

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

UNAUTHORISED ENTRY TO FOOTBALL MATCHES BILL

Wednesday 8 May 2024

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CLAUSES 1 AND 2 agreed to.
Title amended.
Bill, as amended, to be reported.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 12 May 2024

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair:* DAME MARIA MILLER

† Brennan, Kevin (*Cardiff West*) (Lab)
 Brine, Steve (*Winchester*) (Con)
 † Butler, Dawn (*Brent Central*) (Lab)
 † Crouch, Dame Tracey (*Chatham and Aylesford*)
 (Con)
 † Davison, Dehenna (*Bishop Auckland*) (Con)
 † Dinenage, Dame Caroline (*Gosport*) (Con)
 † Edwards, Jonathan (*Carmarthen East and Dinefwr*)
 (Ind)
 † Efford, Clive (*Eltham*) (Lab)
 † Elliott, Julie (*Sunderland Central*) (Lab)

† Gibson, Peter (*Darlington*) (Con)
 Green, Damian (*Ashford*) (Con)
 Knight, Sir Greg (*East Yorkshire*) (Con)
 Lake, Ben (*Ceredigion*) (PC)
 † Philp, Chris (*Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire*)
 Rees, Christina (*Neath*) (Lab/Co-op)
 † Stevenson, Jane (*Wolverhampton North East*) (Con)
 † Watling, Giles (*Clacton*) (Con)

Chris Watson, Leoni Kurt, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024

[DAME MARIA MILLER *in the Chair*]

Unauthorised Entry to Football Matches Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I have a couple of reminders for Members: please remember to switch electronic devices to silent, and that no food or drink is permitted during the sittings of the Committee, except the water provided. *Hansard* colleagues would, as ever, be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to them. My selection of groupings for today's sitting is available online and in the room. There will be a single debate on both clauses and the amendment.

Clause 1

OFFENCE OF UNAUTHORISED ENTRY TO DESIGNATED
FOOTBALL MATCHES

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to take clause 2 stand part and amendment 1—

Title, line 1, leave out from “football matches” to “for which” in line 2.

This amendment would update the long title to reflect the fact that express provision is not required to enable a football banning order to be imposed following conviction of the new offence.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Maria. Following your guidance, I intend to cover the whole Bill and my proposed amendment to its long title in my remarks. I thank everybody for coming along this morning—let's see if we can make a law.

The Bill is intended to address a real concern that has come up in football, namely the problem of unauthorised entry to football matches. Members of this Committee will be familiar with the Euro 2020 finals, which saw England host the elite men's competition. I do not need to remind hon. Members that the English team got to the final, but lost on penalties; however, the day was also spoilt for many fans and for many watching by the disorderly scenes of people attempting to enter Wembley stadium, which is within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central. It is good to see her here today—to support the Bill, I hope.

Those fans were attempting to enter Wembley stadium without tickets. It is believed that between 3,000 and 5,000 ticketless fans were able to gain entry to Wembley stadium on that occasion using a tactic often known as tailgating, which refers to two people going through the turnstiles on one ticket. Many of those entries were forced on members of the public who held official tickets. If any members of the Committee were actually at the final, they may have witnessed the aggressive

behaviour, disorder and overcrowding that compromised the safety and security of stewards, police officers, spectators, players and officials, and indeed tarnished England's reputation as a host of major sporting events.

I am delighted that England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are due to jointly host the Euro 2028 competition. Clearly, we should do all we can to ensure that such scenes do not reoccur on that occasion. The actions of those who entered the Euro 2020 final without tickets not only were unsettling, but posed a real threat to the safety of thousands of attendees at the match. In the report she was commissioned to write by the English Football Association, Baroness Louise Casey concluded that the events of that day could have resulted in a tragic loss of life. We have seen too many such tragedies at football matches in recent decades caused by inadequate safety regulation and policing for this House not to take legislative action where a further gap in the law is indicated.

In discussing clause 1, I should point out that during my time on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee—I am delighted that so many members of that Committee are present, including the esteemed Chair, the hon. Member for Gosport—we undertook an inquiry into safety at sporting events. I think all members of the Select Committee were surprised to discover that entering or attempting to enter a football match without a ticket is not a specific criminal offence. In our subsequent report into safety at major sporting events, which was published in December 2023, the Committee supported the need for my new Bill to rectify that gap in the law. I am delighted that all the Committee members representing seats in England and Wales, which is the territorial extent of my Bill, co-sponsored the Bill to bring our recommendations to law. I also thank the Government for their support of the Bill.

