Neil Marston, RFU Council Representative for Cumbria

RFU Representatives Report – October 2025

1.Presidential matters

1.1 Deborah Griffin, President, welcomed Council members to the first scheduled Council meeting of the season. The President congratulated the Red Roses on their tremendous win in the Rugby World Cup and thanked all those behind the team and the tournament.

2.CEO update

2.1 Bill Sweeney, Chief Executive Officer, updated Council on the current matters facing the game and the Union, including:

a. Acknowledgement of an exceptional performance in winning the Women's Rugby World Cup.
b. Positive progress with the Nations Championship and noting the press coverage regarding the proposed R360 tournament.
c. World Rugby were supportive towards the USA growth plan to aim to address the shortfall of funding for the RWC in 2027.
d. Positive commercial deals, including partnerships with Clinique and Lucky Gold Star, which were the first exclusive women's game deals.

3.Chair update

3.1 Sir James Wates, Chair of the RFU Board, thanked the Council and colleagues at the RFU for their warm welcome since the start of his term in the Summer.
3.2 He highlighted the need for transparency and regularity of communication to the Game and noted his excitement to be working with the Council for the remainder of the season.

4.Finance Update: 25/26 Budget

4.1 Francesca Pierce, Chief Financial Officer, provided an update on the 2024/25 financial year, noting that the Annual Report and Accounts were to be signed and published in the coming weeks. She also provided an update on the current financial year.

5. Standing Reports

5.1 Council received reports from the following groups: Governance Standing Committee, Community Game Board, Council Nomination's Committee, Men's Professional Rugby Board, Champ Rugby Board, HIPM Subcommittee, and the Commercial Report. The reports were taken as read with the opportunity to raise any questions.

6.County Championship Regulations 2025/26

6.1 Council approved the Country Championship Regulations for 2025/26, which included the following changes from the 2024/25 season:

a. The eligibility criteria for Bill Beaumont Division 2 and 3 and Gill Burns Division 2 and 3 had been widened to allow Men's players from National League Clubs 2nd XVs and below (provided that such players have not appeared on a match card for a team participating in National 1 or National 2) and Women's Championship 1 Clubs 2nd XVs and below (provided that such players have not appeared on a match card for a team participating in Championship 1).
b. The place-kicking competition which would have been in place in the event of a draw in a pool containing two counties, the quarterfinals, semi-finals or final has been replaced with a countback mechanism.

6.2 The Council agreed to grant delegated authority to the Governance Committee to finalise any minor drafting amendments to the regulations as required, ahead of circulation.

7. Rugby World Cup 2025 and Impact'25
7.1 Alex Teasdale, Executive Director of Women's Game, presented some headline statistics from the Women's Rugby World Cup, including a record breaking 444,465 tickets sold; Red Roses' social media posts receiving 120million views; a 50k increase in database growth; over 1million now following Red Roses player channels; and over 32,000 visits to rugby.com since the tournament
7.2 Achievements since implementation of the last strategy in 2021 were noted, including 477 new women's and girls' teams, a rise of 18% in clubs hosting women and girls' rugby, 1456 women having qualified as coaches and match officials and the first exclusive women's games partners having been secured.
7.3 It was noted that the new 'Every Rose' strategy would be released shortly and include big goals to achieve for 2030.

8. Professional Rugby System Proposal
8.1 Council discussed possible changes to the men's professional rugby system in England, and in particular how this would interact with other areas of the game. Council voted to formally acknowledge the need and rationale for changes to the Professional Rugby System; to support the need to find a solution to the issues set out, and to support the Men's Professional Rugby Board bringing proposals to Council (and other relevant decision-making bodies) in or before February 2026.

9. **Safeguarding Training**
9.1 The Council received safeguarding training, with a focus on the safeguarding of adults.

10. Community Game Future Update and Delivery System
10.1 David Roberts, Community Game Board Chair, and Steve Grainger, Executive Director of Rugby Development, provided Council with an update on work to align the delivery by Constituent Bodies, the RFU, professional clubs, and the future Regional Growth Boards. Update sessions for Constituent Bodies will take place in November.
10.2 All clubs were encouraged to attend upcoming Competitions webinars, as feedback from these would be crucial to inform further action.

11. Governance and Representation Review
11.1 The Governance and Representation Review Group, established by Council in 2023, presented its final recommendations following a wide-ranging consultation.
11.2 With this piece of work concluded, Malcolm Wharton CBE is now stepping down as chair and it was agreed that the Group be reconstituted with the addition of several additional Council Members, together with a representative from the Presidential Team, to take the recommendations and develop firm proposals for voting later this season.
11.3 The reconstituted Group intends to work on final plans likely to be put before Council, and ultimately the wider RFU membership, before the end of the season.
11.4 Council then engaged in a series of facilitated workshops to discuss the recommendations from the Governance and Representation Review, the output of which will assist the Group in developing proposals for voting.

12. RFU Annual Report 2025 – President's Assurance Statement
12.1 Rob Udwin, Immediate Past President, shared the President's Assurance Statement for the 2024/25 season which demonstrates how the Council met its obligations under the RFU's constitution. This will be published in the 2024-25 Annual Report.

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Since the previous council meeting, I have attended two standing Committee Meetings , Audit & Risk Committee and Governance Committee, I have also attended the CB and Club Development Sub Committee and Competitions Development Sub Committee Meetings.

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