Location	Boardroom, RL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF (Parking in Blue Car Park, M11 2DU)	**Date & Time**	Tuesday 13 January 2026, 10.00hrs till 1400hrs
Present	Nigel Wood OBE (NW), Rob Graham (RG), Martin Coyd OBE (MC), Emma Rosewarne MBE, Dermot Power (DP), Lord Jonathan Caine & Abi Ekoku (AE), Graeme Sarjeant (Acting Company Secretary)	**Chair**	Nigel Wood OBE
Observers In attendance	Jo Drapier & Ed Mallaburn		
Apologies in advance	Joanna Coates & Emma Rosewarne		

Item No		Minutes	Who
1.0		**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES** Nigel Wood OBE nominated and appointed chair for meeting. Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies received from Joanna Coates & Emma Rosewarne	
2.0		**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** No new declarations	
3.0		**MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER**	
	3.1	**Minutes** Minutes from meeting held on 19 November 2026 approved as accurate record.	**AE**
	3.2.	Action Tracker from – 19 November 2025 meeting	
4.0.		**MATTERS ARISING** Progress against the action tracker noted and updates provided on the following: • Board discussed need to strengthen 'fit and proper person' criteria in light of recent issues.GS advised that information obtained from the new football regulator may be helpful in this regard. • Board acknowledged the need for a subcommittee to sign off on disciplinary and operational rule changes before the season under delegated authority due to time constraints. Sub-committee will address specific operational and disciplinary rule changes, some of which originated from the strategic working group, ensuring that only relevant experts are involved in the detailed review. • Board discussed status of grading documentation for clubs, it was confirmed that updated grading documents would be available by the end of January, with	

		communication to Clubs ongoing and grading meeting planned to address any outstanding issues. • As several clubs had expressed uncertainty about the requirements for achieving grading scores, Board requested clearer communication in this area in the future.	
	4.2	• Board reviewed recent insolvency events and the processes for club readmission. • AE described the process undertaken for Salford readmission - incl. local authority engagement and support for Club stadium use arrangements. The result, selection of a new club with 'clean hands' and no association with previous governance and financial failures. • Board discussed the rationale for not imposing a points deduction on Salford. AE justified this, citing the creation of a new company with no connection to the old, late recruitment and the non-distribution of central funds as sufficient sanction. • NW raised concerns about consistency with past practice, however Board agreed that RFL insolvency policy allowed for case-by-case discretion. It was requested that any future deviations from precedent should be communicated to NEDs. • AE re-confirmed reason for rejection of Featherstone Rovers membership application – i.e.: due to insufficient separation from the old company and failure to meet governance standards. This was stated as a clear distinguishing factor from the Salford situation. • Board considered options for compensating clubs affected by lost fixtures due to Featherstone's absence, including financial compensation and/or the creation of replacement fixtures - to maintain competition integrity by ensuring all clubs would play the same number of fixtures. • A proposal whereby Featherstone's fixtures were replaced with alternate matchups (originating via a proposal from League Express' Martyn Sadler) ensuring each club maintains its expected number of home and away games, with the aim of preserving revenue and competitive balance was considered. • Board acknowledged logistical challenges, such as stadium availability and scheduling, and agreed that flexibility and consultation with Clubs would be necessary to implement a new fixture list incorporating these matches. • It was agreed that Executive should communicate proposed fixture changes to clubs, seek feedback and clarify Board authority to enforce new fixture schedule if necessary. • Alternative solutions, such as financial compensation for lost fixtures, were considered but ultimately the Board leaned towards the fixture replacement approach as the preferred method to maintain competition integrity. • RG outlined 2026 budget, including in relation to key assumptions, cost savings, the approval process, and internal controls for significant expenditures.	

4.3	• Board agreed to proceed with the break-even budget citing cost savings in insurance, staff costs, and operational efficiencies, with the budget reflecting updated commercial income and revised community game projections. • Budget had been previously reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee, with final approval sought from the Board. • Executive authorisation limit for expenditure was questioned in relation to Hawkeye commitment for head injury tracking, with confirmation provided that spend items over £100,000 required Board approval. • Community Game and Membership Fees - budget included assumptions on community game membership fee increases and associated hardship provisions, with Board emphasising the need to demonstrate value to participants – especially due NCRL alignments in 2026.	
4.4	• Board debated draft proposals to simplify the salary cap. These included improving real-time monitoring, and aligning cap levels with actual club spending, with a view to consulting clubs before the next season. • It was agreed that any changes to the salary cap system would require thorough consultation with Super League clubs, recognising the diversity of club positions and the need for consensus. • Discussion highlighted the increasing gap between central distributions and actual player spending, with concerns about owner fatigue and need for cap level to assist long term sustainability plans for clubs. • Board discussed how salary cap reform might link with broader strategies for player development and domestic player quotas - noting the need for careful modelling and communication to avoid unintended consequences.	
4.5	• DP addressed ongoing governance issues, including allegations of bias in disputes, the handling of disciplinary and safeguarding matters. • RFL response confirmed that all communications and investigations on matters raised by Wigan RL were documented and that the absolute independence of Board would be maintained in the review of all matters. • Board committed to providing timely responses to club concerns, ensuring that all correspondence is properly documented and that clubs are kept informed of the outcomes of investigations.	
6.1	• Board discussed ongoing negotiations with Rugby League Cares (“RLC”) regarding the 2026 funding contribution. It was acknowledged that there was a need to clarify service expectations for the budget and to contemplate the introduction of recipient contributions or player registration levies for future years – 2027 implementation targeted. • Board debated whether services should be limited to on-field personnel only (men, women, wheelchair players, and match officials) and discussed need for data on past spending to inform decisions.	

