

LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Minutes of the Board meeting held using Zoom Video Conference on Monday 19th April 2021

Present: D. Clarke in the Chair, & Messrs P. Deakin, J.T. Hughes, H.H. Hughes, K. Andrews, R.T.J. Briers, M.J. Worsley, C.A. Baker, J.S. Greenwood, A.S. Kerboas & M. Downs.

In attendance: Messrs, G. Burns, G. Morgan & B.H. Stott.

Apologies: A. Soutar.

Minutes of the last meeting.

The minutes of the Board meeting held on Monday 8th March, (previously circulated) were accepted and signed per procuracionem by the Honorary Secretary as a correct record.

Matters arising.

Notification from Steve Grainger (RFU) that Covid emergency club funds that have not been issued should now be held pending repurposing.

RFU Council Members Report.

KA issued a written report prior to the meeting which is attached as appendix 1.

Questions & Comments.

1. KA – Council had received an excellent presentation from Simon Kemp on medical issues within the game, conclusions were that now injuries numbers are not getting worse due to current impositions.
2. MD – Future Competitions Structure – our 3 Council Members had fought our corner hard in our opposition to lower XVs entry in to the leagues. However all three proposals on league structure, national cups and lower XV entry had been approved by council. This now goes to implementation stage.
3. PD – approx. 30 clubs in Lancashire has applied and been successful for the Winter Sports Survival fund. Total grants were around £1M.
4. PD - Most clubs are now advising they are better off financially.
5. PD - 2nd phase of financial help via RFU is now open, this is the Asset Improvement Loans up to a maximum of £150K with a 2 year payment holiday, 10 year loan term and 2% interest. These loans are only available to incorporated clubs.
6. Local Authorities are offering restart grants of up to £18K.
7. PD – To apply to the Hargreaves Trust for a grant to the County.
8. MD – County Championship Review – The Review Group had launched a survey to the wider game which MD very strongly that the questions were worded to get a negative response to the Championship. DC had raised this issue also within RFU Competitions committee. The survey was produced by the “Insight Group” who its seems no one knows about. MD to write to Tim Miller the chairman of the review with our feelings on it.

Annual General Meeting.

MD surveyed the Board with regard to the format of the meeting, whether virtual or face to face. A majority wanted face to face and so due to current lockdown restrictions it was planned to hold on 7th July.

All officers are happy to stand again with the exception of ASK. GB was happy to offer to stand in the Volunteers role that ASK would leave. ASK warmly thanked for his work with the County.

Discussion and conclusion made on addition of Vice President.

Correspondence.

None appertaining to this meeting.

New Members.

No new memberships have been received.

50:50 Draw

Apr 21	Value
P Hanson	£53.40
E Neely	£8.90
P Hanson	£8.90
C Baker	£8.90
G Burns	£8.90

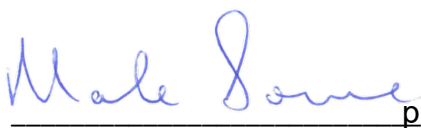
Date of next meeting.

Next Meeting: To be confirmed.

Any other business.

KA – John O’Ryan is setting up a company to fill the void left by the redundancies of professional staff. This company offers to organise emerging schools competitions. Several points raised to be clarified.
GM – RFU are working with an external consultant who is writing a paper on mental health issues in the game.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7:50pm

 pp Chairman Date 7 June 2021

Appendix 1

Headlines

COUNCIL MEETING HELD BY TEAMS 16.04.21

CEO's UPDATE – COVID-19

Player Welfare Update

The Board and Executive are working closely on the head injury litigation which is overseen by the RFU's lawyers and insurers' lawyers. The legal case itself has not moved forward since we last spoke with no formal claim being lodged. The RFU has received and acknowledged the letter of claim and is working with World Rugby, the WRU as well as their respective insurers and solicitors.

The RFU attended a DCMS Select Committee meeting on head injuries in sport along with the WRU and SRU.

