

SPIRIT OF SHANKLY

NEWSLETTER TO MEMBERS

DECEMBER 2023 / JANUARY 2024



Message from SOS Chair Paul Khan

Hello Comrades,
A quick note to wish you all the very best for the New Year and thank you for your continued support.

2023 was a period of change for SOS, with the departure of Graham Smith, Liam O'Flanagan and Chris Owen from the Management Committee (MC). We thank them for all their hard work.



We have welcomed George Bevan and Gareth Roberts and the return of Jay McKenna, who all bring an array of knowledge and experience. Also Joe Blott resigned from his position as chair and I have had the privilege and pleasure of taking on the role, supported by Peter Hooton as Vice Chair and the management committee.

There have been some notable strategic successes this year with our fan base receiving a full apology from UEFA, exonerating us of any wrongdoing at the Champions League final in Paris. We had representation at the Paris senate, supporters who purchased final tickets from LFC received a refund, and we campaigned for the resignation of the Head of Safety and Security, Zeljko Pavlica, which was achieved in October.

Message from SOS Chair Paul Khan (continued)...

Work that can go unnoticed is at ground level, where we try our very best to help people with banning orders and ticketing issues. We are also very active in the community with projects including debt and welfare advice, organising developmental programmes for local young people and a community food pantry.

As we move into 2024, we face several challenges. We need to develop a proposal to address the Anfield atmosphere and feed into the club's future ticketing strategy. We also need to address the current SOS constitution so that it reflects our relationship with the Supporters Board (SB) and ensure the SB works for all our members and wider fan base. We must ensure the sub-groups we have created work effectively and efficiently with the right people working within each group.

We will work to become more inclusive and listen to the views of all our members. The MC are here simply to represent you and we need to establish the mechanisms so that we accurately reflect your "voice". To this end, in the coming year we will be sending out emails for you to vote on important subjects. We have set up an advisory group of former MC members, whose expertise and insight will help us greatly.

You will also see, in the coming weeks, that we will be advertising via the newsletter and website for positions on the MC and in sub-groups. We need to build support for our technical and marketing teams to focus on recruitment and a dedicated planner and communicator for the SB.

There is lots to look forward to and the SOS committee will continue to work to serve you. Let's hope for a successful end to the season and a brilliant 2024.

To conclude, a quote I often use from a famous activist is "nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something", which is why we're asking you to take a minute to sign this petition from Save The Children and hopefully bring a little peace to the world:

<https://action.savethechildren.org.uk/page/137213/data/1?locale=en-GB>.

Up the Reds and YNWA.

Paul

SOS Christmas celebration in Anfield

Our annual Christmas bash took place on December 21st at The Church in Anfield. It was a brilliant occasion with more than 100 local residents enjoying lunch and entertainment.



Thank you to *Red All Over The Land* Fanzine for their kind donation, Mick Aitchison and chef Kevin O'Rourke, Geoge Sephton, Starsailor singer James Walsh, actor Ricky Tomlinson, singer Asa Murphy, Liverpool Lighthouse Choir and of course our brilliant members and volunteers who came along to support us.



Under 18s in the community

Members of the U18 squad have been helping out at the Greenhouse Project Pantry alongside Fans Supporting Foodbanks and SOS Chair Paul Khan, who said:

"It has been great to see the U18 players every week, which is testament to the connection between the club and the local community. The players are a credit to themselves and the club and we look forward to seeing them at the pantry in the New Year."

And it was great to see this acknowledgment from Caitlin Hawkins, head of education at the LFC Academy:

"It has been fantastic to be in a partnership between U18 players, Spirit of Shankly and other contributors to the food pantry in Lodge Lane. Academy players have been helping each week since September by assisting with setting up, supporting service users and getting to know the regulars. They have even recruited new fans in the pantry who are now following the squad's progress! The initiative has really helped build the relationship between SOS, young players and community social action."

One of the players, Jayden Danns said: *"I have really enjoyed helping in the food pantry and chatting to the dedicated volunteers. It's amazing to think football fans can have such a positive impact on the community. Thank you all for supporting us to feel welcome and included."*

We would also like to thank LFC Foundation who supplied hats and gloves for the volunteers and 100 hampers, alongside 100 chickens from the pantry's meat supplier, Saveway.



