

Petitions Committee: Online engagement on spectator attendance at football matches during Covid-19

Activity

The Petitions Committee ran an online survey to ask petitioners for their thoughts on how the ban on football fans attending matches during the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting them, their local communities, and clubs themselves.

The survey was sent to people who signed the following petitions:

[Allow football fans to be allowed to attend matches at all levels](#)

[Allow the return of spectators to football at all levels below national league](#)

We have summarised the key themes below and illustrated them with quotes from respondents.

Response

13,254 responses to survey

Methodology

Nvivo Pro 12 was used to identify and contextualise the most common words and phrases found in the entire set of responses to open questions submitted through the survey. This allowed us to group and summarise recurring themes which were threaded throughout much of the responses.

In addition to this analysis of the data, Committee staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection.

Survey questions which produced statistical results have been included in the summaries of key themes.

Key themes:

About the respondents and their matchday routines

- **96%** of respondents told us they would have expected to have attended a match in the last six months, had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic. **54%** had purchased a season ticket for the 2020-21 season.
- When we asked how respondents would typically travel to matches prior to Covid-19, the most common response was “**by private car**” (56%) followed by “**by train**” (24%) and “**on foot**” (10%).

Why attending matches is important to fans

- Many respondents told us they attend matches not simply for ‘mere entertainment’ but for the benefit of their emotional and mental health, highlighting the sense of ‘escapism’ and ‘togetherness’ that football can provide.
 - Many also highlighted the importance of attending matches to their family’s routines and relationships. Some told us about their extended ‘football family’ encompassing fellow fans with whom they attend matches.
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Quotes

Survey respondent: "(Football clubs) are the cornerstone of every community, families, friends, dreams are made, lifelong bonds with people, an escape from everything that's terrible in life for 90 minutes where you can stand with your family and friends and just have no care about anything else. A sense of belonging which you can't get anywhere else"

Survey respondent: "They bring people together, you only ever see the negative of a football fan in the paper, the stupid behaviour, the aggression. What you don't see is 3 generations of a family meet up in excited optimism that this might be the day. You don't see the quality time spent as friends and families, you don't see the tradition being passed down from generation to generation. The beautiful thing about football clubs is, it doesn't matter whether you are a group or going the game alone, everybody is accepted and once your in the ground age, gender, creed, religion or colour doesn't matter. The work clubs do in the community is so important because people can relate to it. Get grounds back open".

Survey respondent: "Every other weekend three generations of our family meet to watch Lincoln City. Our club is at the heart of our City; it is something to look forward to, my 8 year old son excitement when we catch the train from London and he sees his Grandad at the match. Football is more than 90 mins in the ground. I see friends I would seldom see. Please don't ever think football can survive with sterile TV deals and Premier League created riches. The game means so much more than that. We need it".

Survey respondent: "They give you the opportunity to feel part of a group, for me personally I get to see family which I don't if

not as we live far away from each other. They create a sense of community and for mental health reasons they are so important. Many people don't have family and football matches create a sense of that for them. The pandemic has had a huge impact on mental health and for men in particular, football is a way of helping them. Also, it's absolutely great and as a Leeds United supporter, not seeing them live in the premier league after 16 years is soul destroying. Why should people in London be allowed to the theatre inside, yet in 40,000 seat stadiums people can't go in?"

Survey respondent: "Football Clubs are everything. Watching your team play on a Saturday is no different to someone visiting church. We see friends, we see family, we sing songs, we laugh, we cry, we unite as a community".

Survey respondent: "My son has mental health issues and going to matches was a reason to leave the house. It was also our shared interest and so meant we got to share quality time together".

Survey respondent: "Without the buzz of matchday on a Saturday, I don't think I would've survived my fight with depression. It is the one thing that helps me survive the stressful and rigorous nature of day to day life".

Survey respondent: "I'm disabled and don't get out a lot and I have made so many friends and other disabled, I'm the vice chairman now of Aston Villa disabled supporters association and we are really struggling with mental health because our one outlet has been taken away from us".

Why clubs are important to their local communities

- The majority of respondents told us of the role their club plays in their local community through outreach programmes working with disadvantaged groups such as homeless people, those with disabilities, ex-offenders and others
- Many highlighted links their club has to local schools, with many providing after-school coaching, school holiday training camps, literacy schemes, and more
- Of the 562 respondents who told us they owned or ran a sports club, team or venue, **almost one quarter** (24.8%) were 'not so confident' or 'not at all confident' that their club, team or venue would still be financially viable in six months.
- Even if their club itself survives, many respondents were concerned that their club's community programmes would suffer. **More than half** (54.6%) were 'not so confident' or 'not at all confident' that such programmes run by their club would still be viable in six months.

