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Date: Wed, 3 Feb 2021 at 17:32

Subject: Update from Jonathan Hill

To:

Good afternoon to all of you and I trust all are well in these ongoing difficult times.

As I am now 3 months into my tenure as CEO, I would like to update you on the progress the Association has made in that time.

When I started in the role, I highlighted three key immediate areas to address, namely the effects of COVID-19, servicing the needs of our wider football community and embracing business transformation. I spoke to you at the AGM at the end of December with regard to initial progress and I would like to take this opportunity to update you accordingly. I would also like to make this a regular, quarterly update.

COVID-19

Where we were

We did of course get to play football for at least some parts of the season across 2020 and critically all of you and our whole football community respected the Government guidelines and adhered to our clear FAI Protocols. Not one outbreak of COVID-19 was attributed to any football activity, on or off the field. Indeed, as outlined in our recent submission to Sport Ireland for their sector consultation on future COVID-19 sports measures:

- At senior international level we played 14 games between September and December in 12 countries across 90 days in camp in total, undertaking over 2,600 tests and in total only seven positive cases were recorded, six players and one staff member of which three transmissions were in-camp and four were brought into camp.
- At senior League of Ireland level, shortened seasons were completed at all levels with our adult National Leagues playing 270 games with 850 tests, all negative, before the return to play in July while our European qualified teams played 15 games in nine countries with over 1600 tests where again all results were again negative. Indeed, the 22 recorded positive cases across the Leagues, staff and players, were all community-based transmissions.
- At Adult Amateur and Underage grassroots level, actually the sector of our game worst hit by the COVID-19 restrictions from a playing and training perspective, we played over 15,000 games from July to October at all age groups without remarkably a single COVID-19 outbreak attributed to any football activity. Every club in the country appointed a COVID-19 Compliance Officer and, with the assistance of the FAI's COVID-19 Steering Group, we brought in all protocols with commitment and determination.

Where we are now

At the start of February, we find ourselves still firmly in Level 5 lockdown with the virus arguably having become more threatening and serious than at any point in 2020 and because of that, we are all acutely aware that grassroots football is currently and sadly in effect halted. We do however continue to plan and prepare for the return of Senior League of Ireland Football, both men's and women's, and it is critical that we continue to learn from our 2020 experiences to ensure we are

properly and professionally briefed for that return and everyone recognises their personal responsibility to ensuring this happens safely, as well as the Association planning accordingly from the centre as well as we look forward confidently to the return of the elite, senior game:

- We announced on Monday the fixture list for the SSE Airtricity Premier Division to kick off on March 19th with a President's Cup between Shamrock Rovers and Dundalk the week before and I hope everyone shares my excitement in seeing our detailed planning becoming reality. But we must do this carefully and prudently as our elite senior men and senior women's teams currently return to train ahead of the start of their seasons. As such, I attended last weekend two online COVID-19 update sessions hosted by our Medical Director Dr Alan Byrne with firstly all Club doctors, physios and match operations personnel and then with Club Managers and coaches. Both were very positively received and all involved recognise their responsibilities in this key area of our Safer Return to Play plan and carefully crafted new, enhanced protocols. Sadly, all underage National League teams are currently restricted from training or playing until March 5th at the earliest and this so needs to become part of our wider, forward-looking plan.
- Our international teams await the return of action in late March when Stephen Kenny's team will begin their World Cup qualifying campaign in Serbia but much planning has already gone into this process. Vera Pauw's Senior Women's Team are due to play two friendlies in April ahead of their FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 campaign and Jim Crawford's U21 Men's team are scheduled to play two friendlies in March before their UEFA 2023 European qualifying bid begins in the autumn in what is a tough-looking qualifying group.
- Tom Mohan's U19 men are currently still due to host a four-team Euro qualifying tournament in Longford in March as part of UEFA's plan to keep U19 football in the schedule but everyone recognises the challenges around that currently and we will continue to liaise with UEFA and our own authorities accordingly. Dave Connell's Women's U19s are also scheduled to go to Greece in April for a European Championship qualifying tournament and a similar cautious approach applies. With UEFA postponing all U17 competitive matches for the foreseeable future, it remains a worrying and stark statistic that many of our underage teams have not played a competitive game since 2019 and this enforced hibernation is at the forefront of our thinking as to how to creatively ensure a feeling of unity and progress – but it is undeniably tough so to do.

