



LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION LTD  
**General Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023**  
**RFU Representatives Report**

Notes from RFU Council meeting and AGM held at Twickenham on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Congratulations goes to **Rob Briers** whose election to be the President of the RFU for 2023-24 was approved at the AGM. He was presented with his Blazer by the outgoing President Nigel Gillingham.

**Ken Andrews**, who retires from RFU Council this year, was awarded Distinguished Membership.

**Dave Clarke** will continue to serve as the Lancashire Representative and will sit on the CB and Club Development Sub-committee, Adult Competitions Management Sub-committee and will continue to Chair the Appeals Committee.

**Paul Deakin**, our new RFU Representative, will now become a full member of the CB and Club Development Sub-committee after being an Independent member of that committee for the last twelve months.

**CEO Report- Bill Sweeney**

Report containing an update from the CEO on strategic matters for the RFU and our game.  
Topics covered:

**Professional Game Agreement (PGA)**

The RFU have been working closely with PRL since January to develop potential solutions for the future of the men's professional game. While good progress across a number of areas of the Professional Game Agreement has been made, it is recognized that the scale of the current challenges facing the men's professional game, in particular regarding the financial sustainability of the system, requires a revised approach.

Since April, the RFU have been working with PRL and external advisors on a plan for restructuring the professional men's game. The RFU have agreed a joint vision of "World beating English teams and thriving professional leagues delivered through a fully optimised system in partnership with players" supported by the following objectives.

- a. World-beating English Teams: 6N, RWC, Champions Cup and Club World Cup success;
- b. Thriving Professional Leagues: high-performing with the best English and international talent;
- c. Fully Optimised System: a true partnership that is financially sustainable;
- d. Player Partnership: developing the strongest pool of healthy players.

They are now working on a three-stage process to develop and deliver the joint strategy, which aims to stabilise and transform the professional game and have a positive impact for a whole game solution. This timeline is designed to conclude at the end of the current PGA:

- a. May to July 2023 - "Stabilisation": developing the strategy to deliver the joint vision.
- b. August 2023 to April 2024 - "Turnaround": develop detailed plans to deliver strategy, develop a detailed business model to rebalance the professional men's game.
- c. May 2024 onwards - "Transform": begin implementation of joint strategy with a balanced, sustainable financial structure.

## **London Irish**

As a result of London Irish and its potential buyers being unable to provide reassurances over the club's financial ability to operate in the Premiership in the 2023/24 season, the RFU confirmed the club is not able to participate in any league next season.

The RFU's Club Financial Viability Group allowed an extra week's extension however, the club has failed to meet its commitments to pay staff and players in full for May.

The decision was taken after six months of talks to take over the club failed to materialise and to provide certainty to staff and players, thereby allowing them to seek alternative employment.

The move also provides clarity to other clubs in the league and prevents a situation where the club goes into administration part way through a season.

The RFU, Premiership Rugby and the RPA has been in regular dialogue with the club to support the takeover and provide regular updates to players and staff and have announced they have launched a hardship fund for players and staff who are most in need of financial support.

## **Chair's Report – Tom Ilube**

The Board continued the program of conducting at least one of the meetings each season on the road, away from Twickenham to engage with the local rugby community. Accordingly, in addition to the Board meeting on 18 May, the Board attended a Community Engagement Event hosted at Sale FC Rugby Club on 17 May with a focus on the Women and Girls' game.

The discussions and questions, and ability to interact with the guests, also provided invaluable feedback from the community game, with Board and Executive members taking many of the points raised back to their respective departments.

Thanks given to Sale FC Rugby Club, Lancashire RFU and Cheshire RFU, along with the local delivery staff for arranging the outstanding event.

## **Governance Regulation Changes- Paula Carter**

Council **approved** the regulation changes pertaining to:

Regulations **1** (Definitions), **3** (Membership of RFU), **4** (Club Ownership and Material Reorganisations), **5** (Insolvency, Funding and International Tickets), **6** (Adult Competitions), **8** (Agents), **9** (Player Safety), **11** (Season), **14** (Men's Registration), **15** (Age Grade), **19** (Discipline), **20** (Anti-Doping, namely amended Illicit Drugs Policy), **21** (Safeguarding), **22** (Covid)

Granted delegated authority to the Governance Standing Committee to finalise the drafting of the regulations and regulations for all competitions.