Government/DCMS Interaction

Winter Sports Survival Fund

- RFU secured significant support from the Government through the Winter Sports Survival Fund. The largest investment ever made into our clubs and the process has helped strengthen the RFU's relationship with the Government and Sport England.
- This has resulted in 522 applications from clubs, with 454 eligible. The independent Board on 1 March confirmed an offer of £17m of grant support with a maximum cap of £50k per club.
- An additional contingency of £3.5m grants will be made available should there be an additional need from our clubs. The Board also established a £3m loan facility to enable a loan grant hybrid for clubs who would need more than the £50k cap in grants.
- The Independent Board has also made a £1.1m grant for the elite Women's game, a £6m loan offer to the RFU to support community programmes and a £27m loan facility for asset improvement in clubs.

Community Return to Play

- On 29th March outdoor team sports returned with adapted activity (i.e no scrum or mauls).
- The weekend of 3/4 April was a big weekend to restart rugby in our clubs.
- The next step will be on 26 April, when matches will be able to restart (still without scrum and mauls). The removal of the risk exposure framework is predicted to be 17 May with 31 May being a target date to return to full contact matches.

RFU's Strategic Plan

Before Covid-19, the plan was to publish the RFU's Strategic Plan externally in Autumn 2020, however, due to the pandemic, the decision was made to delay this until the sport and organisation emerges safely from the pandemic.

PRESENTATION: : Dr Simon Kemp, RFU Medical Services Director

Update on Professional, Community and Age Grade 2019-20 Injury and Concussion trends

The key findings of the 2019-20 PRISP report included:

- a. *Match injuries*
 - i. Stable but high match injury incidence
 - ii. Highest match injury severity (38 days of absence)
- b. *Training injuries*
 - i. Stable but high training injury incidence (increase in contact injuries)
 - ii. Training severity –increasing trend (35 day absence)
 - iii. 44% of all injuries occur in training (increased from 39% in 2018-19)
- c. *Concussion*

- i. Stable but high match concussion incidence
- ii. 20% of concussions occur in training
- d. *Artificial Rugby Turf (ART)*
 - i. Average 7-season severity for ART match injuries six days greater than natural grass
 - ii. No evidence that match injury incidence increased pre or post COVID-19 suspension or for games with a shorter turnaround.

The key findings of the 2019-20 **CRISP** reports included:

- a. *BUCS Super League* -.Incidence of all injuries and of concussion similar to the Premiership.
 - b. *Community Men*
 - i. 7-day time loss injury incidence has increased slightly over the last three seasons, with severity remaining stable.
 - ii. Concussion incidence remains relatively low.
 - iii. Injury & concussion incidence increases with level of competition (e.g. L3/4 higher incidence than L5/6).
 - c. *Schools*
 - i. Incidence of all injuries increase with age.
 - ii. Concussion incidence is relatively high at U18.
 - iii. 70% of total exposure was collected from U18 matches.
- Overall, concussion comprises c.20% of all injuries at every level of the game.
 - The tackle is the game event most commonly associated with all injury (40-50% and concussion (50-70%) risk.

FUTURE COMPETITION STRUCTURE- Stephen Pearson

Council Members approved the recommendations below:

1. That, from season 2022/23, the English Clubs Championship at Level 3 and below will consist of:
 - a. One league at Level 3
 - b. Three leagues at Level 4
 - c. Six leagues at Level 5
 - d. Twelve leagues at Level 6
 - e. approximately sixteen leagues at Level 7*
 - f. approximately 20 leagues at Level 8*
 - g. at Level 9 and below will be determined by the relevant organising committee*

*Exact number of leagues to be determined by final size of leagues, number of team entries and local need.

It is proposed that at all levels leagues would be organised aligned to the key FCS principles (minimising travel, player welfare/need, quality of competition and club sustainability), and that at Level 4 to 6 this would be implemented on a regional basis, whereas at Level 7 and below this would be implemented on a broadly Constituent Body basis (retaining some flexibility where it makes sense for clubs on CB borders to play in different CBs).

Voting: For: Against Abstain

2. That, from season 2022/23, cup rugby will be delivered after the league season (per level, from L5 and below) with mid-season (optional) entry for teams.
The competition format will be determined such that pools will operate at Level 5 and top tier of Level 6, and with regional knockout waterfall competitions at bottom tier of Level 6 and for Level 7 and below, all culminating in a 'Community Game Finals Event'.

