

STRATEGIC REVIEW & COMMUNITY GAME UPDATE - 17 FEBRUARY 2026

Dear Community Game Colleagues,

The Community Board and Community Leaders came together on 17 February for a joint meeting focused on the Strategic Review and its implications for the Community Game. This session brought together representatives from across the community leagues alongside members of the Strategic Review Group, including Nigel Wood and Robert Hicks, to ensure that the Community Game is fully engaged in the governance changes and future direction of the sport.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the Review's recommendations in detail, understand the proposed governance realignment, and reflect on the continued implementation of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL) framework. Members also received updates on competitions, volunteers, match officials, and wider development activity across the game.

Strategic Review – Governance and Community Representation

The Board received a detailed introduction to the Strategic Review, including the background to its commissioning, the work of the Review Group, and the intention to create a unified, investable, and sustainable governance model for the whole sport.

The Review reaffirms the importance of the Community Game within the wider structure and proposes changes to RFL Council membership to ensure that the size and scope of the Community Game are properly reflected. Work on this is already underway, led by Ms Barrett, who will bring forward proposals for updated Community Game representation at the March Council meeting.

The Review also confirms that the Community Game Strategy remains strong and should continue to be delivered by RFL staff in partnership with community volunteers and club foundations. This endorsement reflects the progress made across the game and the importance of maintaining a collaborative, locally-led approach.

National Community Rugby League (NCRL)

The meeting received an update on the continued implementation of the NCRL framework. The NCRL Management Group has now been established and will meet shortly. This group brings together leaders from Men's, Women's, Youth, Junior and Primary Rugby League to oversee operational delivery, competition rules, and calendar alignment.

The Community Board will continue to focus on strategic leadership, long-term development, and commercial opportunities, while NCRL will manage day-to-day operations. National League competitions are now formally recognised as Tier 3, with regional leagues designated Tier 4, and updated Terms of Reference and operational rules have been completed to reflect this structure.

Competitions and Calendar

The Board received updates across all playing offers:

- **Youth & Junior:** Over 270 teams have entered the Yorkshire and National Cups, with a restructured format ensuring every age group has access to a meaningful competition. The weather has caused some disruption, but fixtures are progressing well.
- **Open Age (Men's):** 38 teams have entered the National Cup, an increase on previous years, with strong southern participation. This first year focuses on establishing the structure, with future expansion to be considered.
- **Women's:** The Challenge Cup, Challenge Shield, and Supplement Cup are underway, with plans to align these under the National Cup banner next season.

The Board emphasised the importance of ongoing feedback throughout the season to support continuous improvement.

Volunteers, Match Officials, and Behaviour Standards

The Board reaffirmed the importance of supporting and recognising volunteers, with work continuing to strengthen recruitment and retention.

A significant update was provided on match officials, including the introduction of standardised match official payments across the UK from 2026, with enhancements for exceptional travel circumstances.

The Board reiterated the need for firm action against anti-social touchline behaviour to ensure safe, welcoming environments for all participants.

Financial Sustainability and Commercial Development

The meeting discussed the need for long-term financial sustainability across the Community Game. NCRL provides a platform to commercialise the community game as a unified entity, including opportunities for preferred supplier arrangements and increased investment. Sport England has responded positively to the NCRL model, and the next funding cycle will prioritise club support and facilities.

Strategic Partnership with the Armed Forces

The Board received an update on the new partnership with the Army, Navy, and Air Force, which will provide career pathways for young people, leadership and development opportunities, and support for players transitioning out of academy systems. This partnership will also help connect individuals leaving service with community clubs across the UK.

Closing Remarks

We are encouraged by the work taking place across the Community Game and by the strong alignment between Community Board members, Community Leaders, and RFL colleagues as we move through this period of change. The collective commitment to collaboration, clarity, and continuous improvement remains one of the Community Game's greatest strengths.

As always, the Community Board is here to support you. If you have events planned, need guidance, or would welcome additional support, please get in touch.

Regards

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