

RFL COMMUNITY BOARD SUMMARY – 24 JANUARY 2026

Dear Community Game Colleagues,

We're pleased to share an update following the Community Board meeting held on 24 January, where members came together for a constructive and forward-looking discussion on the key priorities for the Community Game in 2026.

The meeting focused on progress against the Community Strategy, the continued implementation of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL) framework, and the future strategic priorities for the Community Board.

The Board also received an update on participation trends, volunteer support, and governance alignment, with the *More Than A Sport* End of Year Report to be issued shortly, providing further detail on the work undertaken across the Community Game during 2025.

Strengthening Governance and Delivery Through NCRL

The Board received a detailed update on the continued implementation of the NCRL governance structure. This unified approach brings together Men's, Women's, Youth & Junior, and Primary Rugby League under a consistent framework designed to support growth, remove barriers, and ensure high-quality delivery across all regions.

Management Groups are now established across the country, with clear Terms of Reference, aligned competition rules, and strengthened oversight through the NCRL Management Group, which sits as a subgroup of the Community Board. This structure ensures that operational matters are managed locally and consistently, allowing the Community Board to focus on strategic leadership and long-term development.

The Board reaffirmed its support for this direction and welcomed the progress made across all playing offers.

Community Strategy Update

The Board reviewed progress against the Community Strategy, noting continued growth in participation, particularly across Women & Girls and Youth age groups. The update also highlighted the ongoing focus on strengthening club experience, supporting volunteers, and ensuring consistent, development focused governance across all formats.

Open Age male participation, however, remains below pre-pandemic levels, with a reduction of approximately 4,000 players since 2019. This challenge is a key reason why the NCRL framework was created to provide a clearer, more supportive, and better-aligned structure for Open Age Rugby League. The introduction of the new Men's pyramid, with Tier 3 and Tier 4 competitions operating under consistent rules, minimum standards, and shared governance, is designed to strengthen the adult game, improve playing environments, and support clubs to grow and retain players.

The *More Than A Sport* End of Year Report will be published during February and will provide a fuller overview of the work delivered throughout 2025, including participation insight, club development activity, and the wider community impact of the sport.

Standardised Match Official Fees

The Board approved the introduction of a standardised match official fee structure across all affiliated community competitions from the 2026 season. This work ensures fairness, transparency, and consistency for Match Officials, supporting recruitment and retention across the game.

The Board also discussed regional cost pressures, particularly in areas affected by ULEZ, congestion charges, or significant travel distances. It was agreed that these pressures should be monitored throughout implementation, with further consideration to be given if required to ensure competitions remain appropriately supported.

The RFL will publish the updated fee schedule and provide supporting guidance to Competition Management Groups and clubs.

Strategic Priorities for the Community Board

A significant part of the meeting focused on the future role and priorities of the Community Board. Mr Coyd emphasised the importance of the Board playing an active role in shaping the future direction of the Community Game, working collaboratively with RFL staff to support delivery and champion key areas of work.

A long and constructive discussion took place, with Board members expressing a strong desire to contribute their expertise, networks, and insight. Members were thanked for their openness, challenge, and commitment.

It was acknowledged that, in the past, the Board had occasionally drifted into operational matters. These will now be picked up through the NCRL Management Groups, enabling the Community Board to focus on strategic leadership, oversight, and long-term development, the core purpose of the group.

The Board agreed on three strategic priorities for 2026:

1. Participant Growth – including new player recruitment, retention, compliance, playing environments, and facilities
2. Commercial and Revenue Generation – strengthening the sustainability of the Community Game
3. Brand, Media, Marketing, and Events – enhancing visibility, reach, and the quality of community-facing activity

It was agreed that the RFL will develop a collaborative workplan for these priorities, shaped with Board Member input, and bring this back to a future meeting.

Looking Ahead

The meeting reinforced the strength of collaboration across the Community Board and the shared ambition to support and grow the Community Game. The Board's insight, experience, and commitment remain central to driving progress, and we are grateful for the continued support of all members.

The Community Board is here to support you. If you have events planned, need guidance, or would welcome additional support, please get in touch, we are always happy to help.

Regards

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