



ENGLISH RUGBY COUNTIES ASSOCIATION

Counties in Membership

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

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

Associate Members

Derbyshire
Lincolnshire
Nottinghamshire

MINUTES of the meeting held at Fiveways Old Edwardians RFC on Sunday 10th September 2017 at 11:00 a.m.

Counties represented:

Jonathan Dance	Berkshire	Norman Robertson	N.C.A.
David McAteer	Berkshire	Peter Grace (Chairman)	North Midlands
Anthony Flack	Buckinghamshire	Steve Guy	North Midlands
Alan Mitchell (Treasurer)	Cornwall	Charlie Hemmings	North Midlands
Richard Simeons	Cornwall	Rob Bray	North Midlands
John Drew	Devon	Colin Baldwin	Oxfordshire
Treve Mitchell	Devon	Andy Shorney	Somerset
Ivor Smith	Essex	John Atkin	Staffordshire
Simon Collyer-Bristow	Gloucestershire	Becky Davies	Staffordshire
Garry Doherty	Hampshire	Rob Forsyth	Staffordshire
Peter Baines	Herts	Michael Proctor	Staffordshire
David Roberts	Herts	Frank Edmonds	Sussex
David Hodgson	Lancashire	Charlie McGinty	Warwickshire
Brian East (Secretary)	Middlesex		

Apologies were received from:

Gwyn Stone	Buckinghamshire	Mark Hawkes	Somerset
Peter Williams	Gloucestershire	Steve Mead	Somerset
Adrian Sparks	Herts	Malcolm Caird	Surrey
David Herriman	Lancashire	Roger Edmundson	Sussex

1. PRELIMINARIES

- 1.1 The chairman, Peter Grace, welcomed all to the meeting. The meeting stood for reflection in memory of Howard Cross from Eastern Counties and Essex.

2. **Visit from Andy Cosslett, RFU Chairman**

2.1 The Chairman introduced our guest for the day

2.1 Andy introduced himself and outlined his rugby background and his support for the values of rugby. He had been a member of the RFU Management Board since 2012, initially as a non-executive independent director. He was a firm advocate of this role of independent directors who had made significant contribution to the board.

He covered the imminent RFU Strategy document “The game of our lives” and stressed the importance of the role of community rugby. This publication included coverage of the recognition of the volunteers, the improvement of club facilities and the need to increase participation in the game.

After his presentation he took part in a question and answer session.

2.2 Peter Grace (North Midlands) commented about the role of the middle tier of RFU Management in the Community game.

2.3 Jonathan Dance (Berkshire) asked about the possible future of the non-publication of the RFU Handbook and its replacement by an electronic version. This view was supported by Frank Edmonds (Sussex) who added that not everyone has access to I-pads, I-phones or their equivalents.

2.4 Steve Guy (North Midlands) asked about the possible changes to the composition of the area structure. The Area which contained North Midlands was too big geographically and unwieldy. He added that a major reorganisation was not necessary, just minor adjustments.

Colin Baldwin (Oxfordshire) commented that there was a conflict between the area composition and the divisional structure, particularly where competitions were involved.

Charlie McGinty (Warwickshire) said that areas were administration based and the staff were overloaded; perhaps an increase in the number of the areas might improve this.

Ivor Smith (Essex) said that his area is split by the River Thames and presented logistical problems.

Richard Simeons (Cornwall) agreed that the areas were too large but his CB were well served by the staff.

2.5 Andy Shorney (Somerset) asked about whether there had been any reaction to the comments made in the recent RFU Staff survey. Andy Cosslett replied that this was under scrutiny.

John Atkins (Staffordshire) added that his CB were working well with the staff

2.6 Charlie Hemmings (North Midlands) asked about the Governance review recommendations about the length of service of RFU Council members, Were there going to be similar recommendations for the length of service of volunteers?

Becky Davies (Staffordshire) was concerned about role of volunteers in CBs and the good work of leadership academies. It was important to encourage younger people to get involved in the working of CBs.

David Hodgson (Lancs) stated that succession planning was important.