Voting: For: Against Abstain

3. That from season 2022/23, Lower XV teams will be able to play in the English Clubs Championship up to and including Level 7 subject to specific criteria to be set out in the RFU Regulations.

Voting: For: 43 Against 14 Abstain 2

**Communication to the game Friday 16th April 2021: see Appendix 1
Letter from Stephen Pearson see Appendix 2-**

COMMUNITY GAME BOARD REPORT- David Roberts

- a. The final Future Competitions Structure recommendations were reviewed again and approved prior to presentation to Council.
- b. Recommendations from an insurance appraisal project were received and actions agreed.
- c. Recommendations were received from the Payment of Players Review Group and these were agreed for onward recommendation to Council.
- d. Discussion took place around both the Supplemental Ticket Fund model and the retained funds currently sitting with CBs in the Immediate Support Fund.
- e. Approval was given on a forward financial commitment to partner with Sport England on a programme with the Football Foundation to provide a dedicated Pitch Adviser support for Rugby Union.
- f. Approval was given on a forward financial commitment to replace match official communication equipment.
- g. Discussion took place on a revised assessment framework for CB safeguarding support. This focuses on a self-review undertaken jointly with the CB and CB Relationship Manager
- h. Discussion took place on the latest position on player data.

PAYMENT OF PLAYERS REVIEW GROUP – David Roberts/Dave Stublely

Council agreed the proposed Recommendations 1-5 set out above; and granted delegated authority to Governance Committee to amend the regulations for the 2021-22 season.

Recommendations

1: The revised thresholds are:

- a. Level 3 -£250,000 (down from £275,000)
- b. Level 4 -£125,000 (down from £157,500)
- c. Level 5 -£50,000 (down from £65,000)
- d. Level 6 –£0 -no change

2. Clubs at Level 8 and below should only

need to complete the declaration annually if they pay their players or player coaches and wish to be eligible for RFU Benefits. This recommendation was proposed based on the data that has been collected over the first two seasons of the application of Regulation 7

3. Student Clubs and non-voting clubs should be removed from the at level 7 and above (ie Loughborough University).

4. Women's teams - no change to the current regulation but noted that the position continues to be monitored and reviewed on regular basis.

5. No changes made to the current list of RFU Benefits as defined within Regulation 7.

Review of the RFU Benefits discussed wider implications of a hard cap and introduction of sanctions

such as points deduction /relegation with no decision.

PROFESSIONAL GAME BOARD REPORT- Phil de Glanville

Most of the focus has been on Covid-related policies:

- Enhanced Covid protocols focusing on off-field practices and behaviour in the main.
- Introduction of fines (£100 to Restart) to reinforce those protocols for staff and players.
- Change to the testing system for PCR tests to lateral flow tests from the end of March 2021. This will likely be three days per week of testing.

Championship started their abridged season on 6 March after some warm-up matches. The competition is due to complete in June.4.

Premiership clubs requested second team matches for (particularly younger) players and these are subject to the same match day protocols as for the 1st team and are based on playing locally to minimise travel. This has also included the England U20 team playing internal games alongside some matches against Premiership A XV's. England U18 camps have also been running successfully.

PGB was presented with a paper offering a brain health service for retired former professional rugby players along with an associate research project running for five years.

GOVERNANCE STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT- Chis Cuthbertson

Future regulatory obligations of clubs

- Broad support for mandating registration of all adult players to create an ability to communicate with the players directly. Concerns around the timing of requiring all players to be registered from the start of the 2021/22 season.
- The Committee reviewed the introduction of mandated pitch-side care for the age grade game. Initial CGB proposals are that specified levels of care would be mandatory from season 2022/23, with season 2021/22 being a transitional season. In season 2021/22, specified minimum levels of care would be recommended, but given the likely challenges of volunteers accessing training courses due to the Covid restrictions,

Regulation change

- The regulations around "Foreign Player" in match day squads in the professional game could change in season 2021/22 following Brexit, however, the recommendation is effectively to continue the status quo position for next season pending an agreement for a longer-term solution thereafter.

