



Saturday 12 September 2020

Kick Off 3pm

COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

Match day De-Brief Report



## 1.0 Overall Summary

The Covid-19 health crisis has created unprecedented challenges for Scottish football with matches suspended from Friday 13th March 2020 and lockdown measures introduced by the Scottish Government on Monday 23rd March 2020.

The Scottish FA and SPFL convened a Joint Response Group to deal with the implications of COVID-19 and the Scottish Government-enforced lockdown.

Sub-groups were created to look in detail at key areas to be addressed to allow the safe return of football. These groups covered; Medical; Supporter Welfare; Club & Stadium Operations; Broadcast; Regulations and the Grassroots game.

This Operational Policy has been collated using an inter-disciplinary approach in which all key stakeholders have been given an opportunity to contribute, review and amend the information. The club has learned greatly from the 3 home matches which have been operated in line with the Behind Closed Doors Guidance and high standards have been maintained This de-brief report relates to the Ross County V Celtic on Saturday 12 September 2020 which was one of two SPFL Fixtures which were allowed under strict controls to test Covid 19 safety measures as they apply to the return of 300 home supporters. A detailed Operational Document was prepared and circulated in advance of this fixture and the this report has been compiled against the delivery of measures to protect All persons entering the Global Energy Stadium for this fixture.

I do not intend to go over again all the measures that have been put in place since the start of the season for the 3 home fixtures that were safely delivered Behind Closed Doors.

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## 2.0 Home Supporters

The club will admitted 296 home supporters chosen from our season ticket holders for this fixture. Those supporters selected attended after having been provided pre read material about the Club Covid 19 measures that have been put in place for this fixture together with their allocated seat numbers and time they should attend the ground.

They were also advised that they would be temperature tested before being allowed admission to the stadium for the match and should not attend if they suspect they had any of the symptoms of Covid-19. Clearly supporters understood this message and arrived at the car park and the stadium at their designated times.

The stadium was ready to be opened at 13.30 on the day.

## **Stage 1 Travel/Car Parking**

All match supporters were encouraged to travel as per Scottish Government guidelines (i.e. own transport where possible, avoid car sharing). Staggered arrival times to reduce congestion and waiting time on access worked very well and most arrived wearing their masks.

Plenty parking was available for the supporters in the Home Car Park. Spaces were allocated in conjunction with social distancing guidelines with ample spacing applied between parked vehicles. Stewards will direct supporters to the outside Ticket Office for collection of tickets and again social distancing was in place. Tickets were collected and identification checks were made against the 3 lists that had been prepared for supporter admission. Supporters were thereafter advised to remain in the car park area until their allotted time to enter the stadium.

## **Stage 2 Supporter Entries to Stadium – Temperature Checks/Hand Sanitisers**

All supporters passed through a Temperature Testing Zone before proceeding to the entrance gate. All supporters had their temperatures checked and there were no failures or re-tests of individuals.

Prior to passing through this first stage all supporters details were again checked from the prepared lists and invited to use the hand sanitisers which most did comply with and many brought their own for this purpose.

## **Stage 3 Supporters Entry to Stadium – Though Gates not turnstiles**

Having passed through the accreditation and temperature testing zone all supporters went through a sterile corridor and formed part of another socially distanced queue to enter via Gate 5. Very few bags were brought along and the maximum size was A5. Stewards did not physically open bags and search but in very few cases requested supporters to open them for a visual examination only.

Turnstiles were not used to prevent supporters touching surfaces and a separate route in and out of the stadium was in place. Gate 6 being used for exit only.

## **Stage 4 Supporters taking up designated seats**

The 296 supporters who attended were permitted access to the stadium from 13.50 and escorted to their allocated seats populating the North Easterly part of the East stand first and slowly moving towards the south end. A 2 meter seating plan had been put in place and supporters were advised to remain in their seats until the match commenced and all were seated which they duly complied with. The club did not adopt a 'bubble' approach and strict 2 meter social distancing was put in place throughout with all supporters sitting on their own.

