MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location	Boardroom, RL HQ, House of Sport, Gate13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF	**Date & Time**	Monday 17th August 2026, 10:30 -13:30
Present	Nigel Wood OBE (NJW), Dermot Power (DP) (online), Lord Jonathan Caine (JC), Emma Rosewarne MBE (ER), Sara Symington (SS), Martin Coyd OBE (MC), Rhodri Jones (RJ),	**Chair**	Nigel Wood OBE
Observers	Jo Drapier (JD), Ed Mallaburn (EM) (online)		
In attendance	Robert Hicks (RH) agenda items 5.0 & 8.0), Alison O'Brien (AO) (Meeting Secretary)		
Apologies			

Item No		Agenda Item	Who
1.0		**WELCOME & APOLOGIES** NJW welcomed attendees and noted full meeting attendance with no apologies received.	
2.0		**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** NJW invited declarations of interest. No new declarations were made beyond those already recorded.	
3.0		**MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING AND ACTION TRACKER** The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 July 2026 were reviewed. SS asked about whether the New Zealand Test Series related to the men's or both the men's and women's teams. RJ confirmed that, at that moment, the fixture was likely to be men's only, subject to further discussion. ER asked if there was any way of linking that Test Series with the G20 event to be held in Manchester at that time. RJ stated he would investigate. Subject to that clarification, the minutes were accepted as accurate.	**RJ**

		RJ took the Board though a review of selected items from the Action Tracker with NJW commenting that the elevated slide of priorities was helpful. The financial viability of several clubs was discussed.	
		The Board noted the ongoing player development pathway review, covering scholarship, academy, reserves and full-time pathways, and the match review panel review. It was agreed that the Action Tracker should be improved by adding numbering and better prioritisation so that significant, urgent or risk-related items are easier to identify.	**AO**
		AO was invited to provide an update on European Rugby League.	
		ER asked if the Operational Rules included detail on the RFL's policy of zero tolerance of violence against women. RJ stated the Executive would look into that.	**RJ/RH**
		ER asked for an update on the planned investment into concussion spotters. RJ stated the Executive would look into that.	**RH**
		ER asked for an update on the Honours nominations process and timelines. RJ shared that he was working on preparing September/October nominations. He also shared that the RFL had been asked to endorse two nominations from elsewhere which had been done. RJ stated he would share the long list of possible nominations with Board for feedback.	**RJ**
		JD asked if there was any update on the paused Cultural Review following questions from DCMS on this subject to Sport England. ER updated that the RFL Head of People had been consulted and felt it was best to roll this into the staff survey, the output of which was shared with Board in the June meeting. Actions identified had since been prioritised and were underway. MC highlighted the role the Board play in supporting the culture and encouraged Board members to engage with staff whilst in the office.	
		RJ was asked for an update on the RFL President and Vice President process and reported that he had shared a list of potential candidates with NJW which he would share with the full Board. NJW reiterated the need to formalise the process for oversight.	**RJ**
		JD asked for an update on company secretary arrangements and RJ stated that there were ongoing conversations regarding the appointment of a new company secretary whilst provision remained in place to ensure duties are covered.	
4.0		**MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES** JD shared that the Sport England transition investment process is open and that it is light-touch for the 2027-2028 financial year. It was confirmed an email from Sport England was with RJ and Marc Lovering and had been acknowledged. NJW confirmed that other matters arising would be addressed through the agenda where relevant.	
5.0		**CLUB & COMPETITION MATTERS**	