AGM Notice

Council agreed that as in previous years, the AGM will be held virtually after the June Council meeting, which this year will be on Friday 11 June 2021.

Agenda items:

- To consider and approve the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Friday 12 June 2020.
- To receive a report from the Chief Executive for Season 2020/21.3. To receive a Financial Report and to review the Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20
- To appoint BDO LLP as Auditors to audit the 2020/2021 financial statements
- To approve changes to the Rules
- To consider any other business of which due notice shall have been given.
- To hear any other relevant matter for the consideration of the Council and/or the Board of Directors during the ensuing year, but on which no voting shall be allowed.
- To approve the following Board appointments:
- Chair of the Board of Directors – Tom Ilube

- Independent Non-Executive Director Polly Williams
- For season 2021/22. to elect
 - President – Jeff Blackett
 - Senior Vice-President- Nigel Gillingham
 - Junior Vice-President – Rob Briers

BOARD NOMINATION CO- Dominic Proctor

- Chair of Board- Tom Ilube
- INED- Polly Williams
 - Both approved, by the Board and ratified by and are subject to final ratification at the AGM.
- World Rugby Exco vacancy.- Jonathan Webb
- Rugby Football Foundation (RFF) Trustees - Roger Clarke and Kirsty Marlor as RFF Trustees,

COUNCIL NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE- Mike Waplinton

- National Members. - Council approved the reappointment of Maggie Alphonsi and Martin Corry for a further three-year term to 31 July 2024.
- Volunteer Recognition Working Group.- Dave McAterr, Mike Proctor & Nigel Gillingham
- Club Financial Viability Group,- Paula Carter, Stephen Pearson and Deborah Griffin
- The Organising (Appeals) Committee for the Community Game.- Dave Clarke (Chair) & Steve Mead

D&I IMPLEMENTATION GROUP- Genevieve Glover

The focus for the Council Meeting is:

- Recommendation 1, led by Amanda Bennett (Independent) – the composition of (i) RFU standing committees, (ii) RFU subcommittees, and (iii) RFU task & finish/working groups, to be considered within a D&I context and committees to be supported in achieving a diverse mix of members.
- Recommendation 3, -led by Ralph Knibbs (Vice-Chair) – consideration given to the D&I overlay on Council Member appointments. Supporting CBs to attract and retain a more diverse pool of volunteer leaders.
- Recommendation 10, - led by Kirsten Flower (National Youth Council) – to agree in principle to strengthen the relationship between National Youth Council and RFU Council and leverage the experience and perspectives both groups can bring.

CHAIR OF BOARD – Andy Cosslett

Reported on:

- Risk Register
- Board Finance Working Group
- Board size and composition - It is proposed that the Board reduces in size from 14 to 12 over time. From 1 August 2022 there would be three rather than four Council Elected Directors, and the third Executive board seat will be removed at such time as the incumbent leaves the RFU

ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW OF THE RFU AS AN NGB - Nigel Gollingham

Aim: To propose an organisation for the RFU as an NGB that is representative and reflective of society and, in particular, the increasing diversity of rugby participants of the next 10 years, and that the organisation and its processes are agile to meet the demands of a rapidly changing environment.

Potential Topics.

The WG anticipates that the following topics will be considered (among others) by the Review:

- a. What does rugby environment look like over the next 10 years, and how is that reflected in membership of the RFU?
- b. Confirm what are the essential core functions of the RFU and any other highly desirable functions it should undertake as an NGB.

- c. The current administrative/ governance structure between the RFU's members and its organisation at Twickenham consists of the Constituent Bodies. What size and shape should that future structure be?
- d. What body should exercise the current Powers of Council on behalf of the membership and, if appropriate, how should that body be populated, and what is its size and shape?
- e. How can processes and / or the organisation be improved and make its major decision-making processes, particularly about the game, more agile for the future rugby environment? In particular, to establish in which forums decisions should be made.

Council approved that the Chair of the Review of the Organisational Structure of the RFU as an NGB be a recently retired or about to retire Council member.