All supporters were in the stadium and seated by 14.45 on the day. To their credit all remained until half time when there was some controlled movement for toilets.

The Stadium announcer reinforced the Covid 19 Safety Measures throughout the fixture from arrival to departure. The vast majority of supporters wore face masks throughout and very few had a medical exemption. All complied with club requests not to remove them and sing or shout.

No food/drink was provided site and the current guidance on controlled containers was applied with no reported issues.

There were no issues with any Celtic Supporters travelling to the area and attempting to enter without tickets or causing any issues for the match day operation.

### **Stage 5 Supporter Egress**

On the 80<sup>th</sup> minute of the fixture the announcer reminded supporters to remain in their seats at full time and take instructions from stewards to allow East Stand to be vacated in an orderly and socially distanced fashion. This message was repeated prior to full time and all supporters complied and the stadium was emptied in sections and vacated by gate 6 a separate route from ingress.

It took some 8 minute after full time to sagely empty the stadium of supporters. All supporters took all rubbish with them at the end of the fixture which ground staff reported positively upon.

### **Stage 6 – Independent Assessment of Procedures**

As part of the review the following were in attendance to ensure compliance with the Match Day Operational Document

[redacted], SPFL Match Delegate

Chief Inspector [redacted] Police Scotland

Senior Officer [redacted] Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

All reported very positively on the match day operation and Covid 19 measures.

### **Conclusions**

Overall the club supported by independent verification concludes that a Covid 19 secure environment was created and maintained throughout this event.

Like all events there are learning points and the following are but a list of these from a Ross County perspective:

1. Clear planning and communication is essential with a document set for the operation with an emphasis on individual responsibility and records for track and trace.
2. Like all event planning who is in charge of what and when is central to the success and the Covid 19 Officer's post is critical to at every stage.
3. A strict 2 meter stadium social distancing plan must be maintained.
4. Staged arrival of supporter's at the ground and admission to their seating must be carefully controlled.
5. Stewarding knowledge and understanding of the plan and capacity and capability of Covid 19 security measures is imperative.
6. The use of entry/access (no turnstiles) gates only reduced supporter contact with surfaces and worked well on the day.
7. The police and Fire and Rescue Service have an important role to play in reviewing Covid 19 procedures.
8. Temperature testing procedures should be undertaken in an environment that cannot be affected by outside inclement weather.
9. No bags bigger than A5 should be allowed and only visual checks should be taken where necessary.
10. No fast food worked and very little discarded rubbish was left by supporters indeed it amounted to a carrier bag full as opposed to what is usually discarded.
11. The role of the Match Delegate is important and that independent scrutiny and challenge was important.
12. Sufficient stadium signage, Hand cleaning facilities and the wearing of masks must be visible, accessible and guidance followed.

## **Recommendations**

Clearly this was but one test and as such Ross County clearly believes it should be followed closely with further testing to maintain the momentum whilst further improving Covid 19 safety measures and environment.

Ross County play Aberdeen at home on Saturday 26 September 2020. It is recommended that Ross County bellowed to grow home support number incrementally and safety at this fixture. This again would involve all the measures that were put in place for the Celtic fixture but looking at learning points and any further Government Guidance linked to the incidence Covid 19 in the Community.

Ross County believes this can once again be achieved safety whilst allowing incremental progress to be carefully controlled, monitored and scrutinised avoiding anything that can compromise community health and wellbeing.

There is obviously still a supporter confidence issue in returning to stadia across the country and that is right but all authorities and clubs must now work together in

positive partnerships which allow community confidence to grow. In no circumstances should we act in haste as that may result in a race to the bottom as supporter confidence in both club and Government to protect them going forward will be at the centre of taking manageable steps in what is a new football environment.

This is no more than further testing the club's capacity and capability to test our Covid 19 Security measures against a backdrop public protection and disease control guidance.

**To this end Ross County Football club recommends a further small step going forward and that no more than 600 supporters should be allowed to attend our home fixture against Aberdeen on Saturday 26 September 2020.**

[redacted], RCFC Safety Officer/Covid 19 Officer.