

RAFC CLUB ADVISORY BOARD**Meeting Minutes****Date and Time:** Monday 19th October 2026 - 18:00**Location:** HY Lounge, Crown Oil Arena**Attendees and Apologies**

Present	Steve Jones, Emma Loynd, Isabelle Whitley, Leanne Connolly, Howard Munson, Ian Birchenough, Murray Knight, Alison Mills-Daggatt, George Brigham, Ryan Bradley, Laura Thomas, Jamie Willoughby (Chair), Matt Devine, George Delves, Jacob Wright, Emma Thetford (online), Charlotte Cromarty (online).
In Attendance	Stuart Ashworth (Retail Manager), Arron Walster (Head of Retail and Ticketing), Matt Smith, Hannah (Account Manager, O'Neills).
Apologies	Ken Fletcher, Nicola Toolan, Fiona Murray, Liz Holt.
No Apologies	Aqub Nazir, Callum Worsley.

1. Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved. Future meeting minutes will be issued within seven days of the meeting and published online as soon as they have been approved. General issues will be summarised in the CAB minutes for publication on the club website; individual complaints will be handled directly with the supporters concerned.

2. Kit Development and Fan Consultation

The club has engaged O'Neills as kit manufacturer for next season, with Hannah leading the collaboration. The club outlined plans to increase supporter involvement in the design of future kits, with the aim of producing a kit that looks great, sells well and has the backing of both fans and players.

Process

A nine-stage kit development process was presented, running from brief to launch, with sign-off targeted for shortly after Christmas:

- The club will initially develop concepts before consulting both the CAB and the Supporters' Trust.
- Workshops and design reviews will be undertaken before a shortlist of two to three final concepts is produced.
- The final concepts will be presented to supporters for a public vote, to be held in person at a home match rather than online.
- The chosen design will then be refined and approved by the sponsor and the league, ahead of the kit launch.

The club was clear that this is a collaboration rather than design by committee. The CAB will help shape themes and provide input, but will not make committee decisions on the final design.

Constraints

While fan consultation will form an important part of the process, it was noted that the design is not a blank canvas. Several fixed requirements limit the extent of design flexibility:

- Broadcast contrast rules, colour clash rules, league regulations and sponsor colours all apply.
- Three outfield kits are required: a dark home kit that is “us through and through”, a lighter away kit for contrast, and a bright third kit. It was initially discussed whether the third kit could also serve as a goalkeeper kit; however, the club has since confirmed that this will not be possible, as league requirements mean three different-coloured goalkeeper designs are required. The club will therefore need three distinct outfield kits and three distinct goalkeeper kits.
- Both a dark and a light shorts-and-socks combination must be available across the range.
- Crown Oil is confirmed as front-of-shirt sponsor for next season, and its red and black colours will need to work with the design.
- It was noted that the current home shirt and the pink shirt have both sold very well.

Heritage and Identity

Discussion focused on preserving the club's identity through kit design, with strong support for ensuring the home kit reflects Rochdale's traditional colours and heritage:

- There was strong agreement that blue, black and white are uniquely Rochdale's, with no other EFL club sharing the combination.
- Some members felt the current kit was not distinctively Rochdale and could have belonged to any club.
- Blue and black stripes have featured in only 9 of the last 19 seasons and have been absent for four years, so a return would be a strong selling point.
- Next season marks the club's 120th anniversary. Members suggested incorporating “120” or “CXX” across all three kits, with scope for storytelling, media content and merchandise such as training tops and T-shirts.
- An away kit recreating the plain white shirt from the 1962 League Cup Final was proposed, possibly with the old badge. O'Neills confirmed it can recreate historic crests in different materials and textures, subject to league approval.
- The asymmetrical stripe from a past kit was flagged as a distinctive element worth revisiting, along with drawing wider inspiration from historic kits and heritage badges and styling.
- Members asked for consistent trim and detailing across all three kits, noting that this season's trim was not carried through to the shorts and socks.
- Members also discussed whether the third kit could be linked to the goalkeeper's shirt design.

Design Approach (O'Neills)

Hannah explained that design concepts would be developed using mood boards based on historical kits, training wear, colour trends and supporter demographics. Consideration will also be given to patterns, fabric design, contrast requirements and broader market trends, and O'Neills has access to paid colour trend data. The club noted that approximately one-third of season ticket holders are under 22 years old, making younger supporters an important audience when designing kits.

Collars

There was no consensus on collars. The general view was that collars should be used only where they complement the overall design, and players have expressed no strong preference either way. The decision was deferred until concepts are available.

Agreed: Hannah to compile the evening's feedback, post-it themes and the heritage and 120th anniversary direction into a brief for the O'Neills design team.

3. Fan Experience Update and Family Excellence Scheme

Ryan Bradley provided an update on the Fan Experience programme. On returning to the EFL, the club has re-entered the Family Excellence Scheme, under which a mystery (secret) shopper assesses the club across 11 supporter touchpoints. The programme was noted as having run for 20 seasons.

