

Letter to Clubs re East/West Split

Good Evening

The North Executive met last night to discuss the proposal to combine the teams in the Premier Division and Division 1 and then split them East and West of the Pennines. Both Anne Bryant and I took part in the meeting, although in an advisory capacity.

The meeting had been delayed by 24 hours in anticipation of the Prime Minister's statement on the introduction of a 3 tier lock down system although, at the moment, the detail of impact on sporting activities is still awaited from DCMS.

EH is currently working through the latest Government announcements outlining restrictions in different areas of the country. EH anticipates more detailed information from DCMS in the coming days and at that point EH will consider the detail of each level restriction and understand the specific impact on hockey.

In reaching a decision the Exec took into account the significant work that clubs have put in so far to reach a position where playing competitive hockey is possible within the current EH Return to play Covid-19 regulations. It had been suggested that the North Hockey League should be suspended until the New Year, but this was discounted due to the perceived adverse impact on both player physical and mental well being if the league was suspended, as well as the potential impact on clubs. In addition, there is no guarantee that the Covid situation will have changed by the New Year, whilst historically, February and March are the months most impacted by adverse weather conditions.

The Exec noted that although it was a close call, the clubs had voted by 25 to 22 in favour of the split of the league. One club had effectively abstained as the players were split down the middle for and against the split.

The Exec felt that they have a clear duty of care to respond to the numerous concerns raised by a number of clubs about travel, made to EH, the North HA, the North Hockey League and the EH Relationship Managers, particularly when changing and/or shower facilities are not always available.

After a long and detailed discussion, the Executive decided to combine both the men's and women's Premier League and Division 1 and then split them East and West with immediate effect, creating a single division on either side of the Pennines. A document showing the composition of the new leagues is attached.

The decision means that there will be a significant reduction in travel across the North and reflects Government guidelines currently in place in much of the North to reduce unnecessary travel. It should also have an impact on the increased travel costs being incurred by clubs as fewer players share a car.

The Exec confirmed that the results of games already played against teams in your new divisions will stand, as will the result of any similar games played before the new programme is implemented.

Chris Darling is already working on a revised set of fixtures and although this will inevitably take a little time to complete, Chris is hoping to complete this exercise in time to notify clubs late next week and to start the new fixtures from 31 October. The new league format will be based on all teams playing each other once and then splitting the league with the top 6 teams and bottom 5 (West) or 7 (East) in each league, playing each other again. As already confirmed by EH, the top 6 in each league will be playing for a single promotion place available from each of the new divisions into the expanded EH North Conferences.

This decision will have no impact on the current NHL divisions 2 and 3.

Best Regards

Peter