Neil Marston, RFU Council Representative for Cumbria

RFU Representatives Report - November 25th, 2024

Please see below the briefing notes from the RFU Council Meeting held on 25th November 2024. please drop me a line or give me a call if you would like to discuss any matters or require more detailed information.

The RFU Council met at Twickenham on Monday 25th November following the final Autumn Nations match against Japan. It was a good opportunity to reflect on the recent England Men's International matches and the narrow defeats suffered against the southern hemisphere teams. Whilst the results were disappointing, the player pipeline is promising and Performance Director, Conor O'Shea is confident that Steve Borthwick can turn things around. There were a number of agenda items on the day but only one for decision.

1.Presidential matters

Rob Udwin (President) welcomed Council members to the second meeting of the season.

2.CEO's Update to Council

Bill Sweeney (CEO) updated the Council on key ongoing matters. The verbal and written update included:

World Rugby and Rugby Europe Elections

The World Rugby and Rugby Europe election processes has been positive for the RFU. Brett Robinson (Australia) (who the RFU seconded) was elected Chair and Jonathan Webb would serve alongside him as Vice Chair on the World Rugby Executive Board. Janhein Pieterse (who the RFU backed and voted for) won the election to become Rugby Europe President. Dick Tyler also retained his position on the Rugby Europe Board.

Men's Professional Game

On the Men's Professional Game Partnership (MPGP), the recruitment for the chair and two non-executive directors (INEDs) for the Men's Professional Rugby Board (MPRB) has been completed and the announcement has now been made. These are: Chair: Mike McTigue – highly experienced chair, currently chairing IG and Openreach, and an INED on the Telegraph Media Group; INED (governance): Rachel Baillache – former partner at KPMG, current Senior Independent Director at the LTA and board member at UK Sport, former INED at Somerset CCC; INED (performance): Ged Roddy – 30 years performance experience – former Director of Sport at Bath University, Director of Football at the Premier League and director at several football clubs, currently Technical Expert at FIFA. The MPRB's first meeting took place on 22 November. The England Men's player fee negotiation had been completed and the relationship with the players was strong.

Women's Rugby World Cup 2025

The Red Roses were drawn in Pool A with Australia, USA and Samoa. The Red Roses would face USA in the opening match at the Stadium of Light. In the ticket pre-sale window 138,101 tickets were sold for all matches. The RFU were now in the ticket application phase with over 100,000 tickets applied for so far. Interest was also strong in England's fixtures and potential route to the final, and the RFU were working with England 2025 and World Rugby to ensure supporting the marketing of other matches.

People Update

The re-shaping and re-sizing process had been an exceptionally challenging time for the organisation and Council were thanked for their support.The Executive Director of Venue (Anthony Munday) and Chief Financial Officer (Francesca Pierce) appointments had now been made public.
Ali Donnelly had been appointed as the Executive Director of Corporate Affairs. Donnelly had significant experience in rugby, sport and government. Ali founded Scrum Queens and was Head of Marketing and Communications at Wasps. Ali is currently the CEO of More than Equal and before that was Executive Director Digital, Communications and Marketing at Sport England, the Prime Minister's Deputy Official Spokesperson & Head of News, and the Head of News at The Treasury.

3.Chair of the Board of Directors Update

Tom Ilube CBE (Chair of the RFU Board of Directors) noted that in addition to the planned strategic matters on the agenda, Board took time to discuss in depth the ongoing World Rugby Law Trials and agreed the RFU's position and approach. Board also received an extremely insightful brief from Stephen Duckworth, the new Chair of the Injured Players Foundation (IPF). Although already avid supporters of the IPF, the presentation

allowed Board to fully understand the IPF's ongoing work and activities, alongside the vision Stephen brought to the charity and how Board can continue to support.
Board also received an update on the transformation and optimisation update, stadium masterplan, CFO succession planning, GRR and next steps on the CGF.
Tom briefed Council on key elements of the Annual Report and Accounts, particularly relating to Executive pay. Council engaged in a detailed discussion on this, including on how to ensure maximum transparency.

4. Adult Male Cup (Papa John's) Regulations
Feedback from the previous season had been collected, and no significant changes were proposed for season 2024/25, with minor changes around competition format and player eligibility being proposed. Council APPROVED the Adult Male Cup (Papa John's) Regulations for Season 2024/25 and DELEGATED AUTHORITY to the Governance Committee to approve the final draft.