Flag Compliance

SOS have recently been involved with helping one of our members Mark Sweatman, who has had issues around taking his banners into the stadium. MC's Roy Bentham, who has been liaising with Mr Sweatman, said: "We aren't completely out of the woods yet, but we are constantly working towards a resolution with the club so Mark's banners are compliant and he can continue to get them in the ground. Like Jurgen, we recognise the importance of the Anfield atmosphere and our renowned flag heritage is crucial to that."

National activity update

As you know, SOS work closely with the Football Supporters Association on all matters relating to fans, including those items most recently in the news.

European Super League

Our position on this is clear, but it's good to know fans across the country are also opposed to this. From an English game perspective, this shows the need for an independent regulator and the role they would play in preventing our clubs from joining any unauthorised European league. Across Europe, Football Supporters Europe are working with legal groups to judge the state of play and ensure this kind of tournament never sees the light of day.

TV Fixtures

The latest announcement of televised games brought more headaches for match-going supporters, including a 12.30 KO away to Brentford in February, meaning coaches will have to leave Liverpool around 5.30am. And it's not just LFC fans, all clubs' supporters have to deal with moving dates and many fixtures in provisional slots with times finalised potentially just five days before the game. It has to change and the FSA will continue to work to ensure broadcasters, PL and our clubs instigate that change sooner rather than later

PGMOL

Yet more controversy on the pitch, including our match v Burnley, with plenty of festive foul-ups to choose from. The FSA and PGMOL publicly announced the new 'Refereeing Working Group' which will look to further the relationship between supporters and match officials. The first meeting is scheduled for the New Year, and SOS hope to be involved alongside other selected representatives from each network.

PL Meeting

We were hoping to have minutes from the last meeting with the Premier League, on 11 December, with you by now. But despite chasing this a couple of times, unfortunately, we still don't have them. As soon as we do, we will publish them on our website

Here we go again

Liverpool's FA Cup third-round tie away to Arsenal in January has left fans with a strong sense of déjà vu. Once again, the allocation, ticket price and kick-off time showing scant regard for travelling supporters.

Allocation

Under FA rules, and up to the semi-finals and final, visiting clubs are allowed 15% of a ground's capacity, up to a maximum of 9,000 tickets. Liverpool's allocation of 7,600 for the match on Sunday 7 January is 12.5%. Liverpool FC pushed back on this after an initial allocation of 5,200, but supporters are still missing out.

This is not the first time this has happened at the Emirates and we're not the only supporters it has happened to. In 2014, Arsenal were drawn at home in every round. Coventry City were granted the full 9,000 in the third round, but in the following ties Tottenham, LFC and Everton each received just 5,100.

In 2019, Manchester United received 5,233 and a year later Leeds United 8,000. Why do the FA continue to let this happen? We have written to both the FA and Arsenal on this issue in the past, as have the other supporter organisations, and we will do so again.

Ticket prices

Liverpool's last cup tie away to Arsenal, in January 2022, was the Carabao Cup semi-final second leg and tickets cost £10 (£5 for over 65s and under-18s). This fixture has seen prices surge up to £53 for adults and £21 for juniors. We acknowledge this is a different competition, but supporters will be watching the same teams, from the same seats with the same facilities at a cost of £40 - £53 (£21 for under-18s). In other, all-Premier League third-round ties being played on the same weekend, Tottenham Hotspur v Burnley will cost £25 (£10 for juniors) and Crystal Palace v Everton £15 (£10 for over 65s, £5 for under-18s).

Why are we being asked to pay such high prices?

Where's our famous atmosphere?

We have no argument with Jurgen Klopp highlighting issues around the Anfield atmosphere, or lack of it, at times. It's something our fans discuss regularly, it's central to the club's, and Anfield's, identity, and something that many of us are keen to protect.



It is no accident that opposing teams, coaches and fans speak about the 'Anfield effect'. We all know how intimidating the crowd can make it for visiting sides, how the atmosphere can be second to none - ask Barcelona, or Dortmund or City, or Arsenal last season.

We do have concerns though about the lack of opportunities for young supporters to go to the game, catch the bug and preserve this decades-long culture of The Kop. And deep-rooted worries that our culture is being watered down by greater corporate offerings and out-of-reach ticket prices - echoed by supporters across the Premier League.

We are in constant dialogue with the club to explore ways we can improve the situation, get more youngsters to experience Anfield and create the best atmosphere possible every game.