## **Council Nominations Committee -Ken Andrews/Steve Miles**

Council **approved** the appointments to Council Nominations Standing Committee to the following:

- **Steve Miles** (East Midlands) for a period of three years to July 2026
- **Penny Stewart** (Northumberland) for a period of three years to July 2026
- **Ted Atkinson** (Yorkshire) for a period of one year to July 2024
- **Deborah Griffin** (World Rugby) for a period of one year to July 2024

Council **approved** the award of RFU Rose Award to the following individual:

**Floyd Steadman**

Council **approved** the award of Distinguished Membership to the following individuals leaving Council:

- **Ken Andrews** (Lancashire)
- **Fred Batchelor** (ERFSU)
- **David McAteer** (Berkshire)
- **Stephen Pearson** (Oxford University)
- **John Rogers** (Cumbria)

Council **approved** appointments to the:

- a. Governance Standing Committee;
- b. CGB Standing Committee;
- c. RFU Sub-committees; all as set out in Appendix 3.

### **I & D Implementation Working Group**

Matt Webb was appointed as Chair of the I & D Implementation Working Group taking over from Genevieve Glover.

As Matt is a co-opted Council member and his term ends on 31st July 2024, it was agreed that he should be Chair for that period and be considered for a further term of co-option of two years at the June Council meeting 2024

### **Council Handbook- Rob Briers**

Council **approved** the Council Handbook 2023/24.

### **Championship Strategic Review/Transition Group Update- Conor O'Shea**

#### **Introduction and Background**

The Championship Strategic Review Group was set up in August 2021 to consider opportunities and options to support the Championship and its clubs to become more financially sustainable.

Following the report provided to Board and Council in January and February 2022 respectively, the group evolved to become a 'transition' group and make recommendations around a competition structure to be introduced in 23/24 to meet the objectives endorsed by Board and Council. Board and Council last updated in February 2023.

As a reminder, the Strategic Review group suggested that the Championship should fulfil three roles in the English rugby system:

- a. Development – it needs to provide development opportunities for players, coaches and match officials as part of the pathway.
- b. Progression – in order for the Championship to be a successful part of the professional eco-system, we need clubs in the National Leagues to aspire to be part of it, and clubs in the Championship with genuine opportunity to progress into the Premiership with a realistic prospect of staying there.
- c. Attractive – it's accepted that the Championship currently is not attracting fans, sponsors or broadcasters to the level required for it to be financially sustainable. This needs to be a focus of any redesign of the competition.

#### **Recommendation**

- This will be a 22 team competition which is not perfect. It is however essential all teams involved in the Premiership Rugby Cup for the proof of concept and work is required on the narrative.

- The fact that the PGA is being renegotiated and all stakeholders are engaged in discussions around the future number of participating teams in Tiers 1 and 2, the group agrees this is the most appropriate way forward for 23/24.
- This competition between the top two tiers is envisaged to be part of the long-term solution to the sustainability of the Tier 1 and 2 clubs and will form part of the future structured season.
- To maintain momentum innovations will be presented to the Performance Conference in June for debate.

### **National Youth Council report- Kirsten Flower**

The RFU National Youth Council (NYC) is a voluntary consultative body made up of people from across the game aged 18 – 25 years old, composed of current players, referee's, coaches, and club/CB volunteers.

This year, the NYC consisted of 11 members from across the country. All members besides the Chair sat on an RFU Sub-Committees or Working Groups. This includes 3 NYC members attending every Council meeting, with the Chair attending all RFU Council meetings to provide continuity and a point of contact for Council members.

#### **Projects**

##### **Increasing CB Youth Representation**

To support a select number of CB's in establishing a Youth Project/initiative by providing experiences & knowledge, in addition to signposting members to the NYC's Young Volunteer Engagement toolkit, with this resource being used as a guiding tool to help achieve this.

