



MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location RFL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** 27th July 2023, 09.00-14.00

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

In attendance Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer
 Jamie Jones Buchanan – RFL Board Observer
 Robert Hicks – RFL Company Secretary
 Michelle Maple (minutes)
 Rhodri Jones – RL Commercial MD (Item 8)
 Rob Graham – RFL (Item 5)
 Victoria Sinacola – RFL (Item 7)
 Dr Dave Rotheram – RFL (Item 7)
 Dave Elliott – RFL (Item 7)
 Tim Adams MBE – RL Cares (Item 6)
 Chris Rostron – RL Cares (Item 6)
 Emma Goldsmith – RL Cares (Item 6)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting. No apologies for absence were noted.</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 RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and director of IRL Ltd. Chair of SIS, who has Betfred as a shareholder. • RA – member of the Government Loan Committee. • EM – director of RL Commercial Ltd • TS – director of RFL Investments 2020 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. 	
3.0	<p>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER</p> <p>3.1 Minutes The minutes from the meeting held on 23rd May 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 10, page 7 – final paragraph to read, ‘The Board discussed the assessment of clubs against the Financial Sustainability Regulations’, with the subsequent section removed. <p>The summarised minutes of the meeting held on 23rd May 2023 were noted.</p>	RH

3.2	<p>Matters Arising Progress against the action tracker was noted, with the following points discussed in further detail:</p> <p><u>Item 9 – Safeguarding</u> It was noted that safeguarding training for the Board would be rearranged and undertaken online.</p> <p>The Chair reported that dates would be circulated in the coming weeks for 2024 Board and Council dates. This would include dates for key matches, award dinners and the President’s Ball. Dates had yet to be agreed to meet the RL Commercial Board.</p>	NL
4.0	<p>RFL AGM</p>	
	<p>The Board reflected on the RFL AGM held on 26th July 2023. There was general agreement that the Executive performance was strong and a wide breadth of information was provided, although representation from key Club CEO/Chairmen had been disappointing. The Chair requested that information be circulated imminently for the forthcoming Council meeting.</p>	TS
5.0	<p>FINANCIAL MATTERS</p>	
5.1	<p>Management Accounts & Forecast Outturn for 2023 The meeting was joined by RG to present the management accounts to the period ending 30th June 2023, and the projected outturn for 2023.</p> <p>A discussion took place on the England Senior programme costs. These costs were expected to increase in November due to the Autumn Test Series. Meetings had taken place and costs were being managed closely with the Finance and Performance teams.</p> <p>CD suggested that a clearer strategy was required for this budget to determine key objectives and where funds should be prioritised. TS confirmed that a very detailed budget was in place and the Performance department knew the position very clearly.</p> <p>The Board was informed that a tender process was reaching conclusion for the RFL’s external auditors. This would be discussed in further detail at the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 31st July, after which time, the Board would be informed of the successful appointment.</p> <p>Discussion took place on club loans and advances. The Board reiterated its position that clubs must take responsibility for their own finances and seek external investment where required, with the RFL only approached for assistance as a last resort.</p>	
5.2	<p>RLWC2021 Further to discussion at the previous meeting, the finance team continued to pursue outstanding debts owed to RLWC2021A discussion took place regarding the RFL’s ongoing commitment to RLWC2021.</p>	
6.0	<p>RL CARES</p>	
	<p>The Board welcomed Tim Adams MBE, Chris Rostron, and Emma Goldsmith to the meeting to present an update on Rugby League Cares activity. Key points were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The charity had provided direct interventions to over 30,000 people per year, and this now included female and wheelchair athletes. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership with Sporting Chance ended in 2021, with player welfare provision now provided directly by the charity. • Income was generated each year through the charity’s community programmes such as Ahead of the Game and Offload, and partnerships with organisations including the NHS and Movember. • Pre-pandemic, significant work had been subcontracted to Club Foundations, Funding was now contingent on Foundations demonstrating their delivery, with careful management of these contracts managed. • A feasibility report was being carried out on bids for the sport’s museum. <p>A discussion took place regarding the RFL potentially setting up a new body whose purpose would be to secure funding for the game and how this may impact RL Cares. The Chair confirmed that the Board had yet to make any decision on this and would take these views into account.</p> <p>RA queried whether any data was available on the diversity of people working with the charity, to ascertain whether diverse communities were aware of its activities and how to access support. EG confirmed that this data was collected regularly, and 42% of people accessing statutory services were not Rugby League fans. PhD students had also been commissioned to assess the impact the charity was having within communities.</p> <p>TA advised that the Charities Commission was strengthening its rules and regulations and had invited HMRC to investigate specific charities. The Benevolent Fund had created a gift aid fund for severely injured players, and the RFL Board was asked to communicate to foundations to help ensure that Foundations used the Benevolent Fund for this purpose if applicable, in order to avoid any further investigations.</p>	ML
7.0	<p>CHIEF ON-FIELD OFFICER UPDATES</p> <p>7.1 Performance and Coaching Committee The meeting was joined by Dr Dave Rotheram, Dave Elliott and Victoria Sinacola.</p> <p>DR outlined the proposed areas of work for the Performance and Coaching Board subcommittee, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the work of the Performance and Coaching department and be accountable to the Board. • To review and refine the High Performance Strategy for the England men, women, and wheelchair programmes. • To ensure all Sport England talent objectives are met. • To check and challenge the coaching strategy to increase the number and quality of coaches at all levels of the game. • To check the progress of relevant research projects and their impact on the sport. <p>It was anticipated that the subcommittee would first meet before the end of the year. Membership would include CD, TS, JJB, DR, plus a number of specialist members. RA felt this must include also people from outside the game to ensure the best possible performance specialists available.</p> <p>SL queried the progress on development of a coaching strategy. DR stated that the Level 2 coaching qualification was being rewritten to ensure this was fit for purpose in the first instance, and a high-level strategy would be produced before the end of the year.</p>	DR

