of Discussions

1.0 Introduction & Welcome

The Chair opened the first formal meeting of the Watford Supporters Board (WSB) and the Club by inviting each attendee to give a brief introduction and then explaining that the purpose of the WSB is to strengthen the relationship between Supporters and the Club.

He expressed the hope for open and productive discussions at these meetings, leading to positive actions and specific initiatives for both the Club and the WSB to work on together.

1.1 Confidentiality

The Club stated that they aim for openness and transparency within WSB meetings, but explained that, due to the fast-paced nature of the football industry, information and decisions can be fluid and may change at short notice. As a result, it is not always easy to be definitive, and they need to build in a degree of agility given how dynamic the industry is.

As a result, certain details may need to be withheld to protect ongoing activities and avoid reputational or operational risks. The Club emphasised that any exclusions are made solely to safeguard the best interests of Watford FC while still enabling meaningful and constructive dialogue with the WSB.

It was agreed that confidential items not included within minutes will be supplemented by clear justification from the Club. This will be included in a separate unpublished "Part 2" section of the minutes.

These unfortunately cannot be shared with Supporters. The WSB's priority is openness, and any withheld information will be the exception, not the standard practice.

The Chair thanked all supporters for engaging with the WSB, noting that 77 questions had been received across a wide range of subjects from 58 individuals.

Kevin Affleck will attend all WSB meetings as the newly appointed [Club Fan Engagement Lead](#). He reports directly to the Club Chairman, Scott Duxbury and is the focal point for all internal and external communications.

The WSB also thanked the previous lead, Paul O'Brien, for his significant efforts and help in getting the WSB to this stage.

Other Club attendees will also be selected based on the specific agenda topics for meetings.

The expertise and experience of the Club and WSB members was acknowledged and open dialogue and collaboration between all parties was encouraged, both at this meeting and beyond.



1.2 Constitution Documents, including Memorandum of Understanding

The updated WSB constitution was outlined, with these available on the WSB's [website](#). The Memorandum of Understanding is being reviewed by the Club with a view to further discussion at the next meeting.

2.0 Fan Atmosphere

The WSB raised that supporters had raised questions about improving the matchday atmosphere.

The Club noted that the topic had also been discussed with the Sporting Director. The Club highlighted the issue of late arrivals affecting stadium atmosphere and provided statistics that show a large number of supporters enter the ground close to kick-off, meaning there is limited opportunity to build the pre-match atmosphere.

The Club also stated that other activities have been installed to try to improve pre-match engagement. This included the following:

- Introduction of the Family Zone, next to the turnstiles by the Rookey End, to encourage supporters to meet closer to the ground.
- Moving the former player welcome to pre-kick-off, with their walk around the ground ending in front of the 1881 to try to energise supporters.
- The introduction of "Your Song" before kick-off, and the amplification of this with big-screen animation.

The Club noted these, as well as other initiatives, are often reviewed for their effectiveness.

2.1 Safe Standing

The Club noted that quotes for safe-standing installations have been obtained. This is unlikely to happen for at least another season. The initial installation is expected to be in the away section, as away supporters typically already stand, in breach of the Club's current all-seated licence, with a home section to be considered next.

The WSB noted suggestions from supporters to relocate, for example, the 1881 group closer to the away fans. The Club explained that this goes against police advice and poses considerable security, pre- and post-match crowd management and other logistical challenges, such as limited concourse space. The Club's security team does receive intelligence before matches of unrest with opposition fans which has to be managed, and they do not want to put our supporters at greater risk. The Club also observed that Supporters have been resistant to past attempts at relocating specific groups.

However, it was acknowledged and agreed that there is scope to still explore this with the WSB, with the aim of improving the matchday atmosphere

It was agreed that an action group would be established to consider this.

The initial step will be a walk around the stadium with the Club's Head of Security and Ticketing & Supporter Services with a view to considering the potential safe standing areas



and relocations, whilst also considering the importance of supporter engagement with the Club more broadly.

3.0 Pre- Season Friendlies

The WSB conveyed questions from supporters to the Club about the Hansa Rostock fixture, covering topics such as the rationale and security planning, including references made by supporters to the visiting fans.

The Club explained that it accepted the fixture in good faith, with sporting considerations as the primary reason. While the financial benefit and the appeal of hosting a well-supported club celebrating its anniversary were acknowledged, they stressed that the decision was not money-driven. The Club also highlighted how social media can amplify negative perceptions. However, they were clear that this did not diminish the concerns raised and noted that Hansa Rostock are a well-supported club whose fans are expected to mark their anniversary positively and contribute to a good atmosphere.

The Club explained that comprehensive and wide-ranging security planning for the fixture is nearly complete, covering the stadium, its immediate surroundings, and the local area. Full details cannot be shared at this point, but the Club committed to sharing security information to reassure supporters at the appropriate time.

