

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY BOARD MEETING
HELD AT CARRWOOD PARK, LEEDS ON TUESDAY 7 MAY 2013****Present:**

Clare Morrow (Chair)	Non-Executive Director, RFL Board
Nigel Wood	Chief Executive Officer RFL
Damian Clayton MBE	Armed Forces
Stuart Prior	BARLA
Fred Baker	Independent Member
Peter Moran	Independent Member
Trevor Hunt	Tier 3 Leagues
John Piercy	Student Rugby League

In Attendance:

Ralph Rimmer	Chief Operating Officer
David Gent	Director of Participation & Strategic Partnerships
Jon Roberts	Director of Performance & Coaching
Matt Birkett	Head of Community Game Programmes
Mark Covell	Head of PR
BJ Mather	Head of Player Development
Dave Rotherham	National Player Development Manager
Michelle Gibson (minutes)	Executive Assistant

Apologies:

Ian Swandzt	English Schools
Martin Coyd	Tier 4 Adult Leagues
Charlie Bray	Tier 4 Youth and Junior Leagues

ITEM**ACTION**

1.0

WELCOME & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, which had been convened specifically to discuss the Policy Review. Apologies from Mr Swandzt, Mr Coyd and Mr Bray were noted.

The Chair advised that other constituent parts of the game were also being consulted on the Policy Review this week. Despite being asked to maintain strict confidentiality, unfortunately details had already been leaked to the media. The Board was asked to ensure all discussions within the meeting remained private and confidential to respect the parts of the game that had yet to receive details on the Review.

2.0

POLICY REVIEW – THE WHOLE SPORT SOLUTION

Further to initial discussion at the previous meeting, Mr Rimmer reminded the Board that the policies to be reviewed were as follows:

- Competition structures and integration
- Super League Licensing and Promotion/Relegation
- Club sustainability and the appropriate level of RFL intervention in club performance

- Youth development and player production systems

Mr Rimmer stressed that the Review was seeking a whole sport solution which would benefit all elements of the game. As such, it was intended to adopt a structure that was player centric and would allow freedom of movement for players between the different tiers of the game.

In addition, it was intended that a fixed proportion of income would be given to every component of the game, to enable everyone to benefit from the sport's commercial agreements.

Mr Rimmer advised that the RFL had employed KPMG to undertake a detailed analysis of the game over the past ten years. Key findings were outlined as follows:

- The top performing Super League clubs had largely remained unchanged over the past ten years, therefore there was little uncertainty of outcome in league positions
- The sport had a core fan base but was not reaching significant numbers of new supporters
- A 12 team Super League may well provide the optimal structure to increase gate receipts and income for its members
- Two bigger clubs in the Championship would improve gate receipts for that league, as demonstrated in previous years when Super League clubs had been relegated.
- Exit costs would need to be considered for any demoted Super League clubs who would suffer financially.

Consequently, a move back to promotion and relegation was considered to be the best model for the sport. Mr Rimmer outlined the four potential options for the competition's structure as follows:

- Option 1 – A 14 team league with a “one up and one down” promotion and relegation system
- Option 2 – A 12 team Super League and 10/12 team Championship with “one up and one down” promotion and relegation
- Option 3 – Two leagues of 10 teams
- Option 4 – A more radical structure of a 12 team Tier One and 12 team Tier Two, which then split into three divisions of eight teams after 11 matches

As Option 4 would clearly require the most radical change to the current structure, this format was discussed in further detail.

Mr Hunt expressed concern that the four Super League clubs to join the middle division of eight teams would be significantly stronger than the other four clubs from the Championship, therefore it was highly likely they would be promoted the following season.

The Chair also noted that the four Super League clubs would have benefitted from an increased distribution at the start of the season. Mr Wood stated that, at present, the difference in the proportion of

income distributed to Super League clubs compared with the Championship was 12-1. This would be reduced to 2-1 under this structure and, overall, would move the top Championship clubs closer to achieving a Super League position and the ability to operate a full-time environment.

Mr Rimmer added that a Salary Cap increase would need to be considered for the Championship clubs in order to make them more competitive. In addition, the Super League clubs had voted to introduce some Financial Sustainability Regulations, requiring any club directors wishing to spend over 50% of a club's revenue on Salary Cap Values to personally guarantee this spend. This was intended to create more stability within the promotion and relegation environment.

Mr Prior asked how these changes would affect regulations concerning dual registration. Mr Rimmer replied that this issue required further consideration but a document containing more detail would be circulated to all constituents in forthcoming weeks.

RR/BS

With respect to the bottom division of eight teams, Mr Rimmer advised that two teams finishing last would be relegated to join the Regional North or Regional South divisions, with each made up of seven teams. It was intended that each team would play each other once home and away with some cross pool games. The winners of each division then had the opportunity to be promoted the following season.