7.2	<p>Match Officials Department</p> <p>DE provided a brief summary of his previous six months as Acting Head of the Match Officials department. Significant work had taken place to reshape the culture and environment of the department, and to produce a vision up to 2025, with increased transparency in the pathway for Match Officials.</p> <p>A consultation process on salary structure and relocation to the Etihad was ongoing with the Match Officials.</p> <p>The Chair felt any issues needed to be resolved, to ensure all staff could be brought back under the one roof, otherwise this would undermine the benefits of the relocation.</p> <p><i>DR and DE left the meeting.</i></p>	TS/DE
8.0	<p>RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT</p> <p>The meeting was joined by RJ who updated the Board on key aspects of the work of RL Commercial.</p> <p>RJ reported on the status of broadcast negotiations. A deal was expected to be confirmed within the next couple of weeks.</p> <p>A discussion on other broadcast rights not within the current negotiation took place with various options being considered.</p> <p>The Chair asked whether the calendar would be released when the broadcast deal was announced. RJ confirmed that the calendar was nearly finalised and would likely be shared after the Challenge Cup Final.</p> <p>The Board also discussed the future of the 1895 Cup competition. RJ stated that the forthcoming finals day at Wembley would provide a useful insight into the demand for these matches and the women's Challenge Cup fixtures and determine the future of this competition.</p> <p>Discussion took place on the international games, ahead of the IRL Board meeting in Singapore later in the week. It was recognised that the France 2025 World Cup had been part of a coherent international strategy, and an alternative strategy would need to be considered for international Rugby League in the northern hemisphere going forward. It was suggested that the Board meeting in September be extended to include a specific session to discuss international strategy, and to provide the Board with feedback from the IRL Board meeting.</p>	TS/NL
9.0	<p>CONCUSSIVE & SUBCONCUSSIVE IMPACTS</p> <p>RH presented an update on the recent Brain Health subcommittee meetings, initial data from the Academy law trials, and other activity to reduce concussive and sub-concussive impacts.</p> <p>The Board noted the objectives of the Brain Health subcommittee, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to reduce rates of concussion by 30% over next 5 years (where measurable). • to reduce modifiable concussion risk factors, where concussion rates are not measurable. • to reduce absolute sub-concussive exposure to professional players by 30% over next 5 years. 	