Where we want to be

We all remain hugely restricted by the ongoing lockdown and, notwithstanding the progress made in relation to the LOI/WNL and the senior international teams, it is critical that we communicate clearly to our wider grassroots football community where we hope to be moving forward and where those aspirations sit in the context of current realities. As such, we will release a statement via our own social media platforms and the media later today which explains our position in the most detailed way we can do, given the fluid nature of the pandemic currently. Data suggests that we are heading in the right direction and the promise of a vaccination process gives us all hope for the year ahead, but it is important for the FAI to follow ongoing guidance, to plan prudently and to give as clear and realistic a direction as we can:

- As noted, we know that all Adult Amateur and Underage Grassroots football activity of any sort remains in cessation until March 5th at the very earliest, with no games or training allowed under the current Government guidelines and all primary and secondary schools and third level football suspended, and the outlook remains difficult. As such we are

reviewing all upcoming events from March onwards right through to the autumn and working with all of our affiliates, we will give a clear and timely direction with regard to their staging (or otherwise) as early as we can. Obviously, there is a balance here between a practical and realistic approach and a desire not to postpone or cancel events or programmes too early, but we will take a balanced and sensible approach to each individual example.

- We do of course recognise that this leaves much of our Adult Amateur and Underage Grassroots players in limbo with all of the corresponding worries in relation to the ongoing absence of the wider physical, mental and social benefits of our sport for players, parents/guardians, volunteers, administrators and referees alike and this underpins our ongoing discussions with Sport Ireland and Government. We want to be 100% ready and prepared for a return to training and playing whenever this will be possible and our desire for clarity and timely communication was expressed very firmly at a recent meeting with Minister Chambers so we can plan accordingly. We are very much aware of the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and we share the concerns of our grassroots community as to possible drops in participation and volunteer numbers the longer Level 5 lockdown goes on. As importantly, we also recognise the financial hardship this is causing our grassroots and that is why we will soon be sending out a detailed survey of all leagues and clubs (that will be administered with the help of our National Affiliates and four Provincial Associations) as to the direct financial effects which will directly inform those ongoing discussions with Government around support for football in 2021.
- These negotiations reach out of course beyond the grassroots space and we are also proactively addressing the needs of the LOI and WNL as well as the Association itself where our financial outlook, along with all other Irish sports NGBs, continues to be fundamentally affected by the effects of the pandemic:
 - On Monday we presented our COVID-19 financial support package to all the LOI clubs which was based on audited financial data from 2019 (in effect our last full season) and which we believe gives our clubs the platform to be able to commit to the season ahead. This is of course a complex process, made more urgent by the fact that this season will see no fans in stadia from the very start of it (which is very different from 2020 where season ticket sales had been possible at the start of the year). But we must cut our cloth according to our own broader financial situation in 2021 so our commitment to underwrite this proposal is predicated on constructive dialogue with Government with regards to financial aid to help underpin the financial viability of the clubs and the League as a whole in these extraordinary circumstances.
 - We are also committed to getting our underage National League teams back to action as soon as possible, from U14 Boys up to U19 Men and U19 Women and we will seek this return as early as is practical and safe and as part of our wider discussions with the authorities.
- Finally, we of course want and need to see fans, so essential to our game, back in our stadia both at League and international level and I suspect we all crave a full Aviva Stadium urging on the men's team in our upcoming FIFA World Cup 2022 qualification process which of course, uniquely this year, will play out within the calendar year – directly because of COVID-19. The inspirational effect on all of our teams in having fans in our stadia is unquestionable, the financial effect on us not having them is far-reaching and our “Guidelines for Re-opening sports grounds” document, co-authored with our friends at the GAA and the IRFU, was in effect our strategy for a Return to Watch in 2021. Again, we have asked the Government to review this closely in the context of 2021 as without a planned return we do run the risk of not only League and national team games continuing to be played out behind closed doors but also that our ability to host EURO2020 will be challenged as well. Again, Government are

clear of overall objectives here and we continue to discuss the operational and financial implications accordingly.

