



**MINUTES**

**RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

**Location** RFL HQ, House of Sport, Gate 13, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024, 10.00am

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

**In attendance** Julia Newton – RFL NED designate  
Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer  
Jamie Jones-Buchanan – RFL Board Observer  
Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes)  
Rob Graham, RFL – Item 4  
Rhodri Jones, RL Commercial – Item 5  
Victoria Sinacola, RFL – Item 6  
Marc Lovering, RFL – Item 9

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	<p><b>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed Julia Newton to her first meeting as the RFL’s proposed Non-Executive Director. It was noted that JN would be attending in an observer capacity until being formally appointed at the RFL Council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> July.</p> <p>No apologies for absence were received.</p>	
2.0	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>Declarations of interest were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• EM – director of RL Commercial Ltd.</li> <li>• TS – director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and of RLWC2021 Ltd.</li> <li>• JJB – director of Leeds Cricket, Football &amp; Athletics Ltd, trustee of Leeds Rhinos Foundation, trustee of Leeds 2023, patron of Inspire North, pundit at Sky TV pundit.</li> <li>• JN – chair of Women in Sport, chair of GB Taekwondo, SID at Capital Letters and board advisor at LCR Property.</li> </ul>	
3.0	<p><b>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING &amp; ACTION TRACKER</b></p> <p>3.1 <b>Minutes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The minutes from the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</li> </ul> <p>3.2 <b>Matters Arising</b></p>	

		Progress against the action tracker was noted.	
4.0		<b>FINANCIAL &amp; FACILITIES MATTERS</b>	
	4.1	<p>The meeting was joined by Rob Graham, who presented the 2023 year-end audited accounts, an update on the 2024 management accounts and forecast outturn, and the proposed sale of Odsal Stadium.</p> <p><b>2023 Accounts</b> The Board reviewed the draft financial accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, which had been recommended by the Audit &amp; Risk Committee for approval.</p> <p>The Chair noted that page 18 referred to a position that differed to page 19. RG provided an explanation under the accounting rules . It was felt that an explanation on this point should be included in the final narrative within the report. RG also agreed to provide the Chair with a brief of the overall audit process.</p> <p>Subject to the above amendment, the Board <b>approved</b> the 2023 accounts.</p>	
	4.2	<p><b>Management Accounts</b> An overall variance to budget on the management accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024 was reported. This was due to the timing of costs incurred in the overhead/central cost departments.</p> <p>The Board discussed several variances that could be realised in the accounting year including the impact of the timing of the sale of Odsal.</p>	
	4.3	<p><b>Odsal</b> The Board reviewed two offers to purchase the site at Odsal:</p> <p>The Executive recommendation was to accept the offer from Bradford Bulls. Subject to approval by the Board, it was proposed that the offer should be put to the RFL Council for comment, with a version of the Board paper being circulated within the Council meeting pack prior to the meeting, to ensure full transparency.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that the offer would likely generate a robust discussion at the Council meeting. There was general agreement that Knight Frank should present the offer and the current valuation position as an independent third-party expert.</p> <p>The Board <b>approved</b> the sale on the basis that this decision could be revisited if it did not receive the support of Council members at the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> July.</p>	
5.0		<p><b>RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT</b></p> <p>The meeting was joined by RJ, who summarised key points from RL Commercial's activity as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Club Forum was held on 25<sup>th</sup> June with all clubs present to provide an overview of the Challenge Cup Final's financial performance, together with a mid-year update for RL Commercial. The Forum was generally positive, with discussion centred on number of matches, future matches at Wembley and the future of French club participation in UK domestic leagues. The Challenge Cup competition would be discussed further at the forthcoming Council meeting.</li> <li>• Discussions continue on the prospect of staging a Super League match between Wigan Warriors and Warrington Wolves in Las Vegas as part of the NRL weekend in March 2025.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Samoa Test Series for the England men’s team was recently announced, with matches being held on 27<sup>th</sup> October at Wigan and 2nd November at Leeds. Negotiations to finalise a women’s international against Wales on 2<sup>nd</sup> November are also underway, together with a wheelchair international on 26<sup>th</sup> October at Wigan.</li> <li>The current commercial partnerships and strategy was being reviewed with support from IMG, with a view to introducing a new strategy at the end of the year.</li> </ul> <p>Discussion took place as to whether the 2025 international tour.</p>	
6.0	<b>PEOPLE UPDATE</b>	
	<p>The meeting was joined by VS, who summarised the results of the recent staff survey and actions for improvement.</p> <p>Adjustments to the survey format to enable staff to provide more free text had resulted in increased feedback, which was overall very positive.</p> <p>Discussion took place on opportunities for Board members to meet and interact with staff, with the suggestion that this potentially take place before a Board meeting in an informal breakfast setting.</p> <p>JJB suggested that the ethnicity categories on the survey needed to be widened. VS confirmed that the survey had adopted Sport England’s categories, but agreed to review these going forward.</p>	
7.0	<b>BRAIN HEALTH COMMUNICATION &amp; OPERATIONAL PLAN</b>	
	<p>The Board reviewed the update from the Laws and Brain Health Committees on any rule/regulation changes applicable to brain health matters.</p> <p>The Laws Committee had discussed potential new laws relating to hands off to the face, kick-offs and the three person tackle. These would be discussed further and, if agreed, presented to the Board for approval in September.</p> <p>The Brain Health Committee was due to meet on 10 July to review the data obtained from the men’s and women’s Super League, Reserve Grade and Academy and to review the rollout of the 44 recommendations approved in November 2024.</p>	
8.0	<b>ANTI-DOPING IN RUGBY LEAGUE</b>	
	<p>RH provided an update on the latest position for Anti-Doping in Rugby League and the sport’s operational plan to combat doping in the sport.</p> <p>No further cases had been raised from UKAD, although the volume of Adverse Analytical Findings (AAF) remained high within the professional game where the testing programme was prevalent.</p> <p>UKAD was keen to collaborate with the RFL on research study opportunities, with a business case being produced to deliver a project to help understand the issues of doping in Rugby League. Movember had also indicated that they may be willing to be a partner in the study and fund some research, and the plan will be discussed further with RL Cares and Movember in due course. The detail of the project had yet to be confirmed, and a final proposal would be brought to the Board meeting in September.</p>	