	5.1	RJ introduced representatives of Huddersfield Giants, Ralph Rimmer, Richard Thewlis and Andy Hobson, who joined the meeting to present the club's proposed development strategy and home ground plans for the 2027 season and beyond, including the proposed move to Dewsbury. Ralph Rimmer provided background on the current stadium ownership position, the departure from the Huddersfield stadium site, and the absence of viable alternative sites within Huddersfield. The Dewsbury option was presented as a time-sensitive opportunity to provide a more suitable matchday environment, improved atmosphere and future development potential. Andy Hobson outlined the proposed brand and marketing strategy under the theme “One Giant Future”. The Board was shown plans for a revised identity campaign, fan retention and acquisition activity, community engagement, season ticket strategy, travel arrangements, and proposed stadium refurbishment and development. The presentation included plans for refurbishing existing areas at Dewsbury, developing a new stand, increasing capacity, improving broadcast facilities, and supporting the club's longer-term sustainability through use of the wider site. The Board asked questions regarding capacity, planning permission, broadcast logistics, construction timelines, funding, family support for the project, potential overruns, implications for grading, fixture scheduling with Dewsbury and other clubs, fan reaction, and whether the proposal should be regarded as temporary or potentially longer term. The Board noted that approval of the proposed move is a matter for the RFL Board under the applicable regulatory framework. The Executive were asked to prepare a paper for the September Board meeting, setting out the proposal, regulatory considerations, pros and cons, club views where relevant, grading implications, risks, and a recommendation.	**RJ/RH /AO**
	5.2	Robert Hicks joined the meeting, and the Board received an update on the Featherstone Rovers administration process, interested consortia, land ownership issues and engagement with Wakefield Council. RJ provided an update on North Wales Crusaders, and the Board considered the club's temporary licence position, proposed renaming to Wales Crusaders, and plans to relocate or reintegrate into South Wales. Executive to provide a recommendation to the Board at the next meeting.	**RJ/RH**
	5.3	The Board received an update on the proposed change of name from Midlands Hurricanes back to Birmingham Hurricanes. The proposal was regarded as straightforward and uncontroversial, and Board sign-off was agreed unanimously.	
	5.4	The Board received an update on the proposed Championship reset, including work on salary cap, distribution, competition structure, league format, 1895 cup format and branding. A proposed structure of two conferences, with East and West divisions and a cross-conference cup format, was discussed. The aim would be to provide a balanced number of home and away fixtures and retain meaningful end-of-season opportunities for more clubs. The Board noted that the structure depends on the final number of clubs, with an even number required. Raised by ER the Board also discussed the risk of perceived imbalance between conferences and the need to	**RJ/RH**

		consult clubs before finalising the model. LC asked if the proposed approach was consistent with the output of the club-led strategic review and RH confirmed that it was. The Executive was asked to consult clubs on the proposed Championship structure and continue developing the refreshed competition branding.	
6.0		**RECAPITALISATION & BROADCAST UPDATE** RJ provided an update on negotiations with Sky Sports, discussions with a potential secondary broadcaster, and analysis of a possible SuperLeague+ route. The Board discussed the respective advantages and risks of a secondary broadcaster arrangement and an owned-and-operated SuperLeague+ model. It was agreed that the Executive and advisors will continue parallel analysis of the secondary broadcaster and SuperLeague+ options, including financial modelling, production arrangements, data access, marketing requirements and contractual protections. The Board discussed the initial recapitalisation written offer received from the NRL shortly before the recent club meeting. The Board also discussed a separate potential investment proposal. MC asked what good would look like for us and NJW replied that there was an expectation that the Board would positively embrace any opportunity with the intention to strengthen the British game. The Executive, supported by Deloitte, will prepare a response framework to the NRL offer, continue engagement with clubs, advance work on the alternative investment proposal, and ensure that any proposed transaction is assessed against valuation, governance, control, legacy, growth and sustainability criteria. The Executive was asked to continue analysis of secondary broadcaster and SuperLeague+ options, including financial, production, data and marketing considerations.	**RJ/RH**
7.0		**BIG OFFER** The Board received an update on the work previously referred to as the “Big Ask” and now framed as the “Big Offer”. Deloitte will support the public affairs and government engagement work, with AO taking a RFL lead officer role. The proposed framework includes themes around communities, participation, facilities, community hubs, major events, legacy and Rugby League World Cup 2030. The target is to develop a high-level offer by mid-September, ahead of the Labour Party Conference and the MPs' Rugby League fixture at Hill Dickinson Stadium on 28 September 2026. The Board discussed the potential international calendar, including New Zealand and Australia fixtures, a possible Pacific tour, and the opportunity to position a 2030	

