

RFL COMMUNITY GAME STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP SUMMARY – 9 SEPTEMBER 2026

Dear Community Game Colleagues,

We are pleased to share an update following the latest meeting of the Community Game Strategic Advisory Group (CGSAG).

The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress across the Community Game, consider the future membership and composition of the CGSAG, and discuss a number of important strategic developments around participation, player pathways and future investment.

Community Game Update

Members received an update on activity across the Community Game and the continued implementation of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL).

There was recognition of the progress made during the first year of the new structure and the work taking place across the different areas of the Community Game. The Group also recognised the considerable contribution made by clubs, volunteers, Management Groups and RFL staff in delivering activity across the season.

Whilst there remain challenges, the direction of travel is positive and the focus will continue to be on ensuring the new structures provide greater consistency, alignment and support across the Community Game.

CGSAG Membership and Skills

Following the approval of the revised Terms of Reference, the Group considered the outcome of its first annual Skills and Composition Review.

The review demonstrated significant strength in Community Game knowledge, competition management, governance, strategic thinking, stakeholder engagement, safeguarding, volunteering and participation.

It also identified areas where the Group would benefit from additional expertise and greater diversity of experience, including Women's Rugby League, commercial development and partnerships, marketing and communications, digital innovation and wider independent strategic and business expertise.

The review will now help inform future appointments and succession planning to ensure the CGSAG continues to have the right balance of skills and experience to fulfil its strategic role.

The Group also considered its representation at RFL Council. The five CGSAG representatives attending Council do so on behalf of the CGSAG and the wider Community Game, rather than as individual representatives of particular sectors. Representatives will therefore reflect positions agreed collectively by the CGSAG.

Participation and Sport England

Members received the mid-year More Than a Sport update, with core Community Game participation currently standing at more than 43,000.

The mid-year position provides some cautious optimism, particularly within the Men's Open Age game, where participation is ahead of the same point last year following a period of decline. There continues to be growth across other areas of the game, whilst some challenges remain, particularly around retention and transition through the older boys' age groups.

Members recognised that the mid-year figures provide only part of the picture and agreed that a deeper review of the data will be undertaken at the end of the year. This will look beyond the headline figures to better understand trends across individual age groups, competitions and player retention.

The full More Than a Sport Mid-Year Report will be published towards the end of September and will provide much more detail on the progress being made across the Community Game. Please look out for this when it is released.

The Group also received an important update on future Sport England funding. The anticipated new funding cycle has been replaced by a transition year through to March 2028, which will provide continuity of funding and delivery while the future approach is developed.

The RFL intends to use this period to review how its participation resource and programmes are structured rather than simply continue with the existing model. This will include further consideration of a more place-based approach, bringing together community clubs, Foundations, schools, Active Partnerships and other local partners to better coordinate Rugby League activity within communities.

Further work will take place during the transition year to develop this approach and ensure the Community Game is well positioned for the next Sport England funding cycle.

Talent and Performance Strategy

Mr Lovering provided an update on the emerging Talent and Performance Strategy, including consideration of how the talent pathway impacts the wider Community Game.

A key component of the new strategy will be a reset of the male talent pathway, and new Elite Pathway Licences introduced from 2028.

The Group welcomed the direction of travel and the increased focus on creating a more connected pathway between the Community and the Professional Game.

Commercial and Investment

The Group returned to the important issue of generating greater commercial investment for the Community Game.

Members agreed that there is a significant opportunity to better demonstrate the collective scale, reach and social impact of the Community Game and develop a proposition which can be taken to potential commercial partners.

Rather than considering individual areas of the game in isolation, the intention is to develop an overarching Community Game proposition which demonstrates the breadth of opportunities across clubs, schools, education, alternative formats, match officials and other areas of the sport.

Further work will now take place to develop this proposition, with members of the CGSAG invited to contribute their commercial experience and expertise.

Looking Ahead

The meeting reinforced the importance of the CGSAG continuing its transition into a genuinely strategic forum for the Community Game.

There is considerable work taking place across Rugby League which has the potential to positively influence participation, player development, club sustainability and the experience of everyone involved in the Community Game.

The role of the CGSAG will be to continue providing strategic leadership, advice and challenge, while ensuring that the voice and interests of the Community Game remain central to the wider development of the sport.

Thank you, as always, to the thousands of volunteers, coaches, match officials, administrators and others who continue to give their time to Rugby League.

Regards,

Martin Coyd OBE

Chair Community Game Strategic Advisory Group
RFL Executive Director