

MINUTES

Community Board Meeting

Location:	Wakefield RLFC Doncaster Road, Wakefield WF1 5EY	Date:	Wednesday 12 th March 2025
		Time:	1.00 pm – 4.00 pm
In Attendance:	Neil Ashton, Fred Baker, Jake Brook, Mark Cordeaux, Steve Curtis, Martin Coyd OBE, Lt Col David Groce MBE, Trevor Hunt, Steve Langrick, Tracey Leung-Fullerton, Nick Leigh, Lee Mitchell. Stuart Prior, Sue Taylor	Chair:	Marc Lovering
RFL Officers in Attendance:	Kelly Barrett, Marc Lovering, Tony Sutton (in part)	Invited Guests:	
Apologies:	Anji Gardner		

Item No.	Agenda Item	Action
1.0	<p>Welcome & Introduction</p> <p>Mr. Lovering welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that due to Ms. Sandy Lindsay MBE resigning from her position, as the RFL Non-Executive Director and Chair of the Community Board, last week, he would assume the role of Chair on an interim basis.</p> <p>The Community Board wanted to formally express their gratitude to Sandy for her time on the Board and her significant contributions to the Community Game, particularly highlighting her role in the introduction of Our League Active and her advocacy for the Community Game at various forums.</p>	
2.0	<p>Minutes of the November meeting</p> <p>There was one amendment made to the minutes at the request of Mr. Hunt regarding the Community Board Terms of Reference, specifically item 4, as detailed below.</p> <p>Mr. Hunt informed the members that he had consulted with Mr. Sutton before the meeting about the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference and their alignment with the articles. Although he disagreed with the proposed changes, he acknowledged that he represented just one voice among many at the table.</p> <p>The minutes from the meeting on November 27, 2024, were then approved as an accurate record.</p>	Ms Barrett
3.0	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>The Action Tracker review was shared with the group. Ms Barrett presented</p>	

	<p>on each action.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Community Board Terms of Reference – KB to be circulated. 2) Game-wide review updates were included in the More than a Sport Report. Further updates will be shared with the Community Board in due course. 3) Entry Fee for Champion Schools. Mr Ashton to speak to Andrea Murray about introducing this into the 2025/26 competition. 4) Our League Active – Armed Forces to be invoiced for their representative teams. Ms Barrett to action. 5) Our League Active – Donations reinvestment opportunities. No feedback was received from any Community Board member. KB to follow up. 6) Player Pathway – An agenda item for the meeting. 	<p>Ms Barrett</p> <p>Mr Ashton</p> <p>Ms Barrett</p> <p>Ms Barrett</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Update from Tony Sutton Mr Sutton, the CEO of the RFL, joined the meeting remotely and provided an update on the postponement of the RFL Council meeting.</p> <p>The RFL confirmed that the four resolutions proposed by members had been passed by proxy, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The removal of RFL Chair Simon Johnson. - The appointment of a Chair for the Implementation Committee. - The Implementation Committee will conduct a review of the sport, with findings to be reported at the next scheduled Council meeting in July 2025. - The Implementation Committee will consist of Club Representatives alongside RFL Board members. <p>The Community Board expressed respect for the rights of professional tier clubs to seek a review. Members agreed that if the review impacts the community game, appropriate representation and input from the community game must be included.</p> <p>Full support was given to Mr Sutton in representing community elements of the sport, with a potential need for further community representation based on the scope of the review.</p> <p>The introduction of an interim RFL Chair raised significant concerns among Community Board members. Assurances were provided that a fully transparent process to appoint a new independent Chair would begin after the three-month review period, ensuring compliance with the Code for Sports Governance. Maintaining this compliance is vital to protect Sport England funding.</p> <p>Mr Sutton then left the meeting.</p> <p>Mr Groce OBE drafted a letter on behalf of the Community Board to be sent to the RFL CEO, the Interim Chair, Mr Hetherington, and Mr Beaumont.</p> <p>The Community Board agreed to send the letter outlining its position.</p>	
<p>5.0</p>	<p>More than a Sport – End of Year Strategy Update</p>	

In advance of the meeting the “More than a Sport” End of Year Review for 2024 had been circulated.