		Rugby League World Cup bid as part of a wider government and international relations proposition. LC confirmed the sporting event bill included reference to the Rugby League World Cup. The Executive was asked to continue developing the Big Offer with Deloitte, prepare briefing material for key stakeholders including DCMS engagement, and incorporate relevant government policy references and major event funding opportunities.	**AO**
8.0		**LAWS & INNOVATION** Robert Hicks joined the meeting, and the Board discussed proposed work on laws and innovation, noting that any future relationship with investors or the NRL could influence on-field and off-field product development. The Board discussed options around card sanctions, the need to involve commercial and marketing expertise while avoiding gimmicks, and the importance of protecting the integrity of the sport. There was detailed discussion of head injury risk, academy tackle height enforcement, referee education, women's and academy game exposure, injury rates, strength and conditioning, pitch quality, player welfare, and the possible future role of a players' association. The Board emphasised the need to act positively and quickly where safety trends are identified. ER asked that detail be shared on how the S&C programme would be integrated and for the list of S&C qualifications to be updated. RH confirmed further law and innovation proposals will be developed with appropriate input from commercial, competitions, medical, coaching, refereeing and player stakeholders, with decisions likely required by October or November 2026 if changes are to apply for the following season.	**RH** **RH**
9.0	 9.1 9.2 9.3 9.4	**ADDITIONAL REPORTS** The Board noted the Management Accounts had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The position was described as tracking broadly in line with previous months, with work continuing to address variances before year end. JD confirmed that the Sport England payment was expected to have landed last Friday and the Board thanked her for her support in this matter. The Board reviewed the proposed Rugby League Cares agreement, including counselling provision. RJ thanked SS and ER for their support in the process. RJ will take the agreement away for further consideration before bringing the matter back to the Board. The Board had no questions on the governance update paper received in advance of the meeting. The Community Game Strategic Advisory Group (CGSAG) Terms of Reference were discussed and approved in principle. MC provided context that the revised structure is intended to provide more appropriate representation across men's, women's, children	**RJ**

		and young people, education, inclusion, wheelchair, learning disability, physical disability, touch, tag and masters activity.	
	9.5	AO highlighted the need for the use of RFL email accounts for Board business, noting IT policy, GDPR and governance benefits of using the RFL accounts provided. AO stated assistance will be provided to Board members who need support accessing or using their accounts, including arrangements for overseas travel access where necessary. Board can access support at ICTSupport@rfl.co.uk	
10.0		**BOARD SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES** The Board acknowledged that they had received minutes from the Community Game Strategic Advisory Group meeting held on 8 July 2026. The Board discussed the community game, including competition structures, calendar alignment, national and regional formats, the impact of travel, adult male participation, younger participation trends, doorstep fitness, touch and tag growth, and the balance between formal competition and recreational participation. The Board requested that an update on participation including trends by gender, geography, age group, format and comparison with wider team sport participation patterns be made available to be included on a future Board agenda. MC provided feedback from his recent stakeholder engagement sessions that Community Clubs preferred no community games to be scheduled during Magic Weekend. The Executive noted this for fixture planning.	**AO** **RH**
11.0		**RISKS** ER asked whether climate change and related operational impacts were adequately reflected in the risk register. Specific examples included hard pitches, pitch watering restrictions, extreme weather, travel disruption and pitch condition impacts on player safety and competition delivery. RJ reported that sustainability is already captured, but that pitch condition and climate-related operational risk may require more detailed consideration. DP stated that the Audit and Risk Committee will consider pitch management, climate conditions and related sustainability and operational risks at its next meeting.	
12.0		**ANY OTHER BUSINESS** No further substantive items of any other business were raised.	
13.0		**DATE OF NEXT MEETING** Monday 21st September 2026. The Chair thanked attendees and closed the meeting.	