



**MINUTES**

**RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

**Location** The RFL, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF      **Date & Time** Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2025  
10.00 am

**Present** Lord Jonathan Caine (from item 4.2), Martin Coyd OBE, Abi Ekoku, Rob Graham, Dermot Power, Emma Rosewarne      **Chair** Nigel Wood OBE

**Apologies** Joanna Coates

**In attendance** Jo Drapier, Sport England  
Jamie Jones-Buchanan, RFL  
Ed Mallaburn, IMG  
Alison O'Brien, Company Secretary (Interim)  
Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes)

| Item No | Agenda Item  | Who |
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| 1.0     | <p><b>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</b></p> <p>It was agreed that the meeting would be chaired by Nigel Wood OBE. This was proposed by ER and seconded by AE.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Joanna Coates.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone involved in the recent grading process, and the independent panel involved in the selection of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Super League clubs, for their considerable work undertaken in the past few months.</p>   |     |
| 2.0     | <p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>ER advised the Board that she is no longer a £50 a year member at Newcastle.</p>   |     |
| 3.0     | <p><b>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING &amp; ACTION TRACKER</b></p> <p>3.1 <b>Minutes</b><br/>The minutes from the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2025 were approved as an accurate record.</p> <p>3.2 <b>Matters Arising</b><br/><u>Director Duties</u><br/>JD advised that the Code for Sports Governance required a separation of duties between the Chair and the accountable officer. The Chair stated that it was proposed that Abi Ekoku should undertake the position of CEO moving forward on an interim basis, assuming accountable officer status.</p> |     |

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|     |     | <p>The Board considered this proposal and supported the appointment of AE as the RFL's interim CEO. This was proposed by the Chair and seconded by DP. The Chair confirmed that this would be formally communicated to Sport England.</p> <p>Progress against the action tracker was noted, and updates were provided on the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rugby League Cares</b> – RG agreed to confirm with Steve McCormack if the three Welfare policies had been drafted. The Chair also requested that the formal agreement between the RFL and Rugby League Cares going forward be finalised. AE agreed to pick this up with CR.</li> </ul> <p>It was suggested that Marc Lovering attend a future meeting to provide an update on the new Foundation and how this would integrate with Rugby League Cares.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the action tracker be updated and dates revised where required.</p>  | <p>NW</p> <p>RG</p> <p>AE</p> <p>ML</p> <p>RG/AE</p> |
| 4.0 |     | <b>FINANCIAL &amp; FACILITIES MATTERS</b>   |  |
|     | 4.1 | <p><b>2025 Management Accounts and Forecast Outturn</b><br/> RG provided an overview of the RFL's management accounts to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and forecast outturn.</p> <p>The Board noted the report.</p>  |  |
|     | 4.2 | <p><b>2026 Budget Planning</b><br/> RG outlined the 2026 budget planning process, with key points and assumptions noted</p> <p>The Board discussed some of the potential savings.<br/> LJC felt it was important to retain some external assurance around the grading process to protect the RFL.<br/> ER suggested Hurst be approached to consider a lighter touch approach, given that no issues had been identified in the past three years.</p> <p>Options to reduce the Operations, Legal and Safeguarding costs were being explored, It was felt that the current interim Head of Legal should be approached to consider a long-term contract.</p> <p>In respect of the broadcast costs for the two additional clubs, NW stated that the Sky contract ensured all the obligations sat with RL Commercial</p> <p>The Chair queried the terms for the next World Cup, RG confirmed that this detail had yet to be confirmed. It was felt that a strategic discussion was required on strengthening the international game in the northern hemisphere, and the balance between performance and financial objectives.</p> <p>ER requested more regular feedback from the Inclusion Board</p> <p>ER felt that further education was required at a Community Game level to continually</p> <p>It was acknowledged that the prospect of bringing together the RFL and RL Commercial boards back into one would require careful consideration of the Articles of Association, to ensure compliance with the Code for Sports Governance. The new chair would also be chair of both bodies.</p> |  |

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| 5.0 |                       | <b>IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b>  |   |
|     |                       | <p>The latest implementation plan was reviewed and noted, and it was agreed that RG and AE would now review this in further detail.</p> <p>DP provided a report from the recent Super League meeting, where the subject of grading was discussed at length. There was also some discussion on the possibility of NRL future investment. It was agreed that the RFL should be central to these discussions and that DCMS be kept up to date - in case there were any implications on the loan agreements.</p>  | <p><b>AE/<br/>RG</b></p> <p><b>AE</b></p> |
| 6.0 |                       | <b>GOVERNANCE MATTERS</b>   |   |
|     | <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p> | <p><b>Governance Action Plan</b><br/>The Board reviewed the latest position on the Governance Action Plan, and AOB provided a summary of plans to address some of the current gaps.</p> <p>There was general agreement that the new structure needed to be accelerated to ensure compliance with the Action Plan. Accordingly, any special resolutions would need to be prepared and circulated to Council members within the required timescales.</p> <p><b>Chair &amp; NED Recruitment</b><br/>The process for the recruitment of a permanent Chair and NEDs was reviewed and noted. It was acknowledged that any current directors wishing to be considered would not be able to participate on the interview panels.</p> <p>AE felt some of the legal issues to address gaps in the Action Plan could be resolved internally with the Head of Legal, and agreed to set some timescales for completion of these actions.</p> |   |
| 7.0 |                       | <b>SAFEGUARDING UPDATE</b>  |   |
|     |                       | <p>The meeting was joined by Barry Polin, who provided a comprehensive update on the submission of the CPSU audit in September, and outlined the current process being undertaken on the RFL's Operational Rules and Safeguarding Policy.</p> <p>ER reiterated that better education and awareness amongst players and volunteers was key to reducing cases, with volunteers knowing how to manage aggressive behaviour.</p> <p>The Board commended the excellent work being undertaken by the safeguarding team, given its current limited resources, and AOB for leading this area.</p>   |   |
| 8.0 |                       | <b>RL COMMERCIAL REPORT</b>   |   |
|     |                       | <p>The RL Commercial report from RJ was taken as read.</p>  |   |
| 9.0 |                       | <b>EXECUTIVE REPORTS</b>  |   |
|     |                       | <p>The following reports were taken as read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People &amp; Culture</li> <li>• Operational Plan &amp; Insight Report</li> <li>• Finance, Facilities &amp; Central Services Report</li> <li>• Performance, Development &amp; Match Officials Report</li> <li>• Litigation Report</li> </ul>   |   |

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|      |      | <p>ER queried some of the amber and red ratings, and whether there were any issues that the Board should be aware of. RG confirmed that these would be addressed under the implementation plan.</p> <p>The Board discussed the detail of the current HR issues, and how best to address this going forward.</p>         |  |
| 10.0 |      | <p><b>BOARD SUB COMMITTEES</b></p> <p>Reports from the following subcommittees were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Committee – 20 August 2025</li> <li>• Brain Health Committee – 11 September 2025</li> <li>• Nominations Committee – 13 August 2025 and 30 September 2025</li> </ul> |  |
| 11.0 |      | <p><b>RISKS</b></p> <p>No new risks were noted.</p>   |  |
| 12.0 | 12.1 | <p><b>AOB</b></p> <p><b>Grading</b><br/>The Chair suggested a review of the grading process was required, and how this process should evolve going forward.</p>   |  |
| 13.0 |      | <p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> November 2025</p> <p><b>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2.45pm.</b></p>   |  |