



MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location RFL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** Wednesday 17th January 2024, 10.00-14.00

Present Simon Johnson, Sandy Lindsay MBE, Dr Cherrie Daley, Tony Sutton, Robert Hicks – Company Secretary **Chair** Simon Johnson

Apologies Jamie Jones Buchanan – RFL Board Observer

In attendance Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer
Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes)
Alison O’Brien – RFL (Items 4 & 5)
Victoria Sinacola – RFL (Item 6)
Andy Wilson – RL Commercial (Item 9)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Jamie Jones Buchanan (JJB).</p>	
2.0	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>Declarations of interest were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SJ – director of RL Commercial Ltd, director of RFLI Ltd 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. • 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. <p>In relation to the agenda item on Brain Health and the proposed content creation, it was noted that JJB was a director of RAM Films.</p>	
3.0	<p>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER</p> <p>3.1 Minutes The minutes from the meeting held on 21st November 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p>	

	<p>3.2 Matters Arising Progress against the action tracker was noted, with the following points discussed in further detail:</p> <p><u>Safeguarding Action Plan</u> Further to the recent Safeguarding training, an action plan was being finalised and would be circulated with the Welfare Report.</p> <p><u>Performance Strategy</u> A draft Performance Strategy document would be brought back to the next Board meeting for discussion.</p>	DR
4.0	RFL STRATEGY – MORE THAN A SPORT	
	<p>The meeting was joined by Alison O’Brien, who provided an overview of the refreshed RFL Strategy since its publication in December 2021.</p> <p>Amendments included reference to RL Commercial and the strategic partnership with IMG, further emphasis on delivering a digital transformation of the sport, and alignment with the sport’s Community Strategy. It was intended that the strategy would be discussed at a joint working session with the RL Commercial Board.</p> <p>The Board reviewed the document and provided feedback as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was general agreement that the strategy should direct people to the Operational Plan for the detail behind the strategic objectives, particularly in relation to revenue generation. • Reference to the new grading structure required inclusion in the document, and how this model would be used to address some of the strategic objectives. • Reference to the new Board structure and RL Commercial Board required inclusion. • Some style issues and proofreading of the final document was required to ensure cohesion. <p>It was agreed that any further feedback would be sent to AOB, who would make the required amendments.</p>	AOB
5.0	RFL OPERATIONAL PLAN	
	<p>5.1 2023 The Board reviewed the final year-end report on the RFL 2023 Operational Plan, updates on which were presented at the recent stakeholder forums.</p> <p>It was noted that the Match Officials Strategy required a refresh as a matter of priority, and it was agreed that a paper would be brought to the next Board meeting summarising latest developments in the department and the next steps to update this Strategy.</p> <p>5.2 2024 AOB reported that the 2024 Operational Plan measures had been refined under the areas of Participation, Performance, Finance and Governance & People, with new detailed measures introduced to cover areas such as brain health and sustainability. An action plan had been produced to monitor progress in each area.</p> <p>SL queried how the number of qualified coaches was measured. AOB confirmed that this referred to coaches undertaking their Level 1 coaching qualification within that</p>	DR

