Neil Marston, RFU Council Representative for Cumbria

BRIEFING NOTES FROM THE RFU COUNCIL MEETING HELD 16th February 2024

Please see below the briefing notes from the RFU Council Meeting held on 16th February 2024. please drop me a line or give me a call if you would like to discuss any matters or require more detailed information.

BRIEFING NOTES:

1. Presidential matters

1.1 Luke Pearce was congratulated on refereeing his fiftieth international. As part of the wider developments around the England senior men's squad and their engagement, some of the players joined Council during the break to meet with the Council members.

2. CEO's Update to Council

2.1 The Council were updated on matters being undertaken by the Executive Staff. These included:

a. In the community game: the Community Game Future project to map out the ten-year plan for the community game which will need to meet a changing landscape; tackle height implementation, updates on match completions which were on a positive trend
b. In the professional game: the Professional Game Partnership progress; the men's performance in the 6 Nations and bringing through younger players, and the women's pathway.
c. In other areas: the successful sold-out match-day against Wales and the alcohol-free zone trial which was positive despite some sensationalist reporting.

3. Chair of the Board of Directors Update

3.1 Tom Ilube CBE (Chair of the RFU Board of Directors) updated the Council on the operations of the Board of Directors, including the last meeting of the Board on 24 January. The Council had an in-depth discussion on the role of the RFU in the media. In particular, the Council discussed the challenges faced by a changing media landscape; as traditional media struggles, it is increasingly dependent on negative headlines and stories in order to generate click-throughs.

3.2 Alleged child abuse Nicky Campbell - Abdul Ezedi: why is he here? - BBC Sounds

4. Correcting Reported Inaccuracies on the RFU Finances

4.1 In recent weeks there have been inaccurate articles published in The Rugby Paper regarding the RFU's financial activities

4.2 The articles contain numerous inaccuracies and misleading statements about the RFU's participation in the agreement with commercial partner CVC announced in 2021.

4.3 These articles and the inaccuracies contained within are unhelpful and damaging to the reputation of the sport of rugby in England, the RFU has written to The Rugby Paper to request the articles are removed from their website.

4.4 They have agreed to take the article down from their website and to publish a correction.

5. Adult Player Registration

5.1 Adult Player Registration is digitising the current registration process, moving the responsibility away from volunteers to individual players, meaning that it will be more straightforward to communicate directly with players, and improved data will help manage rugby and for example to help with retention. This follows the successful role out of age-grade registration, and trials in the adult game during in the 2023/24 season.

5.2 Council was given a live demonstration of the registration process for a player and a club administrator to see how this has been made straightforward for users. It also discussed the feedback that had been factored during the consultation process, and the assurance of the technological solution.

5.3 The new regulation 13 for the Community Game states that to play rugby you must be registered. If you play at a lower level (Counties 3 men's and women's National Challenge 2) you can use dual registration to play for another low-level team to help them complete matches. This is called 'dual club' registration. It is based on the level at which the player plays, not the level of the senior team in the club.

5.4 We have invested in GMS to deliver APR. First Sports International have delivered better.

pathways to more stable access to GMS. The new landing and data entry pages are more user. friendly. We have a bespoke version for mobile phones and tablets.

5.5 Council APPROVED the launch of adult player registration through 2024/25, subject to the continued smooth progress of regulation development, technology delivery, and engagement with the wider game. After final testing of all technology, there will be a final decision in May 2024 on implementation.

6. Re-appointment of Board Directors

6.1 Council discussed the full process undertaken by the Board Nominations Committee and Board, and RATIFIED and recommended to the members the re-appointment of:

a. Tom Ilube CBE as Chair of the Board for a second, three-year term to run from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2027.
b. Polly Williams as Independent Non-Executive Director for a second, three-year term to run from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2027.

7. AGM Calling Notice

7.1 Council APPROVED that the 2024 AGM be 'de-coupled' from the June Council Meeting and held virtually on a separate, mid-week date (likely to be Wednesday 12 June 2024). Moving the AGM away from a Friday evening would benefit clubs and other members.

8. Council Media and Confidentiality Policy

8.1 Council APPROVED a new Media and Confidentiality Policy which had been approved by the Board. It brought greater clarity to the responsibilities of senior leaders within the organisation. It was confirmed that breaches of that Policy would be managed through the current Code of Conduct process.

9. Tier 2 – Update and Introduction of Minimum Operating Standards

9.1 Since February 2023, the RFU, Championship Club Committee and Premiership Rugby Limited have been working to develop a reimagined Tier 2 of the men's game. The objective is to create a second tier that supports the English system by developing young English talent, whilst supporting the clubs become financially sustainable by growing local audiences and increasing the value in the league.

9.2 Council APPROVED in principle to introduce a set Minimum Operating Standards into Tier 2 to apply from season 2025/26 onwards, with a final decision on the detail of the Minimum Operating Standards to follow.

10. Council Nominations Committee

10.1 Council APPROVED the Council Nominations Committee recommendation that the current co-opted members' term on Council, should they individually wish, be extended for a further year until 31 July 2025.

11. Community Game Future – Interactive Breakout Groups

11.1 Council was updated in detail on the Community Game Future work (the focus of this is developing a longer-term investment and prioritisation plan that sees the RFU seeking to focus on a smaller number of things in greater depth), in particular how the areas of focus would be chosen. Interactive breakout sessions were held to get Council input.

12. Council Ways of Working - Progress Update

12.1 There was a short update on the project to ensure that Council can work in the most effective way.

13. Financial update

13.1 Council received its regular briefing on the financial position of the RFU. The report contained information including the current financial performance and forecasted out-turn for the year which is on track with the planned budget.

13.2 Council was also updated on the early financial planning for season 2024/25.

14. Reports

14.1 Council received reports from the following groups and the opportunity to question their authors: Community Game Board, Professional Game Board, Council Nominations Committee, Inclusive Leadership Delivery Group, Governance Standing Committee and the Head Injury Prevention and Management Subcommittee.