A post-match survey is sent to supporters after every home game; the Crawley fixture drew around 250 responses. The information is shared internally and with CAB members to help identify areas for improvement.

The club has historically sat at Bronze and is now targeting Silver accreditation, which requires a benchmark score of 7.5 out of 10. Recent supporter survey results averaged 8.03, exceeding this target.

The club also highlighted its operational procedures, including stadium inspections conducted both 48 hours and 24 hours before fixtures to ensure safety and readiness.

- **Scoring well:** first impressions on arrival, ticketing, social media and finding the ground. Improvements in social media communications, supporter guides, menus and transport information were also noted.
- **Needing improvement:**
 - Toilets and bins: consistently low scoring and the most frustrating recurring issue.
 - Refreshment queues: a significant problem, especially in Pearl Street.
 - Family activity: limited by the lack of covered outdoor space.
 - Retail: on occasion there has been low stock of away shirts, no third shirts and few pocket-money items.
 - Stewarding and searching: some inconsistency reported.

4. Group Exercise – Fan Experience Touchpoints

Members took part in a group exercise to identify improvements across the supporter touchpoints. The following points were raised:

- Reserved stickers on seats (see Item 7).
- Communicate to fans where and what 'U Block' is on Fanbase, e.g. the singing section.
- Season ticket holders cannot purchase a U14 ticket themselves and have to phone the ticket office.
- Toilets need urgent attention, with no bins or hot water.
- Signage to show where the toilets and bars are, including in the Ratcliffe.
- Pre-ordering of food and drink within an app for half time.
- Signage for ordering food at the bar in the Ratcliffe.
- Showing other games or sports in the Ratcliffe and Our Spot.

- Utilise Our Spot more before games, encouraging more Pearl Street ticket holders to use this bar before kick-off.

5. Concessions, Queuing and Pearl Street Bar

Average attendance this season is around 4,200, roughly 1,000 more than last season, and this is putting pressure on existing infrastructure. While the Pearl Street Bar is attracting higher attendance than last season, longer queues have become an issue.

- The kiosks are new and state-of-the-art, but their physical footprint has not grown.
- Service at the counter is quick (around 40 seconds for food); it is the length of the queue that puts fans off and the queues at the Bar for drinks are a more pressing problem.
- In the Pearl Street Bar, the can bar has been converted into an extension of the kitchen, removing a quick-serve option and contributing to delays. Supporters raised concerns about its removal.
- Members felt staff were faster last season. A new Head of Hospitality joins on 20 October and is expected to drive efficiency.
- A lasting fix needs more kiosk locations and layout changes. The club acknowledged that improvements are required but emphasised that significant investment and planning would be needed, and this cannot happen overnight and is not logistically straightforward.

In the meantime, the club advised that it is exploring the introduction of a pop-up bar on matchdays to improve service and reduce queuing times.

Suggested: consider queue signage for kiosks, or a volunteer at the back of the queue, showing the expected wait from that point to reduce the number of people giving up thinking it will take too long.

6. Matchday Searches and Stewarding

Concerns were raised regarding entry searches. The club responded as follows:

- All bags must be checked on entry, including children's bags, with no exceptions.
- Away supporters are searched 100%, while home supporters are selected for random searches. The random element is deliberate, as a predictable pattern would weaken security. Targeted searching and other protocols are applied on a match by match basis depending on specific risk profiles for specific games.
- These procedures are determined in consultation with the local Safety Advisory Group and current security guidance. With the national threat level currently heightened, this is best practice rather than optional.
- The club acknowledged feedback about overzealous or inconsistent searching. Stewards have been briefed, though it was accepted they will not always get it right.
- The club is reviewing its bag-size policy and may introduce restrictions similar to other venues, potentially limiting bags to smaller than A4 size. This is under discussion with the CSG.
- Laura Thomas is producing an FAQ for the website and matchday guide.

The Supporters' Trust has been invited to attend a pre-match briefing and observe the full security operation.

7. Allocated Seating and Reserved-Seat Stickers

A lengthy discussion took place regarding reserved-seat stickers. The club confirmed that reserved-seat stickers have been removed and will no longer be placed on seats. Instead, supporters will be expected to sit in the seat allocated on their ticket.

The stadium is a fully allocated seating venue. The safety certificate, insurance and CCTV operation all depend on fans sitting in their allocated seats. The stickers had also caused confusion at non-league, cup and women's games, and implied that other seats which did not have stickers were unallocated which is not the case.

It was noted that stewards are not currently intercepting fans at entry to direct them to the right seat. To address this, the club proposed to:

- Brief stewards to patrol rows, not just stand at the front, and to assist supporters in locating their correct seats and encourage compliance where necessary.
- Communicate seat numbers at turnstiles, on signage and through the newly proposed pink-jacket volunteer welcome team.
- Email season ticket holders explaining what to do if someone is in their seat.
- Email general ticket buyers reminding them that seating is allocated.
- Give stewards block maps so they can direct fans confidently.

Any issues should be reported to stewards or directly to the club. The no-sticker approach will be reviewed at the February/March CAB meeting.

