

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY BOARD MEETINGS
HELD AT RFL NORTH WEST OFFICES ON 25 MAY 2016 AT 10.30AM
Present:

Clare Morrow	Chairwoman
Neil Ashton	English Schools Rugby Leagues
Pat Crawshaw	University and Colleges Rugby Leagues
Trevor Hunt	Tier 4 Leagues Representative
Stuart Sheard	Tier 5 and 6 Adult Leagues Representative
Jan Robinson	Tier 5 Youth & Junior Leagues Representative
Sue Taylor	BARLA
Fit Lt Damian Clayton MBE	GB Armed Forces Rugby League
Fred Baker	Independent Member
Nigel Wood	RFL Chief Executive Officer

Apologies:

Peter Moran	Independent Member
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In Attendance:

Jonathan Roberts	RFL Director of Performance and Development
David Butler	RFL Head of Community Department Delivery
Kelly Barrett	RFL Head of Operations
Julia Lee (Part)	Project Consultant
Emileigh Clifford (Minutes)	RFL Performance and Development Officer

ITEM
ACTION
1.0 WELCOME, APOLOGIES & INTRODUCTIONS

Ms Morrow welcomed everyone, and explained the focus on the Sport England strategy at this meeting. Ms Morrow also advised that papers should be read prior to the meetings, allowing more time for discussion.

Mr Baker asked how best to deal with questions on the paper, as many Board members could have the same ones. Ms Morrow suggested that these questions be directed to the author of the paper prior to the meeting for discussion.

2.0 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record. Mr Baker asked when these minutes would be appearing on the RFL website. Discussion followed with consideration given to confidentiality where contentious issues are discussed. It was agreed the aim should be to provide accurate, approved minutes. If needed, a summary note should be posted until the final full version is approved. Ms Morrow requested that the minutes of the meeting are publicised at an appropriate time and format to ensure that any confidential or potentially contentious issues could be discussed in full.

JR

3.0 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Receive the action tracker and note the actions taken to resolve the matters arising

Ms Morrow asked the Board why Action 18 was a long term action. Mr Wood explained that this action could not be completed within this year. Ms Morrow suggested that a date of next year be put against this action and that other long term actions had a Board meeting date attached so they did not look open-ended. This was agreed. All agreed complete items should be removed from the tracker.

Ms Taylor gave a verbal update on Action 1. Ms Taylor informed the Board that she had taken the issue to a BARLA meeting, where 'funding at risk' was discussed. Ms Taylor continued that books could be disclosed in the incidence of a concern or a complaint. However, the district leagues are not acknowledged by the RFL, so some concern had arisen over the RFL's interests in these finances. Ms Taylor added that a constitution needs to be written to cover this, but that it would not account for district leagues not associated with BARLA. Furthermore, it is important to account for finances in the eventuality that a league might fold. Ms Taylor informed the Board that this was in place for playing leagues, but not necessarily for district leagues (not necessarily members of BARLA). Ms Taylor also added that trustees had been established should BARLA collapse, thus protecting them financially.

Ms Morrow said that every eventuality must be accounted for, as a principle of governance. Mr Wood reminded the Board that at the moment the scale of this particular problem is unknown, but that it appears to be an issue with money going in, and another issue with money going out. Ms Morrow suggested that Ms Taylor write to leagues and guide in terms of an appropriate constitution. Furthermore, Ms Crawshaw asked that financial statements be requested, as this has not happened before.

4.0 STANDING REPORTS

4.1 Community delivery

The paper was taken as read. Ms Morrow reported to the Board that Mr Butler would include a brief report of the Sport England de-commissioned funding projects (local pilots set up with RL Cares and funded directly by SE) in his report going forward.

Ms Crawshaw asked whether the dispensation described in paragraph 8.2 would continue for an additional year. Mr Butler informed the Board that this had been agreed for an additional year, and that in this time the RFL would work with the league to review activity and form recommendations for the 2018 season. Mr Butler continued that this would need to be communicated to the North West Counties League as it had only been discussed internally earlier this week.

Mr Sheard asked for training for Match Officials to be included on the completion of disciplinary report forms. This was agreed. Mr Butler to raise with the Match Officials department.