Meeting closed at 15.30

K Andrews
D Clarke
RTJ Briers

Appendix 2

Adult Male Future Competitions Structure (FCS) for season 2022/23

The RFU Council met on Friday 16 April, and has approved three further elements of the Future Competitions Structure group recommendations for a new competition structure for the adult male game from Level 3 down, for implementation from the 2022/23 season.

The vote follows an 18-month review into the current competition structure, which has included extensive consultation sessions with Council Members, Constituent Bodies, Club administrators, competition organisers, match officials, coaches and players, in addition to webinars, a national survey and detailed analysis of available data.

The three resolutions passed are in addition to those recommendations previously approved by Council on 27 November 2020, which are summarised below:

- a. The size of leagues at Levels 5 and below to be capped at 12 teams, and at Levels 3 & 4 to be capped at 14 teams
- b. At all levels there will be a protected two-week break over the Christmas period and protected weekend breaks (at points to be determined through the season)
- c. A rapid review of competition structures will take place every three years

At Friday's Council meeting, the following resolutions were agreed:

1. League Rugby - English Clubs Championship at Level 3 and below

From season 2022/23, the English Clubs Championship at Level 3 and below will consist of:

- a. One league at Level 3
- b. Three leagues at Level 4
- c. Six leagues at Level 5
- d. Twelve leagues at Level 6
- e. Approximately sixteen leagues at Level 7*
- f. Approximately 20 leagues at Level 8*

g. At Level 9 and below will be determined by the relevant organising committee*

*Exact number of leagues to be determined by final size of leagues, number of team entries and local need.

At Level 4 to 6 this will be implemented on a regional basis, whereas at Level 7 and below this will be implemented on a broadly Constituent Body (CB) boundary basis (retaining some flexibility where it makes sense for clubs on CB borders to play in different CBs).

2. Cup Rugby – Level 5 and below

From season 2022/23, cup rugby will be delivered after the league season (per level, from Level 5 and below) with mid-season (optional) entry for teams.

The competition format will be determined such that pools will operate at Level 5 and top tier of Level 6, and with regional knockout waterfall competitions at the bottom tier of Level 6 and for Level 7 and below, all culminating in 'Community Game Finals'.

3. Lower XV teams

From season 2022/23, Lower XV teams will be able to play in the English Clubs Championship up to and including Level 7, subject to specific criteria to be set out in the RFU Regulations.

More detailed information regarding implementation and regulation will be communicated throughout the remainder of this season.

Appendix 3

Letter to KA and DC received from Stephen Pearson immediately after the vote on FCS -16.04.21

Hi all,

Thanks for your comments and feedback over the recent sessions we have had around the FCS Council vote today. I haven't seen the breakdown of the vote, but as Ken spoke clearly against the Lower XVs, I thought I would drop you both a line now the vote has gone through in favour.

I do not see this mandate from Council as an opportunity to force a single solution across the country with or without the support of the clubs. We will have no success if we do that in the long run (even if we could do it short term). I want to work carefully across the country with local implementation groups to look at the landscape in detail and see how we can get the best rugby outcomes for all. If that is already been delivered with Lower XVs competition structures, why would we seek to undermine them? This is the same argument I have used with Middlesex where my call with 40 of their clubs emphasised the strength of their Merit table offer to Lower XVs and the cup competitions that flow from them. Talking to their reps in the aftermath of that call is what enabled Chris Cuthbertson to speak and vote as he did today. We will have more work to do with them as we seek to build the Regulations that will support the new structure and Council will have more votes to approve or reject those regulations.

I know we have a long way to go together before we can develop a full blown proposal that will entice Lancashire clubs back in to the RFU leagues, but this vote of its own does not rule that possibility out. Assuming I am asked by CGB to lead on implementation (and that is David Roberts' call!), I will be willing to work with you to see how far we can progress this (and maybe it will take a full cycle before the first review in 2025/6). I hope you can reassure your clubs as they respond to any media reporting or announcements from the RFU around today's decision. This is not the end. We are only at the end of the beginning.

Have a good weekend.

Best

Stephen