		<p>year. The Board felt that the existing pool of coaches required review to ensure that they undertook continuous professional development and their skills were maintained to a high standard.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the anti-doping assurance framework be included within the plan to assure UKAD that the RFL continued to strive to meet targets in this area. It was recognised that doping within Rugby League remained a prevalent issue, and it was suggested that CD join SJ at the next meeting with UKAD to discuss ways in which both organisations could work together to address this issue going forward.</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>SJ/CD</p>
6.0		PEOPLE PLAN	
		<p>The meeting was joined by Victoria Sinacola to present an overview of the 2023 People Plan outcomes and the results from the recent pulse survey.</p> <p>It was noted that overall sickness absence reduced in 2023. Staff turnover had reduced, with the RFL 11.8% below the national average, and the overall diversity of the workforce had increased. The survey also measured the socio-economic background of the workforce, with 21% identified as coming from a low socio-economic background.</p> <p>CD suggested that it would be helpful to see the sickness absence data over the past few years to establish the trend over a period of time.</p> <p>The Board reviewed the draft 2024 People Plan. A brief discussion took place on succession planning for senior leaders in the organisation SL also suggested that the Plan's goals be amended to "supporting staff in their careers" as opposed to "supporting staff in their jobs".</p> <p>Subject to the amendments above, the Board approved the draft 2024 People Plan.</p>	<p>VS</p> <p>VS</p>
7.0		POLICY REVIEW	
		<p>TS presented the proposed scope and methodology for a review of the Director's Code of Conduct, ICT Policy, Unacceptable Behaviour and Language definition, and Social Media Policy.</p> <p>The Board reviewed and discussed at length the current definition of 'Unacceptable Behaviour and Language'.</p> <p>The Board was supportive of an external company reviewing the current definition and policies if needed, with some initial proposals to be produced internally and input provided from the Inclusion Board in the first instance. Recommendations would then be brought to the Board in due course, with any changes to the definition to form part of the 2025 Operational Rules. It was agreed that RH should act at the Executive Lead for this work with assistance from the Director of People & Culture.</p>	RH
8.0		RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT	
	8.1	<p>MD Report The report from RL Commercial MD, Rhodri Jones, was taken as read.</p> <p>TS provided a brief update from the recent RL Commercial shareholders meeting.</p> <p>Shareholders were receiving monthly updates from IMG, which were well received. The Board felt that the updates from RL Commercial should also be delivered to</p>	

	<p>Championship and League One clubs to ensure they felt fully informed on the game's financial position. This would be discussed further with RJ.</p> <p>The Board felt that a joint meeting with the RL Commercial Board would be beneficial to progress some key issues.</p> <p>A recommendation from the RL Writers & Broadcast Association to rename the Super League Grand Final Man of the Match Award from the Harry Sunderland Trophy to the Rob Burrow Trophy was endorsed by the Board.</p>	SJ
8.2	<p>Free To Air Broadcast Rights</p> <p>TS reported that the BBC had presented the RL Commercial Board with a proposal to extend the Challenge Cup broadcast contract by a further two years, to include ten live men's Super League games on BBC 2 on Saturday nights.</p> <p>The current contract would be extended at the current rate, and the deal would provide continued terrestrial exposure for the Challenge Cup competition.</p> <p>The Board approved the extension of the Challenge Cup contract, enabling the RL Commercial Executive to conclude the contractual formalities on the free to air rights for men's Super League.</p>	
9.0	<p>BRAIN HEALTH COMMUNICATION & OPERATIONAL PLAN</p> <p>The meeting was joined by Head of Media, Andy Wilson, to present the proposed communications plan for rollout of the brain health recommendations. Key dates were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15th January – Media event to be staged at the Etihad to provide support for Match Officials, with RH providing details of the sanctioning framework prior to its publication on RFL channels. • 19th January – Championship & League One launch. • Late January – Broadcast briefing with Sky and BBC. • 8th February – Super League launch. • 20th February – Speaker's House event with Rugby League Cares, with Prof. Chris Brookes in attendance. • TBC February – Ref Box explanation. <p>Content of the plan comprised three strands, with an updated tackle height video for the Community Game, Ram Films to produce a film of the tackle clinic and interviews with key spokespeople, and video content with Prevent around the instrumented mouthguards.</p> <p>Significant communication was underway within the Community Game, with community webinars, media events ahead of the opening fixtures, and sessions with the Community Lions. Dr Gemma Philips and Bob Beswick from Rugby League Cares were also undertaking visits to professional clubs, potentially with involvement from the Players' Union.</p> <p>RH reported that the Brain Health Committee had recently discussed a petition to move Under 6 and 7s to Touch and Tag Rugby, resulting in a recommendation from the Committee for all Under 6s to play Touch and Tag from the start of the season. The Board approved this recommendation.</p>	