Quotes

Survey respondent: "Without the club, there would not be the outstanding Charlton Athletic Community Trust, an independent charity which regularly receives awards and visits from politicians. A popular program of the Trust is the Charlton Upbeats, a team for children with Down Syndrome. These young people inspire fans and have raised

awareness of disabilities in the community. As the father of a child with autism, I cannot speak highly enough of the work of the Trust. I would also like to highlight the way the Trust and club have led in regards to racism in football, having one of the oldest anti-racism programs of any club in the county. there is huge reach with football clubs to do good in this regard, especially given the mixed demographic of people attending matches".

Survey respondent: "Football clubs are crucial to local and micro economies in towns and cities up and down the country which have been left behind as manufacturing and other traditional industries have largely moved overseas without being replaced. The leisure and hospitality sector in some areas is largely supported by fans of football clubs alone.

Football clubs contribute hugely to charity and local causes, and often have their own foundations set up with longstanding and widespread community projects affecting the lives of thousands of people up and down the country. Football and the industries which serve it directly (e.g. hospitality and security staffing) and indirectly (e.g. public transport) contribute massively to the economic growth of this country in terms of employment and tax revenue on a scale which isn't matched by any other sector."

Survey respondent: "Football clubs feed into the local community through revenue from fans attending games, hospitality and transport and are a net positive influence in the areas that they are located. This is without factoring in any charitable efforts from the clubs themselves".

Survey respondent: "Football clubs also provide jobs for the local community and many are actively involved in community

projects, working in schools, providing school holiday clubs and supporting local grassroots teams. The loss of the local football club is a devastating blow to any community and all measures should be taken to avoid this happening”.

Survey respondent: “Football clubs are not just for 90 minutes on a Saturday but throughout the year, as they also help with the local community, homeless charities, hospital visits at Christmas, and simply just having a voice on social media, connecting people. Having a football club also brings the additional revenue to a town/city. On match days, both home and away supporters spend their hard-earned money in our shops, pubs, restaurants”.

Survey respondent: “Clubs are centres of community activity in their respective towns and cities - both on match days and in between. Clubs provide vital support for boys, girls, women, homeless and veteran sport, directly and through schools, charitable support of many kinds in the community. Whoever they are owned by, they belong to their fans and their town”.

Impact on the clubs themselves

- Many respondents highlighted that clubs are faced with losses not simply in terms of ticket revenue but also merchandising and concessions.
- Many were concerned about the risk to the livelihoods of club staff. Roles at a football club extend beyond the playing and coaching staff to administration, hospitality, catering, stewarding, retail, security, press, community work, and more. Many of these roles centre on services for fans on match days, meaning they are already losing earnings while fans are

not permitted to attend, and risk losing their jobs outright if the situation persists.

Quotes

Survey respondent: “Football Clubs are generally highly involved in the community surrounding them, especially in providing opportunities for young people. With fans being unable to attend fixtures, clubs lose out on essential match day revenue, not only from reduced ticket sales but also concessions and merchandise. This threatens many teams, especially those towards the lower ends of the football pyramid that have lower non-match day revenues, as they are having to run at a loss, which is unsustainable in the long run and could see many football teams wound up. This would therefore negatively impact many communities across the country

Survey respondent: “Football clubs, like any business involving the public, are extremely important. They provide employment, not just for a squad of players but for several hundred ancillary workers, groundsmen, catering staff, security staff, administration, media, coaching staff, etc etc. The wider community around each club also benefit from custom from the thousands of supporters who attend matches every week and prior to the games spend money in pubs, restaurants, food outlets such as cafes and general stores”.

Survey respondent: “As an employee of a large football club it is vitally important to get fans back into stadiums as soon as possible. Not only do we employ over 700 catering staff on a match day in the hospitality sector, our non-match day business is extremely

busy employing 200 plus staff. Closure has prevented anyone working since March in any department”.

Survey respondent: “Clubs create employment from hospitality staff to ground staff, internal security to out sourced traffic management companies the latter also provides a secondary level of security by shutting roads close to stadiums to protect crowds from road traffic, to assist emergency crews as and when required”.