Ticketing procedures for the match will include data sharing, checks for German addresses, and fan ID requirements to prevent unauthorised access by away supporters.

The Club stated it has full confidence in its ability to manage this occasion. There is an associated cost, as for any high-risk fixture, but the money will be spent to ensure the safety of supporters, residents, and businesses.

The Club acknowledged that, for future friendly fixtures involving less familiar visiting clubs, additional consideration and earlier background checking would be built into the planning process.

With proper management, the Club hopes and expects the fixture to be a success. The Club also committed to sharing internal discussions with their counterparts at Hansa Rostock with the WSB and supporters.

4.0 Break

5.0 Matchday Security

The WSB raised that supporters have asked about matchday security, including frustrations around body and bag searches, communication of prohibited items and the availability of safe storage.

The Club stated that there is a bag drop, which all supporters can use, located next to the ticket office. It is a secure location, monitored by CCTV and security and (unlike other clubs) it is free of charge. There is also a separate bag drop for hospitality guests.



This is publicised on the website's "[Visiting Us](#)" page and the Club agreed to take an action to explore whether it could be more prominent in the Matchday Supporter Guide and the possibility to include information on the matchday eticket.

The Club explained and demonstrated the rationale for the searches, as well as the bag and prohibited items policies which are solely concerned with the potential to smuggle dangerous or illegal items into the ground.

The Club noted that new methods are now being used to facilitate this, and these are constantly evolving. Real examples shown to the meeting include concealed weapons inside bottles with dark, or even clear, liquids, small bags and drugs concealed in wallets. In each case the concealed item was impossible to detect with the naked eye.

Pictures are included within Section 9.0 – Annex.

This has necessitated the searches and the prohibited items list which must be kept constantly under review and evolve. The Club takes the present-day threat seriously.

The Club recognised that these measures may seem thorough and, at times, frustrating, but explained that they are necessary to protect the smooth and safe delivery of a matchday. The Club emphasised that a proactive approach is essential to prevent any serious incident, rather than adopting a more lenient stance that could increase the risk of something going wrong.

The WSB and the Club also acknowledged that, while these steps may feel unnecessary to supporters, the reality is that with large crowds and our proximity to London, there is always a degree of opportunity and risk that must be managed carefully.

The Club's priorities are the safety of individual supporters' and incident prevention given the presence of a large crowd. The Club's Safety Team ensure they are up to date with the latest threats, review the stadium and surrounding area, and look to implement all new safety measures early where possible.

The Club stated there is an A4 bag policy now in place. There will be posters around the ground to communicate this clearly. The bag policy and prohibited items list are clearly set out on website's "[Visiting Us](#)" page.

Upcoming legislation, including [Martyn's Law](#), is also likely to introduce further restrictions, including either a no-bag or clear bag only policy. The Club is monitoring developments and is likely (as with other changes) to look to gradual but early implementation. The Club will communicate any changes as they arise.

Since the meeting, the club has included additional information within the matchday guide and is trialling late gates for each stand to the end of the season.



6.0 Supporter Engagement

6.1 Long Distance Supporters

The WSB raised that questions have submitted about the possibility to enhance Club engagement with supporters outside the local area. In particular, those for whom distance makes attendance at 'At Our Place' or similar events impractical.

There was discussion of webinar or hybrid "At Our Place" events using, for example, Teams or Zoom, for supporters not in the room, as well as increasing the lead times before events to ensure supporters could plan travel.

The WSB also suggested that the club hold some 'At Our Place' events in more distant locations where there are groups of supporters or pre match events local to away fixtures.

The Club stated that with online events there is a feeling that online 'At Our Place' events are not received as authentic. One example was the one held during lockdown, with Scott Duxbury and Vladimir Ivic, and feedback was poor. However, the Club can see there may be value in hybrid events for long-distance and international supporters and is happy to consider running a pilot with a view to more if successful.

The Club did run 'At Our Place' events in more distant locations before Covid. However, these were when the Club was in the Premier League and funding was available. It would be difficult to fund these events while the Club remains in the Championship. However, pre-match events before away fixtures, such as gatherings in local pubs with Club representatives present, may well be feasible.

Lead times can vary depending on the nature of the specific event. The purpose of the recent 'At Our Place' was to introduce and enable supporters to meet Ed Still and there was a very narrow window of opportunity. The Club expects to be able to offer longer lead times for future events.

The Club agreed to take an action with the WSB to review this.

6.2 Hornets at Home

The 'Hornets at Home' initiative that the Club initiated during lockdown is still available on request. Club ambassadors will call housebound, elderly, or disabled supporters. This has been very well received by those who receive these.

6.3 Junior Hornets

The Club stated that they remain immensely proud of its ongoing commitment to the Junior Hornets. A new, dedicated Junior Hornets interactive digital platform is being developed for launch in the summer. It will replace the existing page on the Club website.

