



## ENGLISH RUGBY COUNTIES ASSOCIATION

### Counties in Membership

Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Cheshire  
Cornwall  
Devon  
Durham  
Eastern Counties  
Essex  
Gloucestershire  
Hampshire  
Hertfordshire

Lancashire  
Middlesex  
North Midlands  
N.L.D.  
Oxfordshire  
Somerset  
Staffordshire  
Surrey  
Sussex  
Warwickshire

### Associate Members

Derbyshire  
Lincolnshire  
Nottinghamshire

### MINUTES of the meeting held at Fiveways Old Edwardians RFC at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2016

#### Counties represented:

Jonathan Dance	Berkshire	David Herriman	Lancashire
Anthony Flack	Buckinghamshire	Brian East (Secretary)	Middlesex
Peter Rhodes	Cheshire	Peter Grace (Chairman)	North Midlands
Richard Simeons	Cornwall	Charlie Hemmings	North Midlands
Alan Mitchell (Treasurer)	Cornwall	Steve Guy	North Midlands
John Drew	Devon	Norman Robertson	N.C.A.
Ivor Smith	Essex	Colin Baldwin	Oxfordshire
Peter Williams	Gloucestershire	Paddy Gregan	Oxfordshire
Gary Doherty	Hampshire	Simon Mead	Somerset
Jed Stone	Hampshire	Des Chalmers	Somerset

In attendance: Malcolm Wharton, Chair of RFU Community Game Board  
Simon Winman, RFU Head of Club Development

#### 1. PRELIMINARIES

The chairman, Peter Grace, welcomed all to the meeting and thanked members for attending in spite of the snowy weather conditions. He welcomed both Malcolm Wharton and Simon Winman to the meeting.

#### 2. APOLOGIES were received from:

David McAteer	Berkshire	Mike Waplington	N.L.D.
David Butt	Devon	Malcolm Caird	Surrey
Gordon Roulinson	Derbyshire	Andy Shorney	Somerset
Roger Pierson	Eastern Counties	Rob Forsyth	Staffordshire
Adrian Sparks	Hertfordshire	Frank Edmonds	Sussex
Peter Baines	Hertfordshire	Roger Edmundson	Sussex
John Greenwood	Lancashire	Ken Nichols	Sussex
David Hodgson	Lancashire	Charlie McGinty	Warwickshire
Rob Briers	Lancashire		

3. **MINUTES** of meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2015

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record.

4. **Steering Group Notes**

4.1 The minutes of the Steering Group held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016 had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The meeting reaffirmed Item 7.2 of the previous meeting that the appointment of the late Jim Bambrick had been a singular honour to reflect his major contribution to ERCA and that no such appointment would happen in the future.

5. **The RFU Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP) Strategy Paper**

5.1 This paper discussed and approved by the RFU Council meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015 had been distributed to members with the papers for the meeting. Simon Winman and Malcolm Wharton spoke to the content of the paper.

The first 6 AGPs are planned to be operational by September 2016 with 1 in each of the RFU Areas. Each had been selected in consultation with the CB Facilities coordinators. The appropriate CB were asked to approve the choice. The management of the AGPs is important and is one of the main selection criteria. There is a steering group managing the facilities.

The real learning about this initiative will come from the pilot scheme. The facilities will remain under the control of the RFU in order that flexibility is maintained and that other users are taken into consideration.

The RFU is mindful of local club issues. The RFU will continue to provide support for natural grass pitch and is promoted. Already 500 groundsmen have signed up to the programme. Remedial work is in hand to assist clubs that have suffered in the recent bad weather conditions. Club chairman and groundsmen have been assisted to ensure that improvement is applied at the correct time. 15 ground improvement tractors are still operational and the pricing model remains the same.

5.2 Peter Grace reported on his recent survey on the effect of flooding within CBs. There had been a reasonable response and that clubs within CBs were coping with the difficulties.

5.3 Alan Mitchell (Cornwall) commented on the classic problem of games being postponed where the pitch would be irrevocably damaged if a match went ahead. There were inevitably clashes between coaches and groundsmen.

5.4 David Herriman (Lancashire) said that Cumbrian clubs were very unfortunate and many clubs were flooded. Lancashire club were experiencing difficulties with waterlogged pitches but not with flooded club-houses.

5.5 Peter Rhodes (Cheshire) reported that most Cheshire clubs were unaffected apart from waterlogged pitches.

5.6 Norman Robertson (N.C.A) emphasised that clubs must check their consequential loss clauses in their insurance policies and sought clarification on what is included and excluded in such policies.

5.7 Simon Winman summarised.

- Clubs have been made aware of the availability of toxicity testing of pitches as a result of flooding. He emphasised that some of the waterlogged pitches were as a result of poor drainage and reiterated the use of advice from Keith Kent and the use of the RFU Tractors (q.v.).
- The RFU are in contact with all clubs affected by flooding – 6 clubs were under water

- The RFU is considering a new insurance broker and insurance package.
- The RFU is educating clubs about how to raise revenue (including the RFU Grand Draw)
- The RFU has some furniture purchases as part of the RWC 2015 competition and that flooded clubs are being given priority to obtain such furniture.

## 6. **RFU PFR survey**

6.1 Peter Grace highlighted the comments made at a Midlands CBs meeting held on 6th January 2016 and attended by 7 CBs meeting concerning this survey into how the PFR was undertaken by CBs and the resulting outcomes.