Mr Baker asked whether the Match Official data had previously been collected. Mr Butler replied that it had previously been collected for one region, but that this was the first time it has been collected nationally. Mr Butler explained that the discrepancy between the course completion rates and the number of first games officiated was due to an inappropriate level of starting game in some areas. There are plans to address this.

Mr Hunt asked what the scale was surrounding the increase of 192 in paragraph 6.4. Mr Roberts agreed that percentages would be included in all numerical comparisons in future.

Mr Butler presented information re: distribution of decommissioned Sport England funding into pilot projects and the appointment of consultant, Chris Rankin-Wright, to monitor the projects with RL Cares using Upshot system (as with Sky Try). It was explained that the funding aimed to increase participation, but that long term sustainability would be difficult to monitor due to the short term nature of the funding.

4.2 Player Development

The paper was taken as read. Mr Roberts informed the Board that a complaint had been received regarding the Leeds Rhinos Foundation Under 13 programme. Mr Roberts continued that the club had been engaged in conversation over this. Furthermore, it was noted that a pragmatic approach in dealing with this was vital in maintaining the agreed standards for player development. Ms Crawshaw explained that community clubs had expressed to her their concern that there were often organised training sessions at the same time as other training sessions, and that this could have an impact on the community game and participation. Mr Wood reminded the Board that Leeds Rhinos believed that this was a positive for the game. Therefore, a discussion should be engaged before sanctions.

JR

Mr Hunt expressed concern over the coherence of Professional Club and community club objectives. Mr Roberts informed the Board that Rugby League is the only sport which restricts the running of talent systems because the number of players for the sport is relatively small. Mr Roberts continued that compliance to the policy review is stressed to Professional Clubs, and encouraged their collaboration on player development. The aim is to ensure the professional clubs do not go back to setting up talent squads from U9 and to ensure that they work with the community clubs.

Jan Robinson explained that concerns had been raised over the scholarship compensation scheme. Mr Roberts answered that the compensation system had been designed to be fair, and to encourage clubs to support community clubs and players within their area. It aims to reward those who retain and develop the players within their systems, and in the community environment. Mr Roberts stated the system was being monitored and that the explanation of the system would be produced and communicated.

4.3 Operations

The paper was taken as read. Ms Barrett informed the Board that the North West Leagues felt that amendments to the Operational Rules were needed, but this had not been raised within the consultation period. Ms Barrett also explained that leagues were misunderstanding Arbitration. Furthermore, the Gambling Policy has been accepted, and will require education.

Ms Morrow continued that the Operational Rules had been agreed, and were open to suggestions throughout the consultation process. Ms Morrow also suggested that a direct approach of asking the Leagues specifically what changes they would like to see would be productive. Jan Robinson also requested that the Leagues be reminded of the formal process for feedback. Ms Crawshaw suggested that the full Operational Rules may be too big for clubs to fully digest.

Mr Baker asked re: feedback process for the Operational Rules. The Board agreed that, although both clubs and leagues were asked, leagues should facilitate the feedback from the clubs.

Mr Hunt asked how the Gambling Policy should be regulated. It was felt a league committee would have difficulty doing this themselves. Ms Barrett replied that the Compliance and Legal Department at the RFL could investigate if complaints were received. Ms Barrett also continued that a streamlined version of the policy would be distributed. FL Clayton suggested that implementation would be similar to that of the Anti-Doping Policy. It was agreed that new posters and material would be needed.

Ms Morrow asked the Board to complete their conflict of interest forms.

4.4 Marketing and Communications

Ms Gray apologised for the late circulation of her paper. Ms Gray informed the Board that she would be discussing communications with the Board members individually to gain understanding of the different voices needed. Ms Gray continued that Headcase materials (Concussion) are both on the website, and being distributed to clubs. Ms Gray updated on the latest submissions to government agencies.

Ms Morrow commented that some stakeholders may not be digitally inclined, and asked whether provision could be made for them in communications. Mr Sheard suggested that the FortyTwenty is a receptive publication, and that contacts at the Rugby League Express could be used more productively. Ms Gray replied that news is being fed to these publications iteratively. It was agreed to have a communications champion for the community game who could feed articles into these publications.