Reciprocal pricing arrangements

Supporters who have been fortunate enough to attend any of our European away fixtures this season will have noted that the price for every game has been set at £17.22 (€20).

This is a welcome price point and credit should go to LFC, who worked with the Union SG, Toulouse and LASK to set up a reciprocal pricing arrangement.

We're quick to show displeasure when prices are deemed too high, so it's only right that we recognise this. **#TwentysPlenty**

Toulouse debrief

We were frustrated to see the allocation for this game in France was way below the minimum levels set by UEFA*, leaving lots of supporters ticketless. Toulouse's official stadium capacity for UEFA competitions is 31,156 - 5% of this is 1,557 tickets. Our allocation was 1,200 tickets, 3.6%.

We contacted both LFC and FSE to see how this had been allowed. LFC assured us they had pressed for a larger allocation, however as we saw and experienced, the away sector of the ground is fenced in, meaning Toulouse are able to push back on any requests for additional tickets due to segregation issues.

FSE told us that UEFA was aware of this issue and stipulated it until the knockout rounds to rectify this. This is of course too little, too late for LFC supporters who all too often are impacted when clubs don't meet minimum requirements. We will continue to work on this and press LFC, UEFA and host clubs on behalf of all fans.

We are aware a large number of our supporters had issues at the game in Toulouse. We have since attended a debrief with LFC and had the opportunity to discuss these issues further. The main issue was that many supporters were not able to access their seats and missed the first half of the match.

LFC advised that as there was only one entry point for away fans, so any congestion meant they were not able to get to their seats. A lack of home stewards and poor sightlines from our section exacerbated this issue. We voiced our concerns around safety in relation to this.

We have made various suggestions to LFC for improvement at European away games and hope to see these implemented in the future.

Representatives from SOS regularly attend pre-match meetings with the club and, where possible, local police and host clubs, where we can highlight any possible problems and raise questions ahead of the fixture.

A meeting was set up with French police ahead of our match in Toulouse. It was a positive and we thank LFC for facilitating it, especially as this was our first game in France after the final in Paris. We hope to be able to do this again for fixtures in the future.

****UEFA's regulation, Article 38 Ticketing, states: "Home clubs must make at least 5% of the total approved UEFA capacity of their stadium available exclusively to visiting supporters, in a segregated, safe area."***

Few words with Ricky Tomlinson

The Liverpool actor, of *The Royle Family*, *Mike Bassett: England Manager*, and *Brookside* fame, came along to the SOS Christmas dinner and helped with the entertainment for the second year running. We're delighted that he also made time for a few words with us...



"Spirit of Shankly have been fantastic in organising the event. It's part of the community and brilliant for the people in the city. I'm a Scouser and I love to be part of something that gives something back.

"The atmosphere and Christmas spirit in The Church was great and I loved the 'Support and Believe' banner that was put up. I've been involved in similar events in the past. I met former manager Bob Paisley a few times, doing charity events in pubs, such as knocking over the piles of pennies for the blind charity. They would save the pennies and I would knock them over when they got to a certain height!

"I was raised a Red and would go on the Kop with my dad, that was 75 years ago. My dad was a red hot Red and he'd go to Wembley in an old-fashioned charabanc. They'd take sandwiches and bottles of beer and they'd be off on that long journey. We lived in a little terrace house in Lamb Street, off Heyworth Street, and all the people in the street waved them off. The motorways weren't built then, so it was a long journey.

"I've got loads of lovely memories of Anfield. I remember Billy Liddell signing my autograph book and standing in the boys' pen as a young lad.

"I go to the match now with writer Jimmy McGovern, and ex-Liverpool player Sammy Lee. We have a great day out. I love the atmosphere in the ground, the singing and the support. It's always an experience.

"Spirit of Shankly is the perfect name for the Liverpool fans trust. My mam used to work in the canteen at Anfield, looking after the players. She loved Bill Shankly and told me he knew everyone by their first name, whether it was the gateman or the canteen staff. She idolised him.

"I'm a Freeman of the City and that's for Liverpool and Everton. Of course, if it was a Liverpool v Everton Cup Final I'd be screaming for Liverpool, but at the same time I hope Everton get treated fairly over the ridiculous 10-points deduction. I love the derby, the atmosphere and the fan banter.

"Football is part of the city's culture, and it must be maintained and nurtured."