- 2 year plans preferred to 4 year plans
- Relationship with Area managers variable
- PFR should cover existing topics/areas and should not be extended
- More flexibility required to take in new ideas that arise outside of the plans
- Time taken by volunteers to produce and deliver the plans needs to be appreciated
- Less criticism of failed ideas/deliverables
- There were too many questions in the PFR survey
- Money for representative rugby should be outside the PFR
- CB should determine the money they spend on outside services and it should be assumed as part of the PFR. This expenditure must remain under the control of the CBs
- CBs should contribute to the review of each Area Manager
- The roles and responsibilities document sent to each CB should be aspirational and not contractual or compulsory

Simon Winman said that the comments made were invaluable. The PFR process is coming to the end of the 5 year funding period which will end in 2016/2017. The feedback will be summarised by mid February 2016 and will be used to inform the CB conference planned for April 2016. He stressed that the RFU do appreciate the work done by volunteers. Each CB has dealt with the PFR process in the own way and the RFU do welcome the feedback from the preparation.

He said that local leadership was important and that volunteer recruitment is being encouraged at both CB and club levels. The leadership academies are very successful and the RFU want to strengthen the succession planning.

- 6.2 Colin Baldwin (Oxon) reported that Bucks, Berkshire and Oxfordshire had held a similar meeting to the Midlands meeting with similar comments.
- 6.3 David Herriman said that the PFR process is complicated and takes time. The volunteers put a lot of effort into the process and finding suitable volunteers is not easy.
- 6.4 Peter Williams (Gloucestershire) said that there is still an “us” and “them” mentality in some CBs and that not CBs are against the PFR process. The attitudes could be improved by better communication.
- 6.5 Antony Flack (Bucks) said that finding younger volunteers is still an issue
- 6.6 Jonathan Dance (Berkshire) said that there had been major changes over the last 25 years in finding volunteers. More volunteers are concentrating on their clubs because the roles has become more complicated.
- 6.7 Alan Mitchell (Cornwall) said that he did not find it any easier volunteering in his club than when he was the CB Secretary.

6.8 Malcolm Wharton summarised by stating that the RFU is aware of such general trends and a CGB Club Development Sub-committee is actively looking at this area. Experience around the country from the various roadshows is generally not positive apart from the younger volunteers. The RFU are determined to find a way to keep that generation in the game.

## 7. CB Conference

7.1 Simon Winman said that the CB conference in April will not include an invitation to the RFU Council members and that the active CB officers are the important attendees. The CBs have been informed about the date and the agenda is being finalised. It is the geographic CB conference. Each CB will have three delegates.

7.2 Richard Simeons (Cornwall) hoped that the agenda will be pertinent and appropriate for the CBs.

7.3 Peter Williams indicated the communication will be the key. He hoped that the attendees will learn from each other and that the conference will not be confrontational. The facilitators should be well briefed and success will depend on the attendees having an open mind.

7.4 Jonathan Dance was disappointed that the RFU Council members were not being invited. He had been involved with the CB Conferences since their inception and that Counties had been invited in the past to suggest agenda items. Simon said that there will be sufficient time built into the timetable for other topics as well as agenda items. The attendee list is not yet finalised.

## 8. Adult Competition Review

8.1 Peter Rhodes (Cheshire) requested information on the progress of the review and the current position.

8.2 Malcolm Wharton gave an overview:

- The RFU did agree the original proposals
- It was agreed that the proposals were to be revisited to avoid the possibility of an SGM
- IPSO/Mori were commissioned to undertake a survey using the 100,000 contacts on the RFU GMS system. 5000 replies had been received and the detailed analysis of the responses were due out later in January.
- All key data was to be given to RFU Council members in late January for consideration at the RFU Council meeting in late February with three possible outcomes
  1. The proposals were to be endorsed
  2. The proposals were not endorsed at all
  3. The majority of the proposals were endorsed with regional variations. The RFU were very aware of the Northern concerns.

## 9. County Championship

9.1 Uncertainty was expressed at the meeting about the current player level qualification and the timing for implementation.

Colin Baldwin commented that the revised regulations were to be considered at the next RFU Governance subcommittee

Jonathan Dance indicated in response to a question that there will not be any extra funding for the Senior CB XV's although more funding had been confirmed for the U20s and women and girls competitions.

- 9.2 Alan Mitchell pointed out that the County Championship final was to take place on the same day as recently announced England v Wales match. This was likely to cause complications with seat allocations. Malcolm Wharton agreed to investigate.

10. **Treasurer's report**

- 10.1 There was £3272.75 in the bank account less today's expenses. .

11. **Any other Business**

- 11.1 Peter Grace said that he was content to continue as Chairman of ERCA and to drive the organisation forward. All CBs secretaries will be circulated with the minutes with a request for feedback.

11. Malcolm Wharton spoke briefly about the current RFU and PRL negotiations ; he was not able to provide any information save that the process was on-going. The RFU Board had been fully briefed about the state of the negotiations.

12. The meeting schedule for the rest of the season (to take place at Fiveways Edwardians RFC)  
Steering Meeting – Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2016  
Full Meeting and AGM – Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2016

The meeting closed at 13:10 with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Signed by Peter Grace, Chairman, as a true record of the meeting

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_