

MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location	RL HQ, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF	Date & Time	Tuesday 4 th February 2025 10.00 am
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Present	Simon Johnson, Sandy Lindsay MBE, Dr Cherrie Daley, Julia Newton, Tony Sutton	Chair	Simon Johnson
In attendance	Jamie Jones-Buchanan – RFL Board Observer Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes) Rhodri Jones, RL Commercial (Items 4 & 5)		Victoria Sinacola (Item 8) Dave Elliott (Item 8)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies for absence.	
2.0	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Declarations of interest were noted as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SJ – director of RL Commercial Ltd, director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd RFLI) and director of IRL Ltd. Chair of SIS, who has Betfred as a shareholder. EM – director of RL Commercial Ltd. TS – director of RFLI Ltd and of RLWC2021 Ltd, trustee of RFL Facilities Trust and Rugby Football League Foundation. JJB – director of Leeds Cricket, Football & Athletics Ltd, trustee of Leeds Rhinos Foundation, trustee of Leeds 2023, patron of Inspire North, pundit at Sky TV pundit. JN – chair of Women in Sport, chair of GB Taekwondo, SID at Capital Letters and board advisor at LCR Property. 	
3.0	MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER 3.1 Minutes The minutes from the meeting held on 3 rd December 2024 were agreed as an accurate record. The summarised minutes of the meeting held on 3 rd December 2024 to be published on the RFL website were agreed.	
	3.2 Matters Arising The Board was updated on key people issues, with ongoing investigations into two members of staff expected to reach a conclusion in the coming weeks. It was agreed that this should be carefully communicated to stakeholders, although the terms of the exit for both individuals would remain private and confidential.	

		Progress against the action tracker was noted.	
4.0		SALFORD RED DEVILS	
		<p>The meeting was joined by RJ. The Board received an update on the current position of Salford Red Devils (SRD) and their potential change of control. It was anticipated that the transfer of the club would take place within the week, and a media event had been scheduled for 7th February.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the Board would need to approve a Change of Control request under the Insolvency & Change of Control Policy, and the new owners would be required to undergo a Fit and Proper Persons Test.</p> <p>Discussion took place on the governance and oversight arrangements for clubs in special measures, and whether any gaps were to be highlighted in the previous process. The Board was supportive of a revised structure whereby the Chair and JN, as chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, would oversee the special measures work, with the Special Measures Committee to continue to meet on a monthly basis. It was expected that SRD would request to be removed from special measures once the transfer of ownership took place.</p> <p>It was felt that the RFL had faced some undue criticism on this issue, and the Chair's Report should refer to the discussion on special measures at recent Board meetings, and what has been done to improve the governance arrangements.</p> <p>The Board also briefly discussed the financial status of other clubs in special measures.</p>	SJ
5.0		RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT	
		<p>The RL Commercial report was taken as read, with RJ highlighting the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The launch of the new season was receiving significant media coverage, with the Super League launch scheduled on 5th February, and the Las Vegas fixture between Wigan and Warrington scheduled towards the end of the month. From a commercial perspective, a new six figure partnership with Egg Energy would be announced later in the week, and Smart Energy had increased their partnership to cover the video referee screen in Super League matches, thus taking commercial income to just over £5m against the current budget figure of £4.75m. For the forthcoming autumn Ashes series, commercial terms had been agreed to stage the first England v Australia match at Wembley, and terms were expected to be finalised with Everton imminently. Discussions were ongoing with both Elland Road and Headingley to stage the third match. <p>The Board commended the efforts of the commercial team, and was pleased to note the increase in ethical energy sponsors and the greater focus on social impact.</p> <p>It was noted that the new grading handbook was ready to be circulated to clubs, and the Board requested that Alison O'Brien attend the next Board meeting to provide an update on the grading review, with the model to be shared at the Council meeting in the summer.</p> <p>The Chair reported that, following Anna Chanduvi stepping down as the RFL's second nominated independent director on the RL Commercial Board, the RFL was required to confirm a permanent replacement. JN was asked to consider being the second representative on the Board.</p>	AOB
6.0		OPERATIONAL PLAN	