Servicing the needs of our wider Football Community

In essence this to me is what any Football Association has at its heart – a core service mentality to help all of our affiliates and stakeholders to deliver our core purpose, namely to facilitate increased and safe participation in our national team game. To understand how best to do this I have embarked on a sector-wide “listening tour” which, to be absolutely honest given the number of people who rightly want to express their particular hopes, views and concerns, is an ongoing task – even if I have spent every spare second that I have had to listen and debate accordingly. If I have not spoken to you yet, I promise I will.

This desire to listen and learn has coincided not only with the ongoing COVID-19 interactions outlined above but also with the root-and-branch review of the very structure of the Association itself via our planned move to a General Assembly and everything that goes with that. In engaging with this process, I have begun to learn much about how the jigsaw of Irish football comes together. As such, it feels appropriate to give you an update on that governance reform process as I know many of you, and many of the members and affiliates you represent, have been keen to hear an update, both generally in terms of overall timetable and specifically in relation to your own consultations and interactions.

Where we were

- In 2019 the Governance Review Group and KOSI recommended a suite of governance reforms in the Association.
- Subsequently and in order to secure the financial support necessary to keep the Association afloat, we agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with Government, which is supported by other key stakeholders i.e. FIFA, UEFA and Bank of Ireland. Together the recommendations from these reports and conditions attaching to the MOU amounted to 164 separate reforms to be implemented by the Association. By the end of 2020 we had fully implemented over 110 of these and made sufficient progress with the other recommendations to be able to draw down 100% of the €5.8m in funding allocated to us by Sport Ireland. This is very significant as an indicator of how Government and Sport Ireland view the progress being made on governance reform.
- As most of you will know, one of the key planks of our reform programme is the adoption of a three tier Governance model comprising a General Assembly, a Board comprising six football and six independent directors, and Committees supported by a new Constitution and Regulations. This model was approved in principle by Members at the EGM on 31 August 2020 and since then we have been working flat-out on the details of these proposals with the aim of having the proposals approved by the Members at an EGM.

Where we are now

- The Board established two Working Groups to (a) design the General Assembly and Board Committees and (b) revise the Constitution and Regulations to implement the new arrangements.
- The first of these Working Groups, led by the President and comprising six football directors, presented proposals to Members at information sessions in November/December and recently finalised its proposals having taken on board feedback from Members, both from those information sessions and from written submissions received from Affiliates.

- In parallel, the Constitution Working Group led by Catherine Guy, Chair of the Governance Committee, has updated the Constitution and Regulations in consultation with FIFA and UEFA.
- I am pleased to say that the Board has now approved these detailed proposals and we are preparing to present them to Members for approval at an EGM, now to be in March. While the MOU requires us to have a new Board in place by March 31st, the Government recently granted us an extension until April 30th to achieve this and that is the deadline we are now working towards.
- The detailed plan to communicate the final proposals to Members and to hold the necessary EGMs to approve the proposals will be sent to Members in the coming days and I want to thank everyone for their commitment to this process, their patience around it and to recognising that overall this is the type of democratic and open process that we may not have felt possible in recent years.

Where we want to be

As I have repeatedly said in my various meetings and calls, I believe our essential mission at this point in our history is to have best-in-class organisational and governance structures in place that are transparent and democratic, conform to FIFA and UEFA requirements and will enable the Association to gain the trust and confidence of all of our stakeholders inside and outside football. I genuinely believe that the proposals we have developed will achieve these core objectives, set us up to become that modern, progressive and diverse organisation we all want to be part of and we look forward to interacting all of this in the round with Members in the coming weeks.