- Board resolved to communicate clearly to RL Cares the exact funding available for 2026, and to convene a meeting with all stakeholders to finalise the agreed service list and funding agreement.

6.2

- England RL/International - Board reviewed post-Ashes report and considered recommendation of sub-committee to replace Shaun Wane (“SW”) as England head coach. Agreement on need for a new direction was unanimous.
- Given the 2026 international calendar, Board determined there was no immediate need for a permanent (full-time) head coach. It was agreed that any appointment would be specific to the “World Cup period” only.
- Paul Anderson and the performance team would be tasked with handling all England RL planning and logistics for the men’s team in the meantime.
- Board were advised of estimated cost to ending SW’s contract and discussed the importance of managing the communication of the decision - including informing SW, his staff, and the wider organisation in a coordinated manner.
- Board noted that several candidates had already expressed interest in the England role, and that a formal shortlisting process would focus on a short-term appointment for the World Cup.

6.3

- Board discussed the ongoing dispute with the IRL regarding financial liabilities from the 2021 World Cup.
- The Board reviewed the IRL's claim for a deficit payment related to the 2021 World Cup and reaffirmed belief that the RFL has no legal responsibility for the debt. The Board further agreed to make a substantial part-payment of the Ashes levy to the IRL as a gesture of good faith while awaiting a formal participation agreement in relation to the World Cup.
- Board further discussed the loss of RFL representation on the IRL Board due to constitutional changes and debated whether to pursue reappointment or remain outside until a more conciliatory environment and relationship is established.

6.4

- The Board received an update on ongoing HR cases, including in relation to staff on statutory sick leave, the use of HR consultancy services and resolution of a case – via discretionary payment, covered by AXA insurance, and including standard settlement terms such as non-disclosure.
- One staff member had returned to work following statutory sick leave. Staff in other cases remain on statutory sick leave, with processes ongoing and managed by the HR consultancy.
- Board agreed to continue using the current HR consultancy as the main HR function until the situation stabilises and further decisions can be made.
- Club Stadium Standards and Testimonial Protocols: The Board discussed economic pressures on clubs regarding stadium standards, recent decisions on temporary seating.
- Board agreed to uphold minimum stadium standards for league and cup matches, allowing temporary seating solutions in some cases but stressed a desire to reject requests that devalue competition integrity.

	AOB	• Board reviewed the criteria for player testimonials, confirming the process and the need for Board sign-off, with tax implications noted. • Board received an update on the recruitment process for the new chair and non-executive directors, including the role of the interview panel, conflict of interest management and timeline for appointments. • DP revealed there had been nine applications for chair and sixteen for non-executive director received, with shortlisting and interviews scheduled for late January. Shortlisting and interview panels to include representatives from inside and outside rugby league. • Process must ensure that current non-executive directors applying for roles are assessed independently, with interview panel making recommendations to the Board and Council. • Board discussed the importance of transparency and regular updates on the recruitment process. • Community Board and Strategic Alignment: MC updated the Board on recent progress in aligning the Community Board with the RFL, aiming for greater volunteer engagement and strategic ownership. • Board agreed there was a need to shift the Community Board from a passive role to more of an active partnership with RFL staff increasing workforce energy and involvement. • Board acknowledged that alignment is intended to enhance commercial opportunities and provide a unified oversight across all levels of the game. • Board were informed that medical standards for the upcoming Super League season have been approved, with interim administrative arrangements in place and plans to recruit additional support as needed. • Board noted positive feedback on medical relationship management with clubs, with ongoing evaluation of technology support resulting from staff feedback. • Board discussed the need to update the Articles of Association following recent AGM decisions and planned organisational realignment after strategic review feedback is received. • Board reviewed the recent Challenge Cup draw process, addressing questions about timing, media coverage, and the decision to stream future draws for greater visibility. • Board considered whether to delay the draw due to postponed games but decided against it, ensuring the process remained transparent and timely. • It was noted that the draw was broadcast live via social media, with plans to stream future rounds for increased accessibility, balancing visibility with logistical considerations.	
8.0.		**There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.30**	