



14 August 2020

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Dear Ms Onwurah

Thank you for your letter of 31 July 2020. I fully appreciate that the issue of a potential change in the ownership of Newcastle United Football Club (NUFC) is of great importance to you, as the MP for the area and as a fan, as it is to NUFC's entire fanbase, and I would like to deal directly with the questions you raise.

Our approach is to be as transparent as we reasonably can be. The details of our Owners' and Directors' Test - the rules governing any potential change of Club ownership - as with all of the rules relating to the governance of the Premier League (Rules), are publicly available on our website [here](#) and on several previous occasions we have issued short statements once a positive decision has been made. However, as in all issues of commercial and sporting sensitivity, where the individuals and organisations involved have a proper expectation of confidentiality, the Premier League has not commented in public nor briefed in private, although we recognise that others in this matter have done so. In this context, I will answer your questions as fully as possible below:

Why did a process which generally takes a month last so long, 17 weeks and counting, without coming to any decision?

There are no timescales prescribed by the Rules in relation to the Owners' and Directors' Test and they generally take considerably longer than a month to complete. Changes of ownership can range from the straightforward to the complex and we therefore treat each case individually. Thorough investigation and resolution of any questions or issues that may arise take time, and we are of the view that the long-term interests of supporters are best served by taking as long as is needed to address all issues of importance properly.

It is not accurate to suggest that no decisions or determinations were made by the Premier League in relation to the proposed takeover. In June, the Premier League Board made a clear determination as to which entities it believed would have control over the Club following the proposed acquisition, in accordance with the Premier League Rules. Subsequently, the Premier League then asked each such person or entity to provide the Premier League with additional information, which would then have been used to consider the assessment of any possible disqualifying events.



In this matter, the consortium disagreed with the Premier League's determination that one entity would fall within the criteria requiring the provision of this information. The Premier League recognised this dispute, and offered the consortium the ability to have the matter determined by an independent arbitral tribunal if it wished to challenge the conclusion of the Board. The consortium chose not to take up that offer, but nor did it procure the provision of the additional information. Later, it (or PIF specifically) voluntarily withdrew from the process. This meant there was never any point where the Premier League Board was asked to make an assessment on the suitability of all members of the consortium. If that additional information had been provided, the Premier League Board would have made that suitability decision accordingly.

We understand that the main issue was not Saudi Arabia's human rights record, a valid target of great criticism, but the Premier League's intellectual property rights. Is that the case and could that not have been made public? Indeed, should not the criteria for the determination/long delay be published? Given the frequent condemnation of NUFC fans who supported the takeover, could the impact of the Saudi human rights record be clarified, specifically and in the context of other Premier League clubs owners and investors?

The Owners' and Directors' Test includes a wide range of disqualifying offences and events, including specific reference to intellectual property infringements. These are critically important to the Premier League's commercial interests and that of our member Clubs. Broadcast revenues are the principal source of income for a majority of our Clubs, including Newcastle United. As noted above, the PIF announced its withdrawal from the process before the Board was required to come to any conclusions on this aspect of the Test.

Is it true that several Premier League clubs objected to the takeover and what influence do the views of competing clubs have in the approval process?

The Owners' and Directors' Test is delegated to and carried out entirely by the Premier League Board. Other member Clubs have no role whatsoever in the approval process.

Is it true, as reported, that the owner, Mr Ashley, keeps the £17m deposit the buyers paid for exclusivity? Do you agree with me that this money should at the very least be invested in good causes in the North East, for example the NUFC Foundation and the Newcastle United Supporters Trust? It is unacceptable that the only person to profit from 17 weeks of frustration for fans should be the man whose ownership of the club is causing such misery for those same fans.

Any payments to be made between the purchasers and the owners are not related to the application of the Test, and we are not aware of all the discussions or arrangements between those parties. What happens to any deposit is therefore not something where the Board has a role.

Do you agree that it is unacceptable to leave loyal fans in such doubt for so long and the process needs to be improved? For example, why were there press briefings but no fan briefings?

The Premier League has not briefed the press on this matter, despite often-incorrect information being published in the media. It is of course a delicate balance to strike - parties to a process such as this deserve that it be kept confidential and carried out in a professional manner. If it were not, then we believe necessary disclosures would be harder to obtain, and potential purchasers would be discouraged from entering the market, to the



detriment of clubs and fans. The Premier League is reviewing its Owners' and Directors' Test in the coming months to ensure it remains robust and fair to all interested stakeholders. Also, the Premier League will be meeting with supporter representatives as part of our Structured Dialogue process, where we will have the opportunity to discuss concerns supporters have directly.

The Premier League has maintained a positive dialogue with Newcastle United throughout this process and will continue to do so.

This is the first time the Premier League has commented on this matter. Due to widespread speculation we feel it is appropriate to make my responses to your specific enquiries available to the other MPs who have raised similar questions, Newcastle United fans and the wider public.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that tapers to the right.

RICHARD MASTERS

Chief Executive