Clause 1 creates a specific offence of unauthorised entry to designated football matches by inserting the new offence into the Football (Offences) Act 1991. It is aimed at deterring people from attempting to enter stadiums without a valid ticket. A fine of up to £1,000 could be levied, but even more importantly, a conviction for that offence could lead to a court-imposed football banning order, preventing a person from attending football matches for between three and 10 years. That represents a strong deterrent for any football fan.

Allowing the Bill to be applicable on any relevant premises reflects the need for cordons to be established outside the stadium where it is believed necessary. In fact, at Wembley stadium that is a common feature of the way that such matches are organised. The law envisioned under the Bill could then be enforced at such places, even when they are not part of the stadium itself.

The scope of the Bill encompasses the designated matches envisaged in the regulations made under section 1 of the 1991 Act. Currently those are matches in the premier league, the championship, leagues one and two, the national league, the women's super league and championship, and the Cymru premier league, along with international fixtures held in England and Wales. In the case of my own Cardiff West constituency, the Bill would impact matches played at the Cardiff City stadium by Cardiff City football club and the Welsh national team. I should pay tribute to the great atmosphere created at home games by Cardiff City fans and the

club's welcome of away fans, which led to an award from the Premier League when the Bluebirds were in the top flight.

I should also praise the exemplary conduct exhibited by the Welsh supporters of our national team—the wal goch, as they are known in Wales—during home matches, as well as the electric atmosphere that they cultivate through their fervent renditions of anthems such as “Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau” and “Yma o Hyd”. It is to ensure that fans, including young children, are kept safe that my Bill is so important.

On Second Reading the issue was raised of why the measure applies only to football matches, because ticketless entry to venues is a concern for other sporting events, as well as live music and a range of other activities. For example, hon. Members will be aware of the tragedy that occurred at the O2 Brixton Academy in December 2022, where ticketless individuals, combined with poor organisation, might have played a role in two fatalities.

Some Members have suggested that the Bill could be more expansive in its remit. However, that would require much more extensive and lengthy consultation and evidence gathering. We have an opportunity here to amend legislation already on the statute book, with significant football events on the horizon. I think that justifies bringing forward a measure that applies specifically to football. I hope that the Government and Parliament will continue to explore the wider issue of safe entry to events and will support well-evidenced legislation on the matter.

There is only one amendment. It was tabled in my name and would alter the long title of the Bill, reflecting the fact that express provision is not required in the Bill to enable a football banning order to be imposed following conviction for the new offence that the Bill creates. When the long title was originally laid, we were not certain where the best home would be for the new offence of unauthorised entry to football matches.

However, as my Bill utilises the Football (Offences) Act 1991 as the appropriate place for the offence, it means that the courts are already empowered to impose a preventive football banning order against a person convicted of any offence under that Act. As we are inserting an offence into that, we have the amendment for the long title because the Bill does not need to contain a specific provision for the offence to be listed as one for which imposing a football banning order is available following conviction. In other words, that bit of the long title is otiose and can be shortened to reflect the actual effect of the Bill. I hope the Committee will assent to that minor technical change to the long title.

I hope the Committee will support my Bill as amended, acknowledging its significance in safeguarding the interests of football fans, players and the wider community. As I said, it has support across the House, from the cross-party Culture, Media and Sport Committee, from the Government and official Opposition. It has the support of the English Football Association and the Football Association of Wales, and the Football Supporters' Association acknowledge its intent to keep fans safe.

Dame Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward the Bill. I was at the final and was caught in the surge of fans who were trying to rush the gates. It was incredibly scary, even for those of us who have been going to football matches for most of our lives. I was surrounded

by young children who were there to enjoy that incredible opportunity for the England team. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward the legislation, which has cross-party support.

Kevin Brennan: I am extremely grateful for all the work the hon. Member has done on football. I participated on Second Reading of the Football Governance Bill recently. It was an enormous achievement on her part to get the Government to bring forward that Bill. It means a lot to me that she intervened and is here to support the legislation. I thank her for that.

