

CELG(4) WPL 14

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

Response from Diverse Cymru



**Diverse Cymru (Formerly Cardiff and Vale Coalition of
Disabled People (CVCDP) and Awetu)**

**Response to the Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee Inquiry into the Welsh Premier
League**

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Background

Diverse Cymru is an innovative new organisation in the Welsh Third Sector, created in recognition of the realities faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payments, self directed and independent living support, befriending and advocacy. We produce information resources, run a service user involvement project and co-ordinate volunteer placements. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access to equality impact assessments. We provide consultancy services and deliver a range of training courses on equality related topics.

We would be delighted to assist with the development of specific work programmes, and with engaging service users in future. We are happy for our response to this inquiry to be published.

Tackling equality issues in football

Given the recent high profile cases surrounding racist insults in football it is clear that more needs to be done on tackling racism on and off the pitch.

Equally tackling homophobia in football is a relatively new area with homophobic language and chants being used on a daily basis, especially from the terraces. Yet the FA only recently signed up to kick homophobia out of football and to a concerted action plan to tackle homophobia. The only professional player to have been 'out' in football was Justin Fashanu, who tragically committed suicide attributable, at least in part, to both homophobia and racism in football.

Similarly women's football is still regarded as less prestigious than men's football, not only attracting lower wages and not being regarded as a legitimate sporting profession, but also receiving little or no media coverage, sponsorship, development of players, or support from the wider sporting community and the public.

Concerted efforts and campaigns, in addition to signing up to national campaigns and movements to tackle racism and homophobia in football and to promoting and supporting women's football and raising levels of respect for the women's game are required in order to tackle a culture in which prejudiced insults and offensive language are considered the norm and even part of the game.

To support these efforts it is essential to ensure that incidents are identified and appropriate action taken, including fines, reporting incidents to the police as hate crimes and suspending players. If supporters hear offensive comments from the pitch and do not see these challenged this further embeds racism and homophobia in the culture of the sport and can lead to individuals and groups of fans feeling that such language and behaviour is acceptable.

Supporters should also be clearly advised that racist, homophobic or any other prejudicial or discriminatory language or behaviour will not be tolerated and they face being removed and banned from future fixtures. This should be enforced in order to reinforce the fact that such language and behaviour is extremely damaging to both other supporters and to players.

In these ways not tackling prejudice in football can lead to hate crime and discrimination in wider society, as many supporters feel that the language used by their idols and by fellow supporters is acceptable. Conversely making it absolutely clear that such language and behaviour will not be tolerated, combined with active and visible promotion of campaigns such as kick racism out of football and kick homophobia out of football, with the support of all clubs, can lead to a decrease in prejudice, discrimination and hate crime in wider society, not merely in sports.

Equal opportunities and youth/grassroots development

Many young players have never been challenged on the language or behaviour they may imitate from professional footballers, parents, peers or wider society. Building tolerance, respect and diversity into grassroots and youth development programmes and initiatives is essential to tackling prejudice in the sport.

Additionally public support for campaigns should extend to professional footballers and local clubs presenting in schools as part of anti-prejudice and discrimination work, such as Show Racism The Red Card, which should be extended to cover all forms of prejudice and discrimination and homophobia in particular.

Club community support officers and similar offices often have a role to play in community development; identifying and developing young players with talent; and

encouraging involvement and participation in football. As part of this role it is essential that clubs reach out into a diverse range of communities and link with community groups and organisations to promote the sport to people who may feel excluded, such as BME people, LGB people and women. This involvement should be supported by education and campaigns to tackle prejudice and discrimination, as mentioned above, in order to ensure that young players are not only encouraged into football, but supported and so they do not encounter the levels of discrimination and prejudice that we currently see in football.