2.7 David Roberts (Hertfordshire) spoke about the Large CB meeting held on 4th June 2017. (defined by the number of clubs in the CBs). Topics covered included CB succession planning, sharing good practice and communication at all levels both within and without the CBs. There were plans to hold similar meetings for both medium-sized and smaller-sized CBs. David agreed to circulate the report from the meeting.

2.8 John Drew (Devon) asked about the improvement of facilities for clubs. He had been involved with two CBs (Devon and previously Herts) and had spent time recording the requirements of clubs but was uncertain how high up the RFU Management chain the information went.

Andy Cosslett replied that there had been an increase in spending leading up to the Rugby World Cup in 2015 but that spending was now down to the previous levels. When asked about a possible increase in the funding he added that it would be important to ensure that an increase in project management skills within the CBs was necessary to match the possible increase in funding.

Michael Proctor (Staffordshire) commented that small clubs needed to find such project management skills.

Andy Cosslett suggested such skills could be found via sponsors on a pro-bono basis. The Artificial Grass Pitches project were an example of this with the provision of such skills included in the capital cost.

John Drew asked whether the increase in spending on the Women's and Girls game had been beneficial, Andy commented that it was noticeable that improvement of facilities increased when more females were involved. He added that this increase in diversity was important and that an RFU Diversity group was to be set up. In response to a question from Richard Simeons he was uncertain whether this money was ring-fenced.

Rob Bray (North Midlands) said that paying back funding was a problem for some CBs. Andy commented that revenue planning was of paramount importance but that the payback period might be extended.

Peter Grace added that the Rugby Football Foundation needed to review their practices.

Anthony Flack (Bucks) said that his CB were concerned about the provision of separate changing facilities when both adult male and female games were being played at the same time.

Charlie McGinty (Warks) said that the increased Sky subscriptions is beginning to have an impact on club finances.

2.9 Steve Guy (North Midlands) expressed concern about the proposed time-table for implementation of the RFU Governance changes.

Peter Baines (Herts) said that there had been a transparent process underway since October 2016 and that the changes had been widely communicated with and to the clubs.

Colin Baldwin (Oxon) said that the planned SGM should not be in London and had expressed that view in the ERCA response to the Governance changes.

Norman Robertson (N.C.A.) said that the move of the board meetings around the country was to be applauded but why does the AGM have to be held in London?

Simon Collyer-Bristow (Gloucs) said that there were safeguards in the processes behind the proposed Governance changes.

Andy said that the game had the final say in the changes and that the game seemed to be in favour of the recommendations. The RFU needed to conform to the requirements from the Government via Sport England.

2.10 Andy then summed up the discussion, spoke briefly about AGP projects in that the lessons from the pilot schemes had been learnt

At this point Andy left the meeting for another engagement.

3. **MINUTES** of meeting held on 4th June 2017

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record. Matters arising were taken as agenda items.

3.2 Peter Grace reported that Cheshire had resigned from ERCA membership.

4. **Artificial Grass Pitches(AGP) Strategy**

Members discussed their experiences within their CBs for the establishment of AGPs

4.1 Ivor Smith (Essex) said that AGP pitches were being held up due to the problem of removing the volume of topsoil

5. **RFU National CB Conference**

5.1 It was announced that this was to be held on 30th September/1st October. RFU Council members were not invited but could attend. The aim of the conference was to develop CB leaders.

6. **County Championship**

6.1 Concern was expressed about the fact that some finals were not to be played at Twickenham but the presentations would take place there. Charlie McGinty had received a response from Keith Shurville to this effect. The decision had been agreed at the RFU Competitions meeting held on 7th September 2017. Most members present were concerned about this decision process.

Jonathan Dance stated that members should discuss this matter with their RFU Council members and ask them to raise the matter at an RFU Council meeting.

7. **Treasurer's report**

7.1 The bank balance was £3530 and there were still unpaid invoices for 9 CBs.

8. **ERCA and future topics**

8.1 Peter Grace agreed to invite Steve Brown to the next meeting.

9. **Any other Business**

9.1 Succession planning – a representative from one of the Northern CBs was requested to attend the Steering Group meetings that are held two weeks before the usual meetings.

The meeting closed at 13: 15

The meetings for next season will be:

21st January 2018

3rd June 2018

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

_____ Date _____