By allowing the Bill to be reported, we can send a resounding message that such conduct as was seen at the Euro 2020 final will not be tolerated, emphasising the importance of ensuring safety and security when attending football matches. The legislation reaffirms our dedication to the wellbeing and integrity of football, and restores our collective duty to tackle the challenges confronting the sport. It upholds the role of the sport as a unifying force in our society. I urge hon. Members to endorse the Bill, including the amendment, thereby contributing to the enhancement, safety and enjoyment of football matches for all.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West on bringing forward this important piece of legislation. It is a small but important Bill, which will hopefully be very effective. We have seen issues around football caused by people who I do not think are football fans, because they bring our national game into disrepute. The behaviour of those people needs to be contained, and the Bill is a step forward in doing that. The danger that those people created, as has been alluded to, when they behaved in the way they did at that European final is completely unacceptable. As I have already said, it drags down the name of our national game. I congratulate my hon. Friend on what he is seeking to achieve.

On the issue of whether the Bill could be applied more widely, the legislation could be seen as a model for other sports to follow. If we get it in place, who is to say that there could not be further legislation that would encompass cricket, or any other sport that is suffering in a similar way from those people who are trying to gain illegal entry to competitions, bring them into disrepute and, in some cases, causing a dangerous situation? The Bill could become an exemplar for other sports to follow. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West for picking up this specific issue and taking it forwards.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West on the Bill. As he said, Wembley stadium is in my patch, and it was an absolute nightmare for all the families that were there and for the police to manage, because it was so unexpected. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing forward the Bill, in the hope that people can go to Wembley stadium with families and enjoy a match without the possibility of that happening again.

Dame Caroline Dinéage (Gosport) (Con): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff West on bringing forward the Bill. It is a timely piece of legislation that could be pivotal in avoiding situations like those we have heard about, which were terrifying for those caught

[*Dame Caroline Dinenage*]

up in them and shone an unpleasant light on what had been a positive and uplifting tournament until that stage.

We know through the work of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that there are a number of issues facing football in the UK and around the world. We have seen the issues facing the stadium in Paris, where French police massively overreacted to British fans. The legislation sends out a really strong message that we care passionately about the safety of fans and the importance of allowing those who have attended matches to enjoy them in a way that is secure and maintains the long-term reputation of the game. I am really keen to put on record my thanks to the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward the Bill.

10.15 am

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Maria. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff West on bringing forward this private Member's Bill and for piloting it through its parliamentary stages with such aplomb and élan. His speech earlier describing the Bill and his amendment to it was comprehensive and accurate, so hon. Members will be relieved to hear that I do not think there is a great deal that I can usefully add to what he said.

All of us, on both sides of the Committee, share deep concern about what happened, particularly around the Euro 2020 finals, but that sort of practice did not just happen there; it is a more widespread problem. The measures in the Bill command the support of the police, the Football Association and the Premier League, so they will be welcomed by all those organisations and by football fans around the country. When football games are disrupted, it spoils the event for law-abiding members of the public going to see their team play, whether it is at Wembley, in Cardiff or anywhere else.

Given that the hon. Member for Cardiff West did such a good job explaining the provisions in the Bill, I do not want to test the Committee's patience or indulgence by repeating what has already been said with such eloquence and flair. The Government fully support the Bill and are grateful to the hon. Member for his

work. We look forward to seeing the Bill on the statute book and helping football fans across England and Wales to enjoy the fantastic national game.

Kevin Brennan: I thank the Minister for his support and his brevity in it, which I am sure is welcomed by everyone on the Committee. It is often said that everything has been said but not everyone has said it yet. However, the Minister broke that rule, which is welcome. I thank all my hon. Friends—they are my hon. Friends, from both sides of the House—for their contributions, and all other members of the Committee for being here. There is nothing else for me to add at this point.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Title

Amendment made: 1, in Title, line 1, leave out from “football matches” to “for which” in line 2.—(*Kevin Brennan.*)

This amendment would update the long title to reflect the fact that express provision is not required to enable a football banning order to be imposed following conviction of the new offence.

Question proposed, That the Chair do report the Bill, as amended, to the House.

Kevin Brennan: May I thank you, Dame Maria, for chairing our proceedings this morning? I once again thank all Committee members for coming along and supporting my Bill; the Clerks in the Public Bill Office; the Home Office officials, who have been extremely helpful; the police and Doorkeepers; and the *Hansard* reporters. Have I forgotten anybody? I am not allowed to refer to people in the Public Gallery. [*Interruption.*] Oh, my mum. Always! I also thank the Football Association and the Football Association of Wales, both of which have been very helpful. I also thank the Football Supporters' Association and members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, who brought forward this recommendation in their report last December.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, accordingly to be reported.

10.19 am

Committee rose.