



RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location RL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** Wednesday 15th February 2023, 09.00-14.00

Present Simon Johnson, Sandy Lindsay MBE, Rimla Akhtar OBE, Cherrie Daley, Tony Sutton & Robert Hicks **Chair** Simon Johnson

In attendance
 Ed Mallaburn – IMG (observer)
 Helen Soulsby (SRI)
 Sarah Bonner (SRI)
 Alison O’Brien – RFL (in part)
 Dave Rotheram – RFL (in part)
 Marc Lovering – RFL (in part)
 Victoria Sinacola – RFL (in part)
 Michelle Maple (minutes)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that Helen Soulsby and Sarah Bonner from SRI Consulting would be observing the meeting as part of their work with the RFL and RL Commercial boards.</p>	
2.0	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>All declarations previously informed were noted. There were no new declarations of interest.</p>	
3.0	<p>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER</p> <p>3.1 Minutes The minutes from the meeting held on 7th December 2022 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p>	
	<p>Matters Arising The updated action tracker was noted. It was agreed that this would be presented as a ‘clean’ document going forward, with completed items removed.</p> <p>The Board also discussed the following matters arising:</p> <p><u>Special Measures Subcommittee</u> It was agreed that the RFL Chair would chair this committee going forward.</p> <p><u>Council Meetings</u> The Board discussed the format for future Council meetings following the sport’s realignment. It was agreed that a report would be received from the RL Commercial MD</p>	RH

	<p>at the start of each meeting, as well as a report from the RFL CEO, before moving into the business of the meeting.</p> <p><u>RLWC2021 Data</u> Following the conclusion of the tournament, TS reported that RLWC2021 data was being collated and would be handed over to the RFL before the end of March.</p>	
4.0	STRATEGY & REALIGNMENT	
4.1	<p>The meeting was joined by AOB.</p> <p>RL Commercial & IMG The Board received an update on the RFL’s relationship with RL Commercial and IMG. It was noted that RL Commercial MD, Rhodri Jones, attended the RFL’s weekly meetings and weekly catchups were held with TS to ensure a collaborative approach between the two organisations. AOB was managing the relationship with IMG, and RH was working with IMG’s legal team on the legal agreement.</p> <p>In respect of IMG’s seven recommendations, AOB reported progress as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repositioned calendar – Significant work was taking place internally at IMG on the calendar, with a view to presenting options in the coming months. • Realigned calendar – A working group had been established to explore this more fully. Clubs and broadcasters had provided feedback on the options available, and an initial model for the Challenge Cup competition was undergoing consultation • Brand strategy – from the work being led by 160over90 was expected to take another two to three months. • Grading – A timetable had been established for grading criteria meetings, with the proposals to be presented at a special meeting on 9th March, followed by a vote on 19th April. • Expansion strategy/non-domestic club criteria – This item would be addressed once the grading criteria was established, and discussions with French broadcasters would be key to this process. • Centralisation of Operations – Discussions on maximising efficiencies were due to take place later in the year, and this was expected to be a lengthy process. <p>The Chair felt the RL Commercial board should receive a briefing on the grading criteria before this was presented on 9th March. AOB agreed to discuss this with RJ.</p>	AOB
4.2	<p>IMG Recommendations The Board reviewed the proposed model from IMG for the grading criteria. ,</p> <p>In the Board discussion, questions and comments were raised regarding the identified criteria in the Stadium section, and whether there were alternative measures available, the advisability of aligning the grading criteria with the existing ROI model and the relationship between the grading criteria and minimum standards.</p> <p>It was agreed that, at the meeting the discussion should focus on the broader principles of the criteria, rather than the individual positions of clubs. Indicative data should be used rather than giving any live or worked examples as these would only be misleading.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Board should meet again prior to 9th March to discuss with IMG how the criteria would be presented, and that this should potentially also include RL Commercial.</p>	<p>RH</p> <p>TS-NL</p>

5.0	RFL OPERATIONAL PLAN 2023	
	<p>The Board reviewed the list of measures and targets for the RFL 2023 Operational Plan. Individual measures were allocated across the five categories of performance, participation, finance, governance/people, and fan reach/engagement. Measures had reduced from 70 to 32, and been categorised into primary, secondary, and tertiary.</p> <p>There was a detailed discussion of how the Tackle It plan integrated into the Operational Plan. The Board suggested that the Tackle It Plan should sit alongside the Operational Plan and feature as a regularly reviewed item at Board and Executive Board meetings going forward to ensure it was consistently reviewed and updated.</p> <p>TS confirmed that the Plan would be reviewed more regularly at both Executive and Board level, to ensure the Board could scrutinise some of these areas in more detail and hold the Executive to account.</p>	RH
6.0	2023 PEOPLE PLAN	
	<p>The meeting was joined by VS, who presented an overview of performance against actions in the 2022 People Plan, together with an action plan for 2023,</p> <p>Board members expressed concern that some departments, particularly the social media team and Match Officials, were subject to external abuse and the organisation could do more to protect its staff and increase lines of communication. Additionally, the Board felt it would be helpful to receive further information on any significant issues that the People team were dealing with, to establish where support could be offered. The discussion ranged around the way that the organisation worked with the Youth Board and if more touchpoints could be provided, and on the progress of work relating to the gender Pay Gap within the organisation.</p> <p>TS reported that the plan would be reviewed on a quarterly basis with the Executive Board.</p>	VS
7.0	SRI BOARD UPDATE	
	<p>On behalf of SRI, Helen Soulsby and Sarah Bonner presented some feedback from their observations of the Board dinner and meeting thus far. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion was open and transparent, with all Board members willing to have their viewpoints challenged. • The Board was regularly focused as to what may not go to plan, often without acknowledging the organisation's gains. • Information sharing could be shared amongst the other Board members, so this was not always the responsibility of the Chair. • Alternative ways to share information with the Executive could be explored, enabling Board members to interact more with the Executive team. • Smaller working groups for specific items could be formed with RL Commercial, which may be more productive than having joint Board meetings. <p>The Board thanked HS and SB for their feedback.</p>	
8.0	RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP 2021	
	<p>8.1 Review of RLWC2021</p> <p>TS presented the projected financial outturn for the tournament..</p>	