9.0	<b>BIG ASK AND NATIONAL FACILITIES STRATEGY</b>	
	<p>The meeting was joined by ML who, together with TS, presented the latest position on the Sports Survival Fund Loan programme, together with the 'Big Ask' proposal to DCMS.</p> <p>The Board was supportive of this approach and it was agreed that further information would be brought back for discussion in due course.</p>	
10.0	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT</b>	
	<p>The report from TS was taken as read. It was noted that the Rugby League Cares had now signed a revised contract with the RFL.</p> <p>TS reported that three clubs had submitted bids for the additional place in League One in 2025 and progressed to the next stage (from the initial eleven expressions of interest). The bids would be assessed and brought back for discussion in September.</p>	
11.0	<b>OPERATIONS &amp; LEGAL REPORT</b>	
	<p>The report from RH was taken as read. The Board discussed the requirement for additional safeguarding resource.</p> <p>SL noted that the review of the Community Game medical standards was due to take place in early June, and queried whether this would include involvement from the Community Board. RH confirmed that any significant changes will be reported to the Community Board, but they were not required to approve the changes.</p> <p>A review of the Directors' Code of Conduct and the Operational Rules definition of Unacceptable Language and Behaviour (ULAB) was ongoing. It was proposed that the Code of Conduct be streamlined to reflect ways of working and enable employment policies to be used for more serious matters.</p>	
12.0	<b>OPERATIONAL PLAN &amp; INSIGHT REPORT</b>	
	The report from AOB was noted.	
13.0	<b>FINANCE &amp; CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT</b>	
	The report from RG was noted.	
14.0	<b>PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT &amp; MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT</b>	
	The report from ML was taken as read.	
15.0	<b>PEOPLE &amp; CULTURE REPORT</b>	
	The paper by VS was noted.	
16.0	<b>LITIGATION</b>	
	The report was taken as read.	
17.0	<b>RL COMMERCIAL</b>	

		The summarised minutes from the RL Commercial Board meeting held on 21 February 2024 were noted.	
18.0		<p><b>BOARD SUB COMMITTEES</b></p> <p>Reports from the following subcommittees were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion Board – 16 May 2024</li> <li>• Clinical Advisory Group – 3 June 2024</li> <li>• Laws Committee – 12 June 2024</li> <li>• Audit &amp; Risk Committee – 25 June 2024</li> <li>• England Performance Unit – 20 June 2024</li> </ul> <p>JJB provided a summary from the first meeting of the revised Inclusion Board. It was noted that Muslim women were deterred from attending Rugby League matches due to the provision of alcohol, and the Committee would consider ways in which to create a safe space to encourage their attendance.</p>	
19.0		<p><b>RISKS</b></p> <p>No risks arising from the meeting were noted.</p>	
20.0		<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>The Board briefly discussed the introduction of an AI app in the organisation to replace the requirement for a minute-taker across different forums, and suggested this could be trialled at Board meetings going forward.</p>	
21.0		<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>17<sup>th</sup> September 2024</p> <p><b>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 14.30.</b></p>	