

Membership Policy of Supporters Direct

1. Supporters Direct is a membership-based organisation. Full Membership is open to supporters' groups that meet the following criteria:
 - a) The group must aspire to play a responsible part in the life of the Club its members support
 - b) It must aim to exercise influence in the life of the Club through share ownership and / or Board representation where possible
 - c) It must be democratic, in which one member has one vote
 - d) It must be an inclusive organisation with reasonable membership fees
 - e) It must be committed to equal opportunities
 - f) It must be committed to non-distribution of profit and proceeds upon dissolution
 - g) It produces audited accounts if its annual income in the previous year was above the exempt amount, or undertakes an Independent Examination under the Supporters Direct Independent Examination guidelines
 - h) It must have a constitution based upon the Model Rules for a Community Mutual or provide documentation as to how its rules enshrine the above principles and why they do not propose to adopt those Model Rules
 - i) It must agree to abide by the Rules Of Supporters Direct and must agree to not bring the Trust Movement and Supporters Direct into disrepute
 - j) It must agree to implement Supporters Direct Best Practice guidelines
 - k) It must either make Supporters Direct a corporate member of the Trust, or should such membership not be available, ensure that the Chief Executive of Supporters Direct is admitted to membership. In either case, such membership shall not have a vote.

2. In applying for Membership, a group will submit an application containing:
 - a) The most recent Annual Return to the Financial Services Authority including the most recent Annual Audited Accounts if its annual income in the previous year was above the exempt amount, which shall be approved by the membership upon the recommendation of the Board. Trusts with an annual income below this figure are required to have an Independent Examination of their accounts.
 - b) A completed form providing information required by Supporters Direct in order that it may confirm the criteria of membership are met by the group.
 - c) A copy of the current Rules or constitution of the trust, or such documents to ensure that Supporters Direct has an up-to-date version of such rules or constitution.
 - d) Payment for that year's membership fee
 - e) A signed declaration on behalf of the trust accepting the conditions of membership.

3. In its first year of existence, a Trust whose formation Supporters Direct have assisted with shall be eligible for that Full Membership for that first year.

4. The Board of Supporters Direct reserves the right to refuse membership if they feel that a Trust does not meet the criteria laid down. The Board can also refuse a group on the basis that they have, in the Board's view, brought the Trust movement or Supporters Direct into disrepute in the previous year of membership. The Board shall also have regard to the unity of the trust movement in considering applications for membership.

5. **Full Membership**
Groups approved by the Board of Supporters Direct shall be entitled to:
 - a) Attend meetings and vote upon resolutions of the organisation and to elect the Board of the organisation.

- b) Receive full services from the organisation.
- c) Apply for financial benefits provided by the organisation directly (such as grant funding)
- d) Eligibility for schemes negotiated by Supporters Direct with public and private bodies on behalf of its members (such as tax concessions, regulatory concessions, bulk purchase schemes, discounted rates).

6. Associate Status

If a group does not meet the criteria for Full Membership, the Board may grant them Associate status that entitles the group to receive a limited amount of services. Associate status shall be granted on condition that the group commit to work with Supporters Direct in order to achieve the criteria for Full Membership within the next 12 months. Associate status shall not be granted for a second consecutive period of 12 months except in exceptional circumstances.

After 12 Months of associate status, a Trust must apply for Full Membership; if the Board reject this application, the organisation will not be associated with Supporters Direct; it may re-apply for Membership in 12 months.

- 7. Membership shall run from 1st April of each year for 12 months (ie, be concurrent with the financial year).
- 8. Membership fees shall be charged of each Trust each full year of such sum as approved by the members on the recommendation of the board.