10.0	<p>GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONAL</p> <p>10.1 Governance Statement The Board reviewed and approved the RFL's 2023 Governance and Inclusion Statements, subject to the following amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to be made to Rimla Akhtar's resignation at the end of 2023. • Reference to be included to four meetings of Council until further notice. • SLE section to be removed to reflect the reduced role of this entity. • Page seven, paragraph two, first sentence to read, "The Chair is Simon Johnson". <p>It was noted that the annual reports relating to safeguarding, integrity and disciplinary had been omitted from the Board pack and would be recirculated for approval.</p> <p>RH also agreed to review the 'Files for Information' circulated to the Board to ensure that any critical papers were included in the main pack, with only reference papers in the information folder.</p> <p>The Board agreed that it should undergo an annual evaluation process in line with good governance. RH agreed to make a recommendation to the Board as to who should undertake this process.</p> <p>Comments from JJB circulated in advance of the meeting were noted on better utilisation of the facilities at home clubs, with a view to retaining revenue within the game.</p>	<p>RH</p> <p>RH/NL</p> <p>RH</p> <p>RH</p>
10.2	<p>EDI Statement The Board approved the RFL's 2023 EDI statement.</p>	
10.3	<p>Interim Committee Chairs The Chair reported that the Nominations Committee had met earlier in the day and recommended that JJB should act as interim chair of the Inclusion Board following Rimla Akhtar's departure.</p> <p>It was also recommended that the Chair act as interim of the Audit and Risk Committee scheduled in February until a new non-executive director was appointed. The Board was supportive of this proposal as an interim measure.</p>	
11.0	<p>FACILITIES – RUGBY LEAGUE MUSEUM</p> <p>The Board reviewed the paper from Jonathan Hyland, Chair of the RFL Facilities Trust, reviewing submissions from both Wigan City Council and Leeds Rhinos to host the National Rugby League Museum.</p> <p>The Board approved the panel's recommendation to progress with Wigan City Council as the preferred delivery partner for the National Rugby League Museum</p>	
12.0	<p>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT</p> <p>The report from TS was taken as read.</p>	
13.0	<p>OPERATIONS & LEGAL REPORT</p> <p>The report from RH was taken as read.</p>	

		<p>ITEM REDACTED - CONFIDENTIAL</p> <p>SL queried whether any additional resource had been allocated to the safeguarding team. RH reported that the increase in cases had slowed down and Liam Moore had been assigned on a part-time basis to explore more efficient processes to manage this administration.</p>	
14.0		<p>OPERATIONAL PLAN & INSIGHT REPORT</p> <p>The report from AOB was noted.</p>	
15.0		<p>FINANCE, FACILITIES & CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT</p> <p>The report from RG was noted.</p>	
16.0		<p>PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT & MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT</p> <p>The report from DR and ML was taken as read.</p> <p>The Board noted JJB's comments ahead of the meeting on positive feedback received from the Women's Yorkshire v Lancashire Rep game and the intensity of the game according to the data received, and JJB's comments on Tom Coyd's excellent coaching and leadership style.</p>	
17.0		<p>PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT</p> <p>The paper by VS was noted.</p>	
18.0		<p>LITIGATION</p> <p>The paper was noted.</p>	
19.0		<p>BOARD SUB COMMITTEE</p> <p>Reports from the following subcommittees were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remuneration Committee – 21st November 2023 • Community Board – 29th November 2023 • Brain Health Committee – November (Minutes) & December (Verbal Update) 	
20.0		<p>RISKS</p> <p>No risks arising from the meeting were noted.</p>	
21.0	21.1	<p>AOB</p> <p>Rugby League Cares</p> <p>It was suggested that discussion was required with the Rugby League Cares Chair on the ongoing negotiation of the new agreement between the RFL and RL Cares.</p>	
22.0		<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>12th March 2024.</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 14.20.</p>	