

Sports rights veteran Kogan in talks to chair Starmer's football watchdog

A media industry veteran who has helped negotiate a string of broadcast rights deals across English football has emerged as the frontrunner to head Sir Keir Starmer's new football watchdog.

Sky News can exclusively reveal that David Kogan, whose boardroom roles have included a directorship at state-owned Channel 4, is now the leading contender to chair the Independent Football Regulator (IFR) following a drawn-out recruitment process.

A Whitehall source said Mr Kogan had been interviewed for the post by a government-appointed selection panel in the last few days.

He was expected to be recommended to the prime minister for the role, although they cautioned that the appointment was not yet guaranteed.

Mr Kogan has had extensive experience at the top of English football, having advised clients including the Premier League, English Football League, Scottish Premier League and UEFA on television rights contracts.

Last year, he acted as the lead negotiator for the Women's Super League and Championship on their latest five-year broadcasting deals with Sky – the immediate parent company of Sky News – and the BBC.

Outside football, he also worked with Premier Rugby, the Six Nations, the NFL on its UK broadcasting deals and the International Olympic Committee in his capacity as chief

executive of, and majority shareholder in, Reel Enterprises.

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Mr Kogan sold that business in 2011 to Wasserman Media Group.

His other current roles include advising the chief executives of CNN, the American broadcast news network, and The New York Times Company on talks with digital platforms about the

growing influence of artificial intelligence on their industries.

Mr Kogan has links to Labour, having in the past donated money to a number of individual parliamentary candidates, chairing LabourList, the independent news site, and writing two books about the party.

One source close to the process to appoint the IFR chair described him as “an obvious choice” for the position.

In recent months, Sky News has disclosed the identities of the shortlisted candidates for the role, with former Aston Villa FC and Liverpool FC chief executive Christian Purslow one of three candidates who made it to a supposedly final group of contenders.

The others were Sanjay Bhandari, who chairs the anti-racism football charity Kick It Out, and Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, who chaired the new parliamentary watchdog established after the MPs expenses scandal.

Sky News revealed last weekend, however, that government officials had resumed contact with applicants who did not make it onto that shortlist for the £130,000-a-year post.

The apparent hiatus in the appointment of the IFR’s inaugural chair threatened to reignite speculation that Sir Keir was seeking to diminish its powers amid a broader clampdown on Britain’s economic watchdogs.

Both 10 Downing Street and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have sought to dismiss those suggestions, with insiders insisting that the IFR will be established largely as originally envisaged.

The creation of the IFR, which will be based in Manchester, is among the principal elements of legislation now progressing through parliament, with Royal Assent expected before the

summer recess.

The Football Governance Bill has completed its journey through the House of Lords and will be introduced in the Commons shortly, according to the DCMS.

The regulator was conceived by the previous Conservative government in the wake of the furore over the failed European Super League project, but has triggered deep unrest in parts of English football.

Steve Parish, the chairman of Premier League side Crystal Palace, told a recent sports industry conference that the watchdog “wants to interfere in all of the things we don’t need them to interfere in and help with none of the things we actually need help with”.

“We have a problem that we’re constantly being told that we’re not a business and [that] we’re part of the fabric of communities,” he is reported to have said.

“At the same time, we’re...being treated to the nth degree like a business.”

Initial interviews for the chair of the new watchdog took place last November, with an earlier recruitment process curtailed by the calling of last year’s general election.

Mr Kogan is said by officials to have originally been sounded out about the IFR chairmanship under the Tory administration.

Lisa Nandy, the culture secretary, will also need to approve the appointment of a preferred candidate, with the chosen individual expected to face a pre-appointment hearing in front of the Commons culture, media and sport select committee as early as next month.

It forms part of a process that represents the most fundamental shake-up in the oversight of English football in the game’s history.

The establishment of the body comes with the top tier of the professional game gripped by civil war, with Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City at the centre of a number of legal cases with the Premier League over its financial dealings.

The Premier League is also keen to agree a long-delayed financial redistribution deal with the EFL before the regulator is formally launched, although there has been little progress towards that in the last year.

The government has dropped a previous stipulation that the IFR should have regard to British foreign and trade policy when determining the appropriateness of a new club owner.

“We do not comment on speculation,” a DCMS spokesperson said when asked about Mr Kogan’s candidacy to chair the football watchdog.

“No appointment has been made and the recruitment process for [IFR] chair is ongoing.”

This weekend, Mr Kogan declined to comment.