It will include interactive features such as games with the opportunity to earn badges, and win prizes, including 'money can't buy' exclusive experiences.

This will be communicated when it is ready to launch.



7.0 Supporter Board/Club Engagement

7.1 Messages to Supporters

The WSB asked if there are any matters that the Club wishes it to communicate to Supporters.

The following was raised:

Loyalty and Junior Rewards Programmes: In addition to the new Junior Hornets platform the Club is planning to launch 'Buzz Rewards' next season, a loyalty programme which will reward all supporters for attendance and spending in the ground with cashback offers.

Shirt Sponsorship: The Club understands supporter's concerns about sponsorship from betting companies. Gambling companies offer significantly higher sponsorship revenues than other sectors, and the Club is not in a position to make an immediate clean break. However, the Club is actively exploring options for next season's front of shirt sponsor that may not involve a betting company. This is viewed as a positive step to balance commercial realities with Club values while continuing to assess alternative partnerships as sponsorship regulations evolve.

Social Media Engagement: The Club reported strong social media engagement statistics, ranking very highly when compared to EFL clubs, and ranking equivalent to the lower end of the Premier League in terms of statistics.

Shirt Sales: The blue 'Elton' away shirt has been the Club's biggest ever selling shirt and has proved extremely popular with supporters and with players. Due to popular demand, the Elton shirt will continue to be available for purchase next season, although it will not be worn on the pitch.

iFollow: The iFollow service has been improved this season and the Club's iFollow sales are the best in the EFL with this season's income to date already exceeding last season's total.

7.2 Opportunity for Collaboration:

The WSB highlighted the Independent Football Regulator's current consultation regarding licensing for top 5 tier English football clubs. There is considerable detail in the proposed regulation, particularly concerning Corporate Governance, finance and financial resources and fan engagement. The consultation period ends on 5th May. It was noted that the skillset of members of the WSB may be relevant to some of the proposed regulation and encouraged the Club to approach WSB members for assistance.

7.3 Club Chairman Attendance

The WSB requested periodic attendance by the Club Chairman at future meetings. The Club noted that the Chairman is willing to engage with the WSB and agreed that his attendance will be appropriate, particularly where there are agenda items which are appropriate for the Chairman to address.



7.4 Football Related Questions

The WSB noted that a significant number of questions had been received regarding manager rotation and player recruitment. The boundary between 'on-pitch' matters and Club strategy matters was discussed in relation to these subjects.

It was agreed that a selection of the more strategic questions of this nature could be submitted to the Club with a view to considering a response, and discussion of such matters at future meetings. The WSB will look to action this in collaboration with the Club.

8.0 AOB

8.1 Season Tickets

The WSB noted that the 2026/27 season ticket renewal information had been issued on the day of the meeting and, as such, was not included on the agenda.

The Club made the initial observation that, following five seasons in which season ticket prices had been held, there have now been modest increases at the last two renewals. The Club tries to keep increases to a minimum. They feel the increase is appropriate in view of the financial reality of running a Championship football club and the cost inflation that the Club is experiencing. The Club noted that ticket pricing remains competitive with other Championship clubs.

8.2 Next Meeting

The next meeting is likely to fall after the end of the season. Agenda items may include ticket pricing (depending on feedback received from Supporters) and a review of the current season and plans for next season in line with the Club's objectives and strategy.



9.0 Annex

9.1 Example of Concealed Items in Bottles

The picture below showed two Pepsi bottles, one of which had a knife concealed inside it. The WSB noted that they could not tell the difference between the two bottles.



9.2 Example of Concealed Items in a Clear Water Bottle

The image showed what appeared to be a standard clear water bottle. However, this bottle could be unscrewed and modified to hide dangerous items, including weapons and drugs. Prior to the demonstration, the WSB also noted that they could not identify any visible differences that suggested the bottle had been tampered with.





9.3 Demonstration of the New A4 Bag Policy

The image below demonstrates and explains the new A4 bag policy, clearly highlighting which bags are and aren't permitted inside the ground. This display will also be available in the ground to help Supporters understand the policy and ensure a smoother entry process.





10.0 Chair's Note

We would like to thank the Club for taking the time to meet with us and for engaging openly in these discussions. We would also like to thank you, the supporters, for taking the time to read through these minutes. We hope this update gives you a clear picture of the conversations held and the context behind some of the discussions from the meeting.

This is only our first meeting, and both the WSB and the Club are committed to progressing these conversations further. To continue strengthening this process, we really need your help. Your questions, feedback, and experiences as supporters directly shape what we raise and ensure the WSB reflects the views of the wider fanbase.

The next Microsoft Form for submitting questions is now live, and the link is included [here](#).

It would be great to hear from as many supporters as possible, and we encourage you to submit questions through the form, your contributions genuinely shape our conversations and help guide the direction of future meetings.