

The logo for the Everton Fan Advisory Board is centered on a dark blue rectangular background. It features the word "EVERTON" in a white, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, the words "FAN ADVISORY" are written in a larger, bold, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the word "BOARD" is written in the same large, bold, white, sans-serif font. Horizontal white lines are positioned above and below "EVERTON", and above and below "BOARD".

EVERTON FAN ADVISORY BOARD

A brief summary of the Fan Led Review and what it will mean for English football

In April 2021, there was an ill-fated attempt by a handful of top-tier European football clubs (including English clubs Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester Utd and Tottenham Hotspur) to set up a so-called “European Super League”, where a hand-picked selection of clubs would enter into a league that they could not be relegated from and into which it would become impossible for most other teams to ascend to. It was a plan hatched, for the most part, in secret by the wealthy owners of the clubs and very few were let in on that secret. Those owners left many in their clubs, including their own managers confused, embarrassed and unprepared, not just to speak to their players, but to meet the press in the run-up to crucially important games their teams would be playing, approaching the end of the season. This gives a small insight into the motivation for the move and the carelessness that was shown by the owners to their own clubs and the fans.

Fans of clubs in all football leagues, not just the Premier League, had long been unhappy with the way the game was being governed. They were unhappy about what they saw as an unfair portion of the football pie being distributed to the Premier League and not enough being cascaded down to the lower league (and indeed non-league) football clubs. They were also unhappy about having no influence in who bought their clubs, how their clubs were run and how well-enforced the rules were around “fit and proper” persons becoming owners and Directors. Fans exist to remind owners how passionately they feel about their heritage, their badge and their grounds, as well as the place those things occupy in their communities. Owners and Directors come and go, but the club and the fans stay put; they remain loyal custodians who bestow their blessing (or sometimes not) to those who purport to want the best for their club.

So rapid was the backlash against the ESL from fans, that the very next day, the Secretary of State for Sport, Oliver Dowden, made an urgent speech in Parliament, saying *“Football is in our national DNA. We invented it, we helped export it around the world, and it has been a central part of British life for over a century. Football clubs aren’t just businesses; they define communities across the country... I was appalled by the announcement made late last night that a handful of clubs are proposing to form their own breakaway European league. These six clubs announced this decision without any consultation with football authorities, or with the government. But worst of all, they announced it without any dialogue whatsoever with their own fans. It was a tone-deaf proposal, but the owners of those clubs won’t have been able to ignore the near universal roar of outrage from all parts of the football community over the past 24 hours.*

To many fans in this country, the game is now almost unrecognisable from a few decades ago. Season after season, year after year, football fans demonstrate unwavering loyalty and passion by sticking by their clubs. But their loyalty is being abused by a small number of individuals who wield an incredible amount of power and influence. If the past year has taught us anything, it’s that football is nothing without its fans. These owners should remember that they are only temporary custodians of their clubs, and they forget fans at their peril... We are unequivocally on the side of fans - and their voices have to be heard when it comes to the future of our national game. It starts with fans, and it ends with fans”.

The writing was on the wall and the breakaway owners could see it; particularly the English club owners. This wasn’t just a fans’ protest, as huge and influential as that was. The government had stepped in and this was not going to end well for those clubs. Within 48 hours, they had all pulled out. Chelsea were first, quickly followed by Manchester City, with the other four clubs backing off the same evening. All clubs were then forced to issue apologies to their fans, but perhaps the most telling one was Arsenal, who said the response from fans had given them *“time for further reflection and deep thought”*. Their statement said *“It was never our intention to cause such distress, however when the invitation*

to join the Super League came, while knowing there were no guarantees, we did not want to be left behind to ensure we protected Arsenal and its future...We didn't make the right decision here, which we fully accept. We have heard you".

The Secretary of State immediately appointed Tracey Crouch MP, a qualified FA Coach and Referee, to conduct a review of how football in England is governed, stipulating the following terms of reference:

- Consider the multiple Owners' and Directors' Tests and whether they are fit for purpose, including the addition of further criteria;
- Assess calls for the creation of a single, independent football regulator to oversee the sport's regulations and compliance, and its relationship with the regulatory powers of The FA and other football bodies;
- Examine the effectiveness of measures to improve club engagement with supporters, such as structured dialogue, that were introduced on the back of the Expert Working Group;
- Investigate ways league administrators could better scrutinise clubs' finances on a regular basis;
- Examine the flow of money through the football pyramid, including solidarity and parachute payments, and broadcasting revenue;
- Explore governance structures in other countries, including ownership models, and whether any aspects could be beneficially translated to the English league system;
- Look at interventions to protect club identity, including geographical location and historical features (e.g. club badges);
- Examine the relationship between club interests, league systems and their place within the overall football pyramid.

This resulted in a report, *The Fan Led Review*, written by Tracey Crouch, with input from various stakeholders and fan groups, covering all English football leagues. Importantly, she believed that fans were, by far, the most important stakeholder in any club and that they should have a voice in any future developments or regulatory requirements.

An important range of recommendations were made and included in a 'White Paper'. A White Paper is a document drafted to say what will go into a Bill to form an Act of Parliament and they usually take around two years to travel through the House of Commons, then the House of Lords, with various amendments being made along the way. The Act then receives Royal Assent, meaning that the King effectively 'signs it off' and it becomes an Act of Parliament. Once that happens, in this case, all football clubs will have to follow the regulations laid down and one very important regulation included in this White Paper is for there to be an Independent Regulator in English Football (IREF).

The report suggests that the IREF should have far-reaching powers to ensure good, fair and transparent governance at clubs. Once appointed, the IREF could operate in a similar way to other regulators such as Ofsted or Ofgem and could have the power to issue, or cancel licences for clubs to operate and to oversee strict licencing conditions, such as making clear what sort of people or groups would be allowed to buy into clubs and to ensure that the rules on "a fit and proper person becoming a Director" are followed. They could influence the way a club runs its finances and regulate on football transfers. The powers of the IREF are still to be determined.

Everton's Fan Advisory Board supports the review and wants to see the introduction of an IREF.

The Fan Led Review can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fan-led-review-of-football-governance-securing-the-gamesfuture/fan-led-review-of-football-governance-securing-the-games-future#foreword>

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