This is a longer term project to ensure sustainability and allow CB's the opportunity to engage at a time that suits them, with regards to capacity & priority focus areas. 223/262 3 of 6

We have piloted the project this year, using the opportunity to put the NYC toolkit into practice and capture learnings with a view to embed learnings & develop case studies to support the establishment of more Youth Projects and resources/documentation.

Work has been ongoing to establish expressions of interest from CB's, ascertain specific CB capacity, and meet with stakeholders from the CB to establish the most appropriate youth offer and support from the NYC.

- They have engaged with 6 CB's; 2 CB's have already established a Youth Project (NLD Youth Council & Hertfordshire Youth Network) with a project plan discussed for 4 other CB's (East Midlands, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Cornwall).
- The group has also produced a presentation to support future CB engagement opportunities.

### **Business Plan – Sue Day**

Revenues generally follow a four-year cycle based on the number and timing of Men's home Internationals. Given the nature and objectives of the RFU, they normally plan to 'break even' across the four-year cycle, 'distributing' investment back into the game through expenditure on professional and community rugby programs.

As a result of both the pandemic and the market conditions surrounding broadcast and sponsorship, the revenues in the current cycle are well down on what had been anticipated pre-COVID.

Based on current forecasts and understanding it is expected that these to remain depressed into the next cycle.

In contrast, the operating costs have risen significantly, in particular, energy, people, technology and insurance costs, as well as rugby investment requirements in certain areas as activity has resumed post Covid and as additional priorities – such as driving participation back post-Covid – have needed to be added in.

**Key elements to highlight:**

*22/23 Outturn* – When setting last year’s budget, it is highlighted that the RFU have been unable to reduce its operating cost base to a level that would be affordable in the longer term. Instead of achieving the £8m profit it would aim for in year 3 of a RWC cycle, they were anticipating a small underlying loss. Although they are tracking slightly favourable to budget in the current year, they are still some way off reaching the £5.9m profit we generated in 18/19.

*23/24 Budget* – A high level view of the 2023/24 proposed budget is captured in Section 5 with further detail provided in the 2023/24 Business plan document (Item 4.2a). The underlying loss of £36.4m is a result of reduced revenues and the fixed/ inflexible nature of our existing cost base.

An extensive business planning process has been developed to ensure that each £ spent has been heavily scrutinised.

*Long Term Affordability Gap* – As a result of reduced revenues and escalating costs, the RFU are no longer on track to achieve a breakeven position over a RWC cycle. The affordability gap equates to £12.4m per year over the next cycle, and despite the expectation that the annual SGF revenues will exceed the annual cost from 28/29, an affordability gap remains into the following cycle, though is forecast to reduce to £7.5m per annum.

**Committee and Working Group Reports were received from:**

- Governance Standing Committee
- Community Game Board
- Professional Game Board
- Every Rose Update Report
- Lou Latter
- I&D Implementation Working Group
- HIPM Committee Report

**Annual General Meeting**

There were presentations from Bill Sweeney (CEO), Tom Ilube (Chair of the Board), Sue Day (CFO), Steve Grainger (Rugby Development)

**Board appointments** were approved for;

Auriol Stevens (INED) to July 2026  
Kirsty Marlor (CED) to July 2026  
David Roberts (Chair of CGB) to July 2026  
Jon Webb (World Rugby) to July 2024  
Deborah Griffin (World Rugby) to July 2026

**Presidential team** were elected:

Rob Briers	President
Rob Udwin	Senior Vice President
Deborah Griffin	Junior Vice President

**Special RFU Council Meeting -17<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

The Special RFU Council meeting has been Board scheduled to cover the following items.

**RFU NGB Governance and Representation Review**

The objective is to review the organisational structures of the RFU as an NGB, the arrangements for the crucial decision-making structures, and recommend how the membership is best represented in those structures. A timetable has been drawn for the review to be presented for approval at the Council meeting in September 2024.

The Nominations Committee will be working closely with Council, Board and Executive to make an appropriate recommendation to Council for the appointment of Chair and members of the Review Group.

**Tackle Height - lessons learned - Rob Briers**

The Tackle height -lessons learned working group will present their findings at the extraordinary RFU Council meeting scheduled for the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2023

**Ken Andrews, Dave Clarke** RFU Council members

**Rob Briers** President elect