8. Fan Experience Initiatives and Themed Matchdays

- **Themed matchdays:** a calendar of 10 dates is confirmed, including Remembrance, Christmas and International Women's Day. CAB was invited to suggest ideas, for example showing photos of fans' relatives who served on the big screen at the Remembrance game.
- **Welcome team:** the pink-jacket team is fully set up. Volunteers are sought to help with wayfinding and first impressions.
- **Matchday morning clean-up:** volunteers are sought to get the statue, toilets and ground ready.
- **Queue times:** a volunteer could stand at the back of queues calling out the expected wait.
- **Grimsby night match:** around 600 blue and white light-up foam sticks will be given away.
- **Pure Innovations:** banners made from repurposed Dale shirts and carrying fan quotes will go up in Pearl Street (on the wall opposite the kiosk) and one other location. Teddy bears from the same project are coming to the merchandise stand.

Group Exercise – Themed Matchdays

Members worked in groups to propose ideas for the themed matchdays. Ideas and volunteer leads (by initials) were recorded as follows:

Date	Fixture / Theme	Ideas and Leads
20 October	Grimsby – 'Light it Up'	Light-up sticks (600) – Dale1907

Date	Fixture / Theme	Ideas and Leads
14 November	York – ‘Remembrance’	Tracks – IB Cadets – GB Girlguiding – RL The Fallen 2018 Programme – SJ
19 December	Bristol – ‘Christmas’	Scarves – EL Selection boxes – lead TBC Santa Dash – lead TBC Sing-along – AM-D
6 March	Newport – ‘International Women's Day’	Girlguiding – RL Her Game Too
TBC	Grassroots Day	Littleborough primary schools – MD Grassroots school teams – EL School nights (Tuesdays) – IB
TBC	Junior Swap Game	Dale Trust / EL

9. Fans Forum and Supporter Communications

Fans Forum

Questions were raised regarding the recent Fans Forum. The club confirmed it had no plans to limit questions or suppress debate at the fan forum, and that there had been no intention to avoid answering questions.

- The recent forum took place in difficult circumstances. The atmosphere beforehand was toxic and fans themselves had raised security concerns, but Ian chose to go ahead. Particular consideration had been given to ensuring Ian felt comfortable attending in the circumstances at the time.
- The format had been designed to keep the event concise while monitoring discussion. To the extent there were attendees who felt they did not have the opportunity to ask a question this is unfortunate but was not intentional on the part of the Club. The club acknowledged the time constraints and confirmed that supporters may submit any unanswered questions to Fan Services for a response.

Supporter Emails

Members highlighted inconsistencies in responses to supporter emails. The club advised that:

- Supporters should direct enquiries to the Fan Services email (fanservices@rochdaleafc.co.uk) wherever possible, as messages received there can be responded to directly or forwarded to the appropriate member of staff.
- Replies will not always be immediate but the Club will endeavour to reply as soon as possible.
- The club is working towards a consistent process for responding to fans.

10. Matchday Music, Announcements

- Post-match music:** “Rocking All Over the World” played at full volume straight after the final whistle is drowning out fan songs. Fans and CAB members agreed it should be delayed until singing dies down, turned down, or replaced with something fans already sing, such as “Hello” by Oasis.

- **Pre-match music:** praised as much improved, with player walk-out songs building the atmosphere earlier.
- **Goal announcements:** timing is now better. Dave waits for the cheer to fade before announcing the scorer, which creates a second wave.
- **Man of the Match:** still announced too quickly, over the top of fan singing.

11. Other Questions and Issues Raised by CAB Members

Paul Hazelhurst Memorial

Steve Jones (CAB member) agreed to take the lead on forming a small volunteer team to assist with ensuring the garden is planted appropriately and maintained throughout the year, with potential collaboration with a local garden centre and/or the council where possible. The Club will carry out a structural survey of the wall to ensure it is safe to work on and does not pose a risk to the public.

Sanitary Facilities

The lack of sanitary bins in some ladies' toilets was raised. The club acknowledged the issue and confirmed that suitable bins would be installed for future fixtures.

Handrails in Pearl Street

The installation of additional handrails within the Pearl Street area was discussed. The club agreed that the proposal would benefit many supporters and will investigate the feasibility of the project, although it was noted that the work would require significant investment and longer-term planning.

Out-of-Bounds Areas

Concerns were expressed regarding supporters accessing restricted areas and steps behind the dugouts. The club recognised this as both a safety and disturbance issue and confirmed that it would be escalated to the stadium manager and safety team for further action.

Oldham Away Ticket Allocation

The club confirmed that tickets for the Oldham away fixture will be sold using a season-ticket-holder priority system. Full details regarding allocation and the sales process will be communicated closer to the fixture date.

Heritage Displays and Trophies

An update was provided on the removal of display cabinets from the HY Lounge entrance. The items are currently being preserved appropriately while plans are developed for a more meaningful permanent display. The club is working with programme editor Mark Wilbraham to determine the best approach for showcasing these heritage items in the future.