	<p>The report outlining the outcomes of the 2024 Operational Plan was reviewed by the Board, with the majority of targets either met or exceeded, together with the proposed targets within the 2025 Operational Plan.</p> <p>CD noted that the 2024 Plan referred to the Performance Strategy as being complete, although this had yet to be finalised. It was agreed that the current status would be reflected, and the RAG rating would be changed from green to amber.</p>	TS
7.0	PEOPLE PLAN	
	The 2025 People Plan was reviewed and supported by the Board.	
8.0	EDUCATION UPDATE	
	<p>The meeting was joined by VS and DE, who presented a comprehensive review of proposals for the expansion of the Education Department to generate additional revenue for the RFL.</p> <p>A five year strategy was proposed to align with the 'More than a Sport' strategy, with the first year to focus on coach education in preparation for DCMS's national coaching register, which was currently being piloted. The five year strategy would incorporate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of current coaching courses, and introduction of a women's coaching course and CPD (both mandatory and non-mandatory) for coaches. • A new suite of Match Officials courses and CPD, mandatory safeguarding courses, and bespoke courses such as mental health first aid. • A review of the RFL's current IMMOFP medical courses, and development of a licence to sell this to universities and other educational institute. • A move towards digital delivery of courses. • A coaching association for all Rugby League coaches, and collaboration with People plus to deliver education to the prison service. • A pricing review and new courses to be delivered via learning platform EtrainU. <p>VS stated that year one would focus on enhancing the coach education department and establishing the coaching association, initially requiring investment into three new staff members, with the team to eventually grow to nine staff members in subsequent years. The Chair felt it would be prudent to agree investment, before reviewing whether targets were being met or whether further losses were expected following year one, with some metrics being put in place to measure performance.</p> <p>Board members also queried whether nine staff members were required if resources were moving online. DE felt that face to face coaching would still be crucial and would enable more work with club foundations, and the additional team members would provide a quality service. VS added that, whilst the investment was a risk, the RFL had been seeking new streams of revenue, and it was expected that this provision would start to make a profit after year one.</p> <p>The Board was supportive of the proposal, but requested an update after the programme's launch in September, together with quarterly updates thereafter.</p>	VS
9.0	BRAIN HEALTH	
	<p>TS updated the Board on the ongoing brain injury legal case and the coroner's inquest into the death of former player, Les Dyl, and the intention to investigate whether contact sport was a contributing factor.</p> <p>The Chair stated that March, an Insurance Broker has approached to explore underwriting opportunities for the sport, with the insurance market still considering Rugby League to be</p>	

		a high risk sport. We need to continue to ensure the extensive research and actions being taken to mitigate risks to players are well considered.	
10.0		GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONAL MATTERS	
		<p>The Board considered the RFL's 2025 Governance and Inclusion Statements, together with the annual reports on safeguarding and integrity</p> <p>The following amendments were suggested to the Governance statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1 – NEDs to be referred to as independent. • 5.3 - Remuneration Committee to refer to new chair, Ed Airey. • 5.4 – Correction to spelling of Julia Newton. • 5.5 – Community Board terms of reference to be included. • 5.7 – Links to Inclusion Board bios to be included. • 12 – Subsections to be renumbered and reflect the new IRL constitution. <p>With regard to the Inclusion Statement, TS agreed to check RFLs' Race Representation Index grade.</p> <p>Subject to the above amendments, the Board approved the 2025 Governance and Inclusion Statements.</p>	<p>TS</p> <p>TS</p>
11.0		CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT	
		<p>The report from TS was taken as read.</p> <p>Discussion took place on the autumn international programme. The Board recognised the commercial benefits of hosting the Australian men's team, but was keen to ensure that attractive international competition was sourced for both the women's and wheelchair teams.</p>	
12.0		OPERATIONS & LEGAL REPORT	
		<p>The report was taken as read. The Board noted the current pressures in the Operations and Legal team, and TS reported that further resource had been brought in to provide support from a compliance and legal perspective.</p> <p>The proposed amendments to the On Field Sentencing Guidelines were also discussed, following consultation with stakeholders and the Laws Committee. This would require all players to commence the season with zero penalty points, with a reduction in points to be carried forward once the player had completed their sanction. Given the Board had approved the Guidelines in December, it was agreed that this amendment and the rationale should be communicated to clubs, performance staff and the media.</p>	TS
13.0		OPERATIONAL PLAN & INSIGHT REPORT	
		The report from AOB was noted.	
14.0		FINANCE & CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT	
		The report from RG was noted.	
15.0		TALENT AND PERFORMANCE REPORT	
		The report from ML was reviewed and noted by the Board.	

		It was also felt that the communications team should be invited to a future Board meeting to outline their plans for proactive communication and development of content for other areas of the sport.	TS
16.0		DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION REPORT The report from ML was noted. Discussion also took place on the requirement to recruit a permanent Performance Director, with ML currently managing both departments. TS confirmed that the structure of the team would be finalised once Sport England funding had been confirmed.	
17.0		MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT The report from PB was noted.	
18.0		PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT The paper by VS was noted.	
19.0		LITIGATION The report was taken as read.	
20.0		BOARD SUB COMMITTEES Reports from the following subcommittees were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and Risk Committee – 31st January 2025 	
21.0		RISKS No risks arising from the meeting were noted.	
22.0		AOB The Chair acknowledged Sandy Lindsay's last Board meeting and thanked her for her considerable contribution to the sport during her tenure.	
23.0		DATE OF NEXT MEETING 1 st April 2025 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.30.	