	<p>It was noted that this would be accompanied by a clear action plan.</p> <p>The Board also reviewed the initial findings from the first three completed rounds of the trials. This indicated that a percentage reduction in head contact could result in a significant reduction of concussions from head contact. Academy staff had engaged positively in the process overall, and media session took place on 6th July to update them on progress. An open discussion was also scheduled on 2nd August at Leeds Beckett University, to which the Board were invited.</p> <p>It was noted that analysis of the 40m kick-off and mouthguard data would take place at the end of the trial. This would involve a detailed review and full report to the Board.</p> <p>JJB cautioned that other dangerous tackles could arise as an unintended consequence of players trying to avoid these types of collisions. JJB added that any rule changes would take some time to embed, and the current generation of players would need to be encouraged to consider different strategies and styles of play.</p> <p>CD queried where the target of reducing rates of concussion by 30% had come from. RH confirmed this was not data driven, but was considered to be an achievable target by the subcommittee. CD felt it was critical to also assess how many head acceleration events actually resulted in concussions as part of this trial. RH stated that not all incidents would result in concussion, but this could be a sub-concussive event that might have a cumulative effect on the player involved.</p> <p>The Chair accepted that there was detailed quantitative data from the trial but asked that there was also significant qualitative data captured and that an objective assessment of this take place prior to the subcommittee making any recommendations.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that the subcommittee produce a suite of recommendations backed up by data insights, and that its members also consider the prospect of other unintended consequences referred to by JJB.</p>	<p>RH</p> <p>RH</p>
10.0	<p>ANTI-DOPING UPDATE</p> <p>The Board reviewed the latest data from UKAD on anti-doping within the sport, which indicated a slight increase in cases in 2023. The biggest risk areas related to League 1, with players reaching the end of their careers, and players entering the sport from the Community Game or from Rugby Union in non-heartland areas where testing was less prevalent.</p> <p>It was noted that Tramadol would be added to the banned substance list from 1st January 2024, and that this substance was likely to be currently heavily used by players that were coming to the end of their careers and suffering injuries.</p> <p>RH reported that the RFL was keen to undertake a research project with UKAD to understand the behavioural changes required to address issues such as what made players more susceptible to doping and what affected their decisions to dope.</p> <p>The prospect of requiring banned players to contribute to the education process for other players was under consideration, with the appropriate approach yet to be determined. It was also recognised that players required more education on the transition process for their retirement and options for the end of the playing career. CD suggested that Rugby League Cares could play a pivotal role in this process as part of the renewed agreement with the RFL.</p>	<p>TS</p>

	<p>CD also felt that the RFL should work closely with the RL Commercial communications team to ensure our compliance with the UKAD Assurance Framework obligations.</p> <p>RA suggested that a deep dive session on this issue be arranged at the appropriate time be held at the Audit & Risk Committee to enable to the Board to discuss this in more detail from a risk management perspective.</p>	RH
11.0	<p>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT</p> <p>The report from TS was taken as read. SL queried whether a more customer friendly journey could be considered for Our League Active. TS confirmed that this had been raised with Richard Donlan, together with other IT systems that required review and an investment case was also being considered to ensure ongoing improvement in this area.</p>	RG
12.0	<p>OPERATIONS & LEGAL REPORT</p> <p>The report from RH was taken as read.</p> <p>The Chair requested an update on London Skolars. The Board would be kept updated on the next steps for the club.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the future of League 1 be considered as part of IMG's review, with some club owners in this competition feeling disenfranchised. TS stated that this issue had been discussed internally recently, with further research to be undertaken and proposals being drawn up for the lower levels of the professional pyramid.</p> <p>It was noted that there had been some media criticism of the Inclusion Board's engagement in LGBTQ+ matters following a magazine article written by James Child.</p>	BA
13.0	<p>OPERATIONAL PLAN & INSIGHT REPORT</p> <p>The report from AOB was noted.</p>	
14.0	<p>FINANCE & CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT</p> <p>The report from RG was noted.</p> <p>EM requested an update on the insurance renewal cost. TS confirmed the details and that the process had been much easier. Positive discussions were also underway on centrally provided liability cover for the rest of the game, which could potentially save significant cost for member clubs.</p>	
15.0	<p>PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT & MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT</p> <p>The report from DR and ML was noted.</p>	
16.0	<p>PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT</p> <p>The paper by VS was noted.</p>	
17.0	<p>LITIGATION</p> <p>The paper was noted. RH reported that a further 22 brain injury claims had been received. It was anticipated that the claimants would seek an application to delay service or seek a Group Litigation Order, joining Rugby League and Rugby Union</p>	

		claims. The next steps would be considered once the claimants actions were determined.	
18.0		<p>RL COMMERCIAL MINUTES</p> <p>RH agreed to re-circulate the minutes from the RL Commercial meeting held on 19th June 2023.</p>	RH
19.0		<p>BOARD SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes from the following sub-committee meetings were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit & Risk Committee – 23 May 2023 • Community Board – 21 June 2023 • Nominations Committee – 24 May 2023 • Brain Health – 26 May and 26 June 2023 • CAG – 26 June 2023 • Laws Committee – 25 May 2023 	
20.0		<p>RISKS</p> <p>The following risks arising from the meeting were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-doping and UKAD 	
21.0		<p>AOB</p> <p>No further items were raised.</p>	
22.0		<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was noted as 5 September 2023, to be followed by an afternoon session to discuss international Rugby League.</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 13.55.</p>	