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Our Ref: 273984/mc/05

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Thank you for your email of 19 October to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP, on behalf of one of your constituents about Blackpool FC and football governance. I am replying as the Minister for Sport.

I realise that many Blackpool supporters have experienced some incredible highs and lows on the pitch over the past decade, and sadly in recent times too many negative headlines off the pitch. Much of this has been played out in the media. What is clear is that there remains a great deal of antagonism between the owners and supporters, which unfortunately was all too evident in the ugly scenes that led to the abandonment of the Blackpool versus Huddersfield game in May.

As a result of this, and several other representations made to me, in August, I wrote to the Chief Executive of the Football League about the suitability of the owners of Blackpool FC, and to ask what efforts the League is making to help resolve the obvious tensions between the supporters and owners of this famous club. I am happy to share the League's response, which I enclose with this letter.

Ultimately, it for the football authorities in this country to explain how they apply the rules and regulations of the game, including the appropriate action to take should clubs or those that own them breach these. An example of this is the Football League recently disqualifying Massimo Cellini from Leeds United FC for failing the Owners and Directors Test (ODT).

The football authorities have sought to strengthen the ODT in recent years, following criticism that it did not do enough to prevent unscrupulous owners from taking control of clubs. I am not convinced they have managed to do this completely. However, I do recognise that the test is fundamentally an application process that assesses legal suitability only, and is designed to protect clubs from individuals who fall within the disqualifying criteria. The test aside, the football authorities carry out additional background checks on individuals and their financial standing as part of the due diligence



process, which are arguably more essential for the future safeguarding of the club.

The ODT test is one of a number of measures the authorities have introduced in response to pressures Government and others have placed on them in recent years. Others include introducing greater independence to the FA's main Board, and improved financial transparency and reporting rules (building on UEFA fair play principles) across all the Leagues that have helped significantly reduce debt in the game and ensure clubs are run more sustainably going forward.

Progress has been made but that does not mean that more can be done. I fully expect the football authorities to continue to find ways to improving football for everyone in this country, including ensuring football fans have a much greater say in how their football clubs are run.

The Government's Expert Working Group on Football Supporter Ownership and Engagement, set up in October 2014, will report to me by the end of November with a set of recommendations aimed at helping supporters groups have stronger links with the executives and owners running clubs, along with incentives for how we can get more clubs supporter owned. The Group has representatives from across government and from the football authorities and supporter bodies, including Supporters Direct, the organisation the Government helped set up so that fans gain influence in the running and ownership of their clubs.

I have made no secret that I want fans to be placed at the heart of their football clubs. I will wait for the Group to report fully, and then consider as many of their recommendations as possible.

I hope this is of use and if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tracey', with a large, sweeping flourish above the first few letters.

Tracey Crouch MP
Minister for Sport