	<p>It was noted that the remaining RLWC staff would leave their employment at the end of March, and Chris Brindley would stay on as a director until September when the accounts are due to be filed.</p> <p>Jon Dutton was working closely with TS and would continue to do so before 31st March 2023 to ensure a smooth handover of all relevant matters and to procure a finalised financial outturn. Discussions were continuing on this with the IRL, DCMS and UK Sport and the RFL as key stakeholders with an interest in the outcome.</p> <p>It was agreed that the RFL Audit & Risk Committee should discuss the latest position, with an update then being provided to the Board</p>	RA & RG
8.2	<p>England Team Performance</p> <p>Discussion took place on the reviews submitted on the England teams performance in RLWC2021</p> <p>The review had incorporated player and staff surveys, written reports from key staff members, and significant support from CD and TS. The work undertaken to get each team to a world cup competitive place had been valuable, but it was recognised that the continual improvement of the teams would be a long-term piece of work. CD stated that the performance department would benefit from some further strategic expertise, and it may be helpful to set up a subcommittee the Director of On Field with this work.</p> <p>The meeting was joined by DR, who provided a summary of the report findings and invited questions from the Board members.</p> <p>The Board discussed the recommendations in detail and asked a number of questions of DS regarding the recommendations that had been made, the way that the coaches would be managed in any new structure, the best way to support the coaches in liaising with Clubs, the nature of the input into the review process and the weight given in the review to various elements. Following the discussion, the Board agreed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To appoint Shaun Wane as Men’s Head Coach on a fixed term basis and to bring him in to the RFL Staff. • To confirm Shaun Barrow as Women’s Head Coach. • To appoint Tom Coyd as Wheelchair Head Coach. 	
9.0	<p>WHEELCHAIR & WOMEN FUTURE STRATEGY</p>	
	<p>The meeting was joined by Marc Lovering, who outlined the proposed roadmaps for the Women’s and Wheelchair games.</p> <p>A positive meeting had recently taken place with the Wheelchair team, involving some ‘blue sky thinking’ on how to build on the momentum from the World Cup. Player registration numbers had surpassed targets set, and a further session would be scheduled with players in the coming weeks.</p> <p>There was a discussion on payment of female players and the competitive position relating to payment of players in both the women’s and wheelchair games. The Board therefore stressed that</p>	

		it was important to ensure players were and felt that they had been consulted and involved in this process.	
10.0		GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONAL MATTERS	
	10.1	RFL 2022 Governance and Inclusion Statements The Board approved the RFL’s governance statement for 2022, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion report for 2022. RA noted the reference to Garbutt & Elliott in the governance report and suggested this required changing to Azets.	RH
	10.2	Annual Reports – Safeguarding, Integrity, Disciplinary & Welfare The Board received the annual reports for safeguarding, integrity, disciplinary and welfare. RH offered to schedule a deep dive on any of the above areas if required as part of a forward plan for Board meetings. The Clinical Advisory Group was also keen to attend a meeting and provide an update on concussion. It was suggested that the timings for meetings required review, with subcommittees starting no earlier than 9am, Board meetings starting at 10am and dinners starting at 6pm.	RH-NL
11.0		INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER’S REPORT The report from TS noted. The Board supported the recommendation to create a dedicated subcommittee of the Board on Head Injuries.	
12.0		OPERATIONS & LEGAL REPORT The report from RH was noted. The Chair asked whether there was any indication of timings for the three potential changes in club ownership.	
13.0		FINANCE & CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT The report from RG was noted, together with an illustration of options for a staff salary increase and the timing of this. The Board approved an annual staff increase in April 2023, but felt that 2024/2025 should be reviewed at a later date. TS agreed to inform all staff of this decision, including the RL Commercial MD.	TS
14.0		PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT & MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT The report by DR and ML was noted.	
15.0		PEOPLE REPORT The paper by VS was noted.	
16.0		LITIGATION The paper was noted.	
17.0		RISKS	

		No risks arising from the meeting were noted.
18.0		<p>BOARD SUBCOMMITTEES</p> <p>The Board noted the minutes from the following subcommittees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical Advisory Group –29 November 2022 • Community Board Meeting –30 November 2022
19.0		<p>AOB</p> <p>Audit & Risk Committee</p> <p>19.1 RA provided a brief verbal update from the recent Audit & Risk Committee. Updated terms of reference for the Committee would be issued to the Board at a future meeting for approval, together with updated policies.</p> <p>A broader discussion took place on risk management, with the Committee overseeing the detail of risk registers and the more significant risks to be issued to the Board. The Committee had also received a presentation from our external auditors in which a discussion had followed about their increased fees for 2023.</p> <p>Broadcast Partner</p> <p>19.2 EM advised that as part of the renewal process, meetings had been taking place with the broadcast market. One potential new partner had been positive about the proposed grading criteria and its intended impact on the game.</p>
20.0		<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was noted as 29th March 2023 (Dinner on 28th March).</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 14.20.</p>