FL Clayton asked whether a response on fan forums might be useful when inaccuracies are found. Mr Wood expressed concern over this method, as it difficult to manage when a response is not given to a comment. Ms Morrow replied that the best method is to continue to publish stories in house that are accurate and attractive.

Mr Baker suggested that the education of the next generation may be the most productive approach; ensuring players are aware of their impact on the game's profile. Ms Gray agreed, reminding the Board that the RFL wants to be considered as a broadcaster in its own right. Mr Hunt agreed, and suggested that the RFL's publication of good articles would mean they are picked up by the appropriate publications.

Mr Ashton suggested more activity was required on the RFL main Twitter accounts during key events. Ms Morrow agreed and requested the development of an approach to continue to improve and develop communication in the organisation.

4.5 Calendar

Ms Morrow requested earlier communication and invitations for key calendar events to support the Board members that wished to attend. Mr Butler agreed to send a "save the date" message for the agreed focus events.

5.0 RFL COMMUNITY STRATEGY

5.1 Receive an update on the new Sport England strategy

Mr Roberts delivered his presentation to the Board.

5.2 To consider the Community Strategy and discuss the prioritisation

It was explained that the Sport England focus would be mainly on inactive people. Mr Roberts continued that there was a need to be clear on the Community Strategy priorities and to link this to Sport England objectives. Furthermore, it appears that the strategy presents challenges for traditional team sports, and other delivery partners will be key in implementation. In response to Mr Baker's question, Mr Roberts agreed that Rugby League Cares may act as a partner, and the pilot projects could inform future delivery.

Ms Morrow asked whether the Sport England strategy would give the RFL an option of catalysing engagement in sports outside of Rugby League. Mr Wood agreed that the Sport England strategy appears to lend mostly to standalone sports. Mr Roberts agreed and noted that Governing Bodies are referenced very little in the document, suggesting that the role of the Governing Body would be primarily that of maintaining core activity and working through partnerships with schools, colleges, clubs, foundations and other delivery partners such as County Sport Partnerships.

Mr Roberts explained that sports including the RFL will receive a reduction in funding and that there will be the need for a transition period during which the RFL will need to improve efficiency and prioritise funding. It was also noted that all funding partners will need to meet the governance charter code to access the Sport England funding. Mr Roberts explained that it was his understanding that other agencies will be able to seek funding and the RFL may be able to work with other partners in the sport to facilitate funding bids to support Rugby League.

Jan Robinson suggested that there were programmes and opportunities already ongoing that may fit this framework.

Ms Morrow agreed, and reminded the Board that projects had already been established in conjunction with dance groups, for example. Jan Robinson continued and asked how mental wellbeing could factor in such projects.

Mr Roberts suggested to the Board that the focus would need to be on participation, retention and growth through targeted delivery. Ms Morrow agreed, but also expressed concern at the focus being too narrow, and that it was important to articulate a wider opportunity. Clarification on the Sport England split of funding was provided.

Ms Crawshaw suggested that mental health and wellbeing for women and girls could be featured. Mr Wood reminded the Board that the numbers playing were very small, and asked if this would be the most efficient investment of money.

Mr Sheard suggested a more flexible approach to games to prevent the drop-off for men's Rugby in the early 20s. Mr Roberts noted that these were already participants, so this approach was not likely to be supported by Sport England. Ms Morrow then asked whether it would be possible to target the drop-offs in the Open Age Game. Mr Roberts noted that this could spread the funding too thinly over a range of areas but would be part of the discussion on retention.

Discussion took place on school sport. Mr Ashton suggested that there were many constraints on schools in developing sport – including curriculum and competition between sports. Mr Ashton continued that for feasibility, an attractive and different offer was required.

FL Clayton agreed that a focus on Match Officials and women and girls' involvement was important alongside the wider game.

Mr Roberts suggested that the RFL should continue to focus on its strengths – with targeted pilot work in geographic areas. The Board agreed that central communications, digitisation and reduced bureaucracy would cut core costs. Ms Morrow suggested that the best strategy would be to invest the money better, rather than force alignment with Sport England.