5. CGF Update and Delivery System Implementation Plan
David Roberts (Chair of CGB) and Rob Udwin (President) noted that the Delivery System workstream was initiated to research and analyse the potential roles and remit, decision making and delivery structures for the RFU to develop an optimal structure for the delivery of the new CGF strategy and associated investment & prioritisation plan (endorsed by Council in June 2024). An 18-month implementation plan was shared for review and endorsement, with the intention to commence in January 2025. Council ENDORSED the final Delivery System solution and implementation plan workstreams and key activities required over the next 18 months.

6. Injured Players Foundation (IPF)
Stephen Duckworth (Chair of the IPF Board of Trustees) gave Council background to the IPF and its work, and his own background. He went through the support that the IPF provides to injured players and to clubs, and emphasised the need for clubs to be aware of the IPF so that should an incident happen, the IPF can be contacted very early, particularly as club surveys showed that less than half of clubs are aware of the IPF.Several Council Members gave examples of the work of the IPF to help players at their clubs, and there was a consensus that this work should continue to be championed.

7. Tier 2 Growth Strategy and Phased Transition
Following an open process, in which several highly impressive candidates were interviewed by representatives of the RFU and the current Championship Clubs, Simon Gillham had been appointed as the independent chair of the Tier 2 Board.
Conor O'Shea (Executive Director of Performance Rugby) outlined the current process for assessing applicants for any new places in the new 14 team Tier 2 competition in 2025/26.
A significant number of clubs in the National Leagues, as well as other entities, expressed interest ahead of receiving the full RFP documentation. These were in the process of being assessed, and selected applicants will be invited for interview and successful club(s) then invited to join before Christmas.

8. PWR Update
Genevieve Shore (Chair of PWR) provided an update on how PWR's commercial development was progressing, including in comparison with other sports and leagues such as the Women's Super League. This included the breadth of commercial partners from inside and outside rugby.

9. Governance and Representation Review Update
Malcolm Wharton (Chair of the GRR Group) updated on the consultation undertaken thus far, and outlined the rationale for change in the governance structure. The next phase of work will include governance structure, representation & skills, engagement & communications and delivery & implementation. Work had commenced on the first two work streams, with planning underway in the engagement & communications work stream, with delivery and implementation to commence once a direction of travel for the governance structure work had been agreed. Next steps included a Council Informal to be arranged for December/January to discuss options.

10. Core Values
Rob Udwin (President) confirmed he had asked Terry Burwell (Hampshire) to chair a group to review how the Core Values are articulated to be relevant to modern society, especially to younger people. Terry Burwell updated Council that there will need to be a wide engagement throughout the game.

11. Stadium Masterplan Update
Alex Cohen (Venue Operations Director) provided an update on the Stadium Master planning project, including positive feedback from the local community.

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12. RFU System Transformation Update
Rory Price (Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation) noted that system transformation projects were on track and focus remained on making sure to manage the interdependencies between the projects carefully. Council were also updated on the progress of the staff restructuring.

14. RFU Annual Report 2023/24
Polly Williams (Senior Independent Director) presented Council with the key elements of the Annual Report. This included setting out the expected loss in 2023/24 given that it was a men's RWC year, and that the RFU remains a robust business with a strong cash position and no debt.

15. Safeguarding Training
Council received annual safeguarding training led by Vivien Rimmer (RFU Head of Safeguarding). This included discussion of how Council Members can support safeguarding assurance throughout the game.

16. Reports
Council received an update on the work of the Head Injury Prevention and Management Sub-committee, in particular around the implementation and impact of the lower tackle height in the community game. The Council discussed how the data was being analysed by the RFU and World Rugby.
Council received reports from the following groups and the opportunity to question their authors: Community Game Board, Men's Professional Rugby Board, Every Rose Update (including RWC25 and WPAG Report), Council Nominations Committee and Governance Standing Committee.

Other Business

Value the Volunteer 2-11-24

I had the pleasure of hosting the Cumbria Volunteer of the Year winner, Trevor Keogh from Keswick Rugby Club at the New Zealand game on 2nd November. Both Trevor and his guest, James, had a thoroughly enjoyable day with visits to the museum of rugby and stadium tour and of course the match day experience.

Additional meetings attended since the last report

I am continuing to review each committee having sat in on Competitions Development sub-committee, CB & Club Development sub-committee and will be observing on Community Game Board and Audit & Risk Committee in the new year.
I have been invited to join the Task Group to undertake an audit of Regulation 9.

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