Ms Barrett and Mr Lovering provided an update on the work undertaken by the RFL Development Team throughout 2024. These updates are provided through the ‘More Than a Sport’ Community Rugby League Reports which are produced twice yearly. As was anticipated and reported previously there was marginal growth across the community game in 2024. The Women and Girls’ section of the sport continues to see growth whilst we continue to face challenges with men’s open age.

A summary is detailed below.

- **Participant Growth:** Positive trends in both Youth and Junior. However, male open-age participation continues to decline, prompting targeted interventions including a review of the competition structure.
- **Inclusive Playing Opportunities:** Wheelchair Rugby League participation continues to grow at an impressive rate. As anticipated, changes in Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL) and Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) focusing on more specialised appropriate disabled participants affected the overall numbers of participants. New pathways for women and youth were introduced.
- **Expansion of Social Rugby League:** Formats like Touch, Tag, and Masters Rugby saw growth, with a record 103 teams at the London Tag Fest and new franchises in York and Newcastle.
- **Facilities and Sustainability:** Over £1.7 million was invested in pitch maintenance and improvements. Clubs adapted to economic challenges through innovative partnerships, enhancing financial sustainability.
- **Governance and Volunteer Development:** Volunteer engagement rose by 4.3%, supported by initiatives such as the National Volunteer Awards. Governance enhancements included regional forum updates and competition management improvements.
- **Social Impact:** The "OuRLeague Life" initiative established eight Community Wellbeing Hubs and launched programs to combat youth crime and support employability.
- **Education and Talent Development:** School and university programs expanded, with improvements in league structures and the introduction of the Pathway to Performance (P2P) program for U15 and U16 female players.
- **England Community Lions Success:** The Lions achieved major victories, including the U19 European Championship and a historic winning tour to Perth, with robust player welfare support.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Declining open-age male participation and regional disparities require targeted interventions to sustain engagement.
- Economic pressures and facility accessibility remain challenges, necessitating continued investment and innovation.
- Enhancing competition structures and governance will be crucial in maintaining long-term growth and inclusivity.

Vision for 2025 and Beyond:

The RFL aims to build on 2024’s progress by:

- Reviewing and adapting competition structure and playing calendar to maximise growth.
- Expanding inclusive playing opportunities across all demographics.
- Strengthening governance through enhanced club support and volunteer development.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing community impact through initiatives that tackle inequalities and promote sustainability. <p>The report will be shared with the Community Game this week.</p> <p>There were questions raised on the new Rugby League Charitable Trust. Mr Lovering agreed to provide a further update at the next meeting.</p>	<p>Ms Barrett</p> <p>Mr Lovering</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Talent & Performance Update</p> <p>Mr Lovering presented the current proposals for the male player pathway, within licensed academies, emphasizing the need for a flexible and inclusive approach to support players' potential and address poor behaviours. He highlighted the importance of having multiple entry and exit points within the talent pathway to accommodate late developers and ensure players have opportunities to progress at different stages in their careers.</p> <p>Mr Lovering also discussed the significance of a strong reserves competition to better prepare players for Super League. Furthermore, he shared the initial findings from the more recent data review on the impact of the scholarship program, which indicated better retention rates for players within the pathway compared to those in the community setting. It was suggested that further data be obtained, specifically on retention rates for players at the Under 15 and Under 16 age groups, to enhance the data review.</p> <p>Both Mr Lovering and Mr Mitchell emphasized the need for improved coaching and player development, with a particular focus on upskilling community coaches and ensuring a consistent approach to development across the sport.</p> <p>The next steps involve Mr Lovering presenting to the Head of Youth on the 19th of March. Community Board members have been asked to submit any feedback or views in advance of that meeting.</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>7.0</p>	<p>Competition Structure Review Open Age</p> <p>Due to a substantial portion of the agenda being dedicated to discussions regarding the various resolutions and their outcomes, it was decided to defer the planned discussion on competition structure and pyramid until the next meeting.</p>	
<p>8.0</p>	<p>Meeting Close</p> <p>The meeting closed at 4.00 pm.</p>	