Mr Roberts delivered a second presentation to the Board regarding the Community Strategy delivery and the key priority for the game in addressing player retention. Across ages this equated to 13500 registered players (2014 to 2015). Mr Butler informed the Board that in some leagues there are more 16-year-old players in open age than in the youth age groups. This would need further investigation. Mr Hunt asked whether the drop-off included players turning to professional contracts. Mr Roberts replied that it does, but that this is a small proportion drop off occurred at all ages from 6-18 years and that this was different for different areas on the county.

It was suggested that NCL clubs may be best target for growth investment. Mr Roberts suggested that the clubs should be engaged in discussion regarding their issues and opportunities.

Mr Sheard asked about retention of University leavers within the sport.. Mr Roberts responded that this could be an area of interest, but that the distribution of clubs and their relative standards nationally may cause some difficulty. This may not, therefore, be the priority but will be considered.

Ms Morrow asked that additional questions be directed to Mr Roberts. Mr Roberts informed the Board that he will be setting up a schools working group, and that he will feedback into a future meeting.

5.3 Update on progress on the development on the female strategy

This Agenda item was discussed during Agenda item 8.0, Any Other Business.

6.0 COMMUNITY INTERNATIONAL AND REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAMME

6.1 Provide information on the Community International and Representative programme for discussion

The paper was received by the Board. Mr Butler stated that the purpose was to illustrate the whole international and representative programme and highlight the investment.

Mr Hunt expressed concern over tours funding by Tier 4 and 5 clubs. It was explained that a significant sum of money had been spent on international tours this year, and that this was taking away vial support from the community game. Furthermore, the majority of these players came from the same groups of clubs, impacting some clubs more than others. Mr Hunt suggested that open age tours should revert to every four years, as the number of tours asking for funding is not sustainable and this could increase the prestige; also whether from RLIF may be possible.

Mr Wood explained that there was no compulsion for a player or club to go on tour, and that it was important to make the distinction between touring as a representative honour, and for social and cultural reasons.

FL Clayton explained that the Lionhearts ask players to fund the tours themselves, which Mr Sheard concurred with, and asked whether it may be a historical issue for NCL teams, rather than an obligation. FL Clayton also asked whether it was still the case that there are two selections per club.

Mr Hunt advised that FL Clayton was correct. However, two players at several age groups has a broader impact on the club. Mr Hunt continued that the funding was still being taken away from the community game whether it came from clubs or players. Mr Sheard informed the Board that Yorkshire Men's League Lionhearts tours are based on players being nominated, and funding the tours themselves. However, Mr Sheard agreed that representative tours were different.

Ms Morrow agreed with Mr Sheard, and reminded the Board that historically open age men's tours were not funded by the RFL as there was an Elite Men's National team. Ms Morrow suggested approaching the RLIF and asking if the tours were of value to developing nations. If this was the case, some funding may be available from this route.

Ms Morrow also suggested that the NCL make it clear to their clubs that they are not obliged to fund their players participation in touring.

Discussion took place regarding the benefits of touring. It was agreed that in some instances the tour is about the experience. However, there are also opportunities to develop other nations this way. Mr Roberts suggested that it may be possible to seek funding from RLEF if the tour could be used to develop other nations. However, Mr Roberts suggested that it may then be an issue for the Community Board International Group.

Mr Wood summarised that it is the decision of the nation whether they play the touring side. However, it should not be down to the clubs to fund these tours and the NCL clubs should not feel the need to fund them. Ms Taylor explained that it was the decision of the club whether they join BARLA (rendering them eligible for BARLA tour selection).

Ms Morrow thanked Mr Butler and said that the discussion would be continued by the Community Board International Group. Ms Morrow highlighted the need for a new tours document to describe the tours, their rules and how they would be funded. Ms Morrow deferred the paper to the Community Board International Group. Mr Butler explained that 2017 would be a fallow year for touring, allowing clarification, and a focus on the Festival of World Cups teams (tours resume in 2018).