Business Transformation

Business, organisational and cultural transformation remain at the heart of our forward strategy and a willingness to debate and embrace change will define our future success and our financial sustainability as a business. A customer-centric, digitally-driven mindset will ensure that we remain relevant and front-of-mind to a new generation of football fans and players, as well as serve our current football family. As always, honest and regular communication, especially with our staff, will be the foundation of this change approach and I trust and hope that this has been reflected in my own approach in these first three months – but the journey has only just begun!

Where we were

- The Association, staff and the wider football community had clearly been the focus of much coverage and comment across 2019 and 2020, much of it negative and this had clearly had an effect not just on overall morale but also on the media and public's perception of the Association generally.
- COVID-19 had had a serious effect on all aspects of FAI finances in 2020 with no income from ticket sales and a significant drop in all other elements of commercial revenue.
- Staff had to take wage deferrals and the Association had to avail itself of the Government COVID-19 Temporary Wage Subsidy scheme as the pandemic took hold.
- Despite new loan arrangements being secured in 2020 with Bank of Ireland, Sport Ireland increasing grant funding from €2.9m to €5.8m and the Association obtaining an interest free loan from the Government for the annual €2.54m licence fee payment on the Aviva Stadium, we still had to apply for €19.2m in total in Government aid.
- 2020 also saw the end of a 10-year main sponsor relationship with telecoms company Three for the national teams.

Where we are now

- We returned our staff to pre-deferral salary levels in November and then made a part payment of deferred salaries in December – not as far as we may have wanted to go but a sign of our intent. We are now two weeks into an eight-week benchmarking process overseen by independent experts Korn Ferry and again we hope that this will help drive forward the reorganisation programme started in summer 2020 – but the ongoing economic situation clearly makes all of this harder than we may have expected.
- We are currently working our way through the payment and settlement of a large number of historical grants and payment promises made to clubs and Leagues across the country. This is a complex process but one that the Board has rightly committed to and I can confirm again that all payments that can be confirmed will be made and that we are working hard to expedite this process. Overall, the intention to move on and a commitment to managing this process in an open, transparent and process-driven way is a positive example of real cultural change within the organisation.
- We were successful in receiving €13.2m of Government aid in late 2020 which was received with grateful thanks, all of which has now been allocated. As noted previously we are currently engaged once again with Government and Sport Ireland around the need for further support in 2021.
- In a hugely positive move, SSE Airtricity decided to stay within the Irish football fold and renewed sponsorship for the League of Ireland for a further two years and furthermore took on the title sponsorship of the Women's National League for the first time which was received very positively. Encouragingly, we will announce another major sponsorship deal for the League of Ireland this week.
- We are close to finalising our broadcast infrastructure for the upcoming season and have recently confirmed our intention to broadcast as many games as possible from the SSE Airtricity Premier and First Divisions and Women's National League.
- A commitment to digital transformation and data-driven decision-making has been supported by UEFA in helping us to instigate a full review and audit of all of our digital platforms, including our website infrastructure and FAInet where we are committed to providing in due course the best possible player and volunteer management system that we can.

Where we want to be

- Moving forward, the absolute aim is to become a financially independent and self-sufficient association, but we all know that much has to happen before we can make that claim especially in the current COVID-19 environment.
- I want us to have a clearly stated and easily understood vision for the Association moving forward and 2021 will see us produce the Strategic plan to take us through to 2025 and beyond.
- I want us to have a motivated, happy and focused staff who have the infrastructure and support around them to deliver that service ethos to all of our affiliates and to everyone within that football community.

That's it and thank you for taking the time to read this long note. I have had a hugely enjoyable first three months and I would like to thank all of you and all of the Board and staff for their support to me in these early days, it has been hugely appreciated. There is much to do to become that trusted and respected organisation we all want us to be but I have witnessed at first hand from so many

people the genuine desire for this to happen and that remains a huge inspiration as we strive to make real progress accordingly.

All the very best and do please, keep in touch.

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