Mr Baker enquired as to the current broadcaster's views. Mr Rimmer replied that some initial consultation with broadcasters had taken place and they were seeking more high quality content; this option would provide 11 conventional rounds, followed by a top division of high intensity games, a second division offering an element of jeopardy with everything to play for and a lower division providing a trophy lift and further jeopardy. It was felt this would provide more excitement for spectators and less mismatches.

Mr Hunt asked how sponsorship of each division would work once two divisions were split into three. Mr Rimmer replied that there could be one sponsor for the whole competition or there could be other ways of achieving sponsorship, however this detail had yet to be resolved.

Mr Hunt enquired whether the four games played each week would be televised and how this would affect attendances and gate receipts. Mr Wood stated that the RFL could be prescriptive as to which matches were televised. Broadcasters would tend to select from the top division of eight teams, however the RFL would try to ensure visibility for the rest of the game. In addition, the research undertaken by KPMG had determined that televising matches did not make a significant difference on attendances.

Mr Moran asked how clubs would sell season tickets without prior knowledge of all the season's fixtures. Mr Rimmer replied that the clubs would be selling supporters a 25 game season of competitive

Rugby League and potentially a trophy at the end of the season.

In terms of the effect on the Community Game, Mr Gent advised there would essentially be no change to the Four Seasons project and the current competition structure. It was hoped to grow the number of teams in tier three South to support the growth of the regional tier two north and south competitions, and enable integration between the two tiers, so a player could move freely without damaging the integrity of the competition.

Mr Wood added that the other element affecting the Community Game would be the reduction in the number of Academies. Mr Baker pointed out that the top clubs running Academies could essentially cherry pick the best players, which would be detrimental to clubs in the middle division.

Mr Hunt felt that currently contracts would restrict a free flow of players between tiers two and three, but dual registration systems would need to beware of Championship clubs demanding their players back on a weekly basis, as Community clubs would inevitably suffer. Therefore, this issue would require further consideration.

RR/BS

Mr Rimmer stated that it was early days in the consultation and, at present, no one knew which would be the preferred model. He added that more detail was still to be worked through and the process was on-going from this point.

3.0 **THE PLAYER PATHWAY SOLUTION**

Further to discussion at the 3 Way Working Group, comprising Super League, Championships and Community Game representatives, Mr Roberts presented proposals for an integrated player pathway (see presentation attached). The key points were noted as follows:

- There would be a reduction in the number of full-time Super League Academies
- Clubs would have the option of a full-time Academy or a part-time alternative through the schools and colleges network with Centres of Excellence
- A club's ability to run an Academy would be separated from its League status
- Clubs running Academies would enter into a six year agreement with an annual audit to ensure a long term commitment from clubs to production of players.

Mr Roberts explained that the reduction in Academies was due to the limited numbers of players being produced and the cost of sustaining a full-time environment, which was proving to be a burden on some clubs. Consequently, the reduced Academy numbers would require quality player development environments at community and schools level.

The rationale and evidence for the RFL's Talent System was presented (see presentation attached).

The Chair stated that the game also had a responsibility to provide playing opportunities for older players (e.g. aged 23) that came through the player development system and were then not signed by professional clubs. Mr Roberts stated that some clubs monitored this very well and helped steer these players back into the playing system. Issues had occurred with players not being initially selected into elite player pathways aged 14 and therefore being left behind at age 17. Mr Roberts stated that the Centre of Excellence concept provided an ideal opportunity for these players.

The Chair left the meeting at 15.10. The remainder of the meeting was chaired by Mr Wood.

It was felt that a group involving Community Game members should be put together to discuss the player development pathway within community environment in further detail.

JR

WO Clayton asked how Community Coaches were being engaged in this process. Mr Rotherham replied that this was covered as part of their CPD programme.

On the subject of Coach Education, Mr Hunt felt the cost of courses was expensive. Mr Roberts stated that the RFL's coaching courses were lower priced than any other governing body. Mr Wood added that the RFL tried to ensure the barriers for entry onto coaching courses were not too onerous but some costs were unavoidable.

Mr Roberts advised that a group had been established, including Mr Mather, Mr Rotherham and Steve McNamara, to review the coaching element of the coaching and player development systems and would report its findings back to the Board at a future meeting.

There was general support from the Board for the direction of travel on the player pathway.

4.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 Disciplinary Issue

Further to the last meeting, Mr Prior and Mr Gent had met to discuss the issue of player banned by Student Rugby League playing in other leagues. Mr Gent agreed to circulate an email to the Board with the agreed action.

DG

4.2 Confidentiality

WO Clayton expressed disappointment that his comments from the presentation at the last meeting had been misrepresented in the press. Mr Rimmer urged all members of the Board to maintain strict confidentiality at all meetings.

4.3 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 24th July 2013.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.25.