7.0 RESPECT

7.1 To receive an update on the progress of the RESPECT campaign

Ms Lee delivered her presentation, agreeing to circulate the touchline rating documents.

Ms Morrow asked who would be policing the campaign, and whether leagues would impose their own sanctions. Ms Lee replied that ultimately this will be self-sanctioned by leagues and clubs. However, the review of Operational Rules will identify anywhere these could be tightened to assist. Ms Lee continued that the definition of a 'healthy' touchline would be up for discussion, and may vary among age groups. Ms Lee introduced an approach to assess the behaviour on the touchline, using a 1-10 rating system (piloted and reviewed). It was noted that there may be cultural and regional differences in the scales, and self-perceptions. Ms Lee agreed, and said that the pilot would allow greater understanding. FL Clayton asked whether the RFL values would be incorporated. Ms Morrow reminded the Board that the RFL values (being reviewed) would underpin this, and that club to club discussions may be important moving forward. Ms Robinson agreed, and said that relativity must be accounted for with the touchline scores.

FL Clayton asked how these issues are dealt with at a professional level. Mr Wood replied that homophobic, racist and sexist comments are dealt with severely.

Mr Sheard asked who would be responsible for challenging the away team's behaviour at a game. Mr Wood explained that it is not realistic to expect a touchline manager to deal with the away team issues. Mr Wood continued that the Match Official could address the coach at a junior level, but stressed that it is not the place of a volunteer to do this. Ms Morrow suggested that social media could support, and Ms Lee explained that a Textline is under consideration.

Ms Lee explained that this would be a large piece of work, and that it may be individual to clubs. It was also noted that often Match Officials may be too tolerant of (some) touchline behaviours. Mr Wood explained that a competition points sanction was most painful for clubs. However, it was recommended that the Match Officials should be a carrier to take this through the clubs. The importance of the home team fans' support was also emphasised.

Mr Hunt suggested that the issue may ultimately be down to a few individuals within the crowd, and this would be the responsibility of the clubs. Ms Lee said that some Sport England funding had gone into positive coach mentoring in Hull, which could support the campaign. The Board also agreed that there was too much challenging of Match Officials. Ms Morrow asked whether a name change would be positive for the relaunch of the project. Ms Lee explained that the project would remain as RESPECT, but that there would be sub-campaigns underneath.

Ms Gray explained that the Lapsed Player Survey research may uncover touchline problems as a reason for drop-off; and suggested it would be positive to share with the clubs the wider impact of touchline behaviour regarding potential sponsorship and stakeholders.

The Board acknowledged the importance of Match Officials in the campaign, however Mr Wood explained that the responsibility should not be entirely theirs. Ms Lee agreed, and expressed concern over expectations on new Match Officials. Ms Crawshaw agreed, and suggested that clubs also need to understand that their behaviour must change.

Mr Baker suggested that it was important a sense of pride in the club was established. Furthermore, appropriate role models at senior levels of the game would be vital. The Board agreed that pride for the clubs would be key. Ms Morrow asked Ms Lee to return and report back after a pilot period.

8.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ms Morrow explained to the Board that a new, expanded strategy was under development around the wider involvement of women and girls in the sport, as players, fans, spectators, staff and volunteers. Spectators and volunteers would also be included. Ms Morrow informed the Board that the new framework strategy (which would include performance and development) would go to the RFL Board once developed, and would be reported to the Community Board. Ms Crawshaw informed the Board that the management of the England Women programme had returned to the Performance section.

Mr Butler asked the Board whether digital or paper resources were preferred. The Board agreed that paper copies would not be provided unless specifically asked for. Ms Morrow asked that all documents are readable on all devices.

FL Clayton asked for an update on the Festival of World Cups. Mr Butler informed the Board that the all four home nations Universities, England and Scotland Wheelchair and the GB Armed Forces team were attending, and the GB Police side had withdrawn, with a fuller update available in July alongside a discussion progress around group travel for the teams. Mr Butler suggested that a deadline of September should be set to make group arrangements for travel and any shipping required. Mr Butler and FL Clayton agreed to progress.

9.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20 July 2016

As there was no further business, the meeting concluded at 3.03pm.