Initial criteria to work with Supporters Direct

- 9. Supporters Direct must be satisfied that a group will both be able to support itself in terms of administration and in terms of volunteers. It must also be capable of achieving the goals its sets itself, which in turn must be in the range of supportable aims for Supporters Trusts. It has a responsibility to ensure that 'Supporters Trust' continues to be a positive term with a good reputation amongst the football world and beyond. As a body in receipt of public funds, it has a responsibility to ensure its services are only provided to those groups who support the wider social and community ethos of its work.
- 10. Groups working with Supporters Direct will receive:
 - a) Staff assistance with Trust formation
 - b) Use of the Model Rules for a Sporting Community Mutual
 - c) Preparatory work with Supporters Direct's legal advisors
 - d) Eligibility for Full Membership of Supporters Direct and thus access to financial assistance for set-up costs
- 11. Therefore, before Supporters Direct assists with the formation of a Trust, it must be satisfied that the group is:
 - a) Committed to registration using Supporters Direct's Model Rules for a Sporting Community Mutual and following an agreed path determined with the group and Supporters Direct based on the three-stage model as laid down in the Supporters Trust Handbook
 - b) Sustainable internally and in terms of its stated aims
 - c) Likely to be a contributing member of the Trust movement and of Supporters Direct,
 - d) Committed to securing representation on the Board of the Club and/or receiving shares in return for investment in the club.
 - e) Associated with a club with that normally has at least 500 supporters, or which has regularly achieved such attendances in the past 3 years. In exceptional circumstances where application of this rule may prevent a sustainable trust being formed, the Chief Executive has the authority to work with a group, providing they are satisfied that all other criteria are or will be met.

- 12.** The Board of Supporters Direct reserves the right to refuse to provide support. It may, at any stage between initial contact and registration and access to Full Membership, determine that:
- a)** Supporters Direct cease to work with and support a group
 - b)** Recommend that a group continue planning and preparatory work and not support registration with the FSA.
- 13.** Any decision under 11 and 12 above will not be taken without the supporters concerned having the opportunity to state a case for why there are special circumstances at their club.

Decisions and Appeals

- 14.** In all cases, a member of Supporters Direct staff may write to a Trust with the authority of the Board in order to secure the information necessary to make a report and make a recommendation for action.
- 15.** Decisions to deny service to a group before formation shall be made by the Chief Executive and communicated to the group concerned.
- 16.** Decisions to:
- c)** remove a group from full or associate membership,
 - a)** alter the status of membership from full to associate
 - b)** assign a group associate status upon receipt of a membership application
 - c)** shall be based on a written report sent to the Constitutional Sub-Committee of the Board which shall have the power to act for the Board.
- 17.** The Trust concerned shall receive a copy of the report, and shall have 28 days to produce a response. The CSC shall then meet within 28 days of receiving the trust's response or within 56 days after first receiving a copy of the report, whichever is earlier. The CSC can:
- a)** accept the recommendation
 - b)** reject the recommendation
 - c)** modify the recommendation
- in addition, they may set necessary conditions for membership to be extended or granted in future.
- 18.** Should a group wish to appeal against a decision by that body, they should write to the Secretary of the organisation within 28 days of the decision being appealed. The Secretary shall refer the matter for decision by an ad hoc committee of normally 3 directors of the organisation who have not previously adjudicated in this matter. The ad-hoc committee may have fewer than 3 members with the agreement of the appellant. The ad-hoc committee shall have a Chair with a casting vote.
- 19.** No board member may sit in judgement of a trust of which they are a member or have a defined interest under the board's conflict of interest policy. Directors must be pro-active in declaring such interests.
- 20.** Appeals shall be binding on all parties and shall be conducted and no party shall engage legal representation.
- 21.** Appeals shall be conducted by the committee reviewing:
- the original documents before the CSC
 - any appeal document submitted by the appellant.
 - Any response to the appeal document submitted by the Chief Executive

22. The appeal body shall have the following powers:

- a) In the case of a group being denied assistance with formation, the appeal may either uphold the original decision or overturn it.
- b) In the case of a group being denied both Full and Associate Membership for bringing the organisation and / or Trust movement into disrepute, the appeal may either be to uphold or overturn the original decision.
- c) In the case of a Group being denied full membership for other reasons the appeal may either uphold the original decision or overturn it.
- d) In the case of a group in associate status being denied Full Membership after a 12-month period of associate status, and being refused an additional period of associate status, the appeal may either uphold that decision or grant associate status. If a group is denied Full Membership status but granted an additional 12 months of associate status, an appeal may uphold that decision or overturn it and grant Full Membership.

Approved 28th October 2004

Amended 31 December 2012