



MIDDLESEX NOTES ON RFU COUNCIL MEETING

Hybrid meeting @ Twickenham Stadium on 1st October 2021 at 10.00 am.
First Council meeting of the 2021/22 season

The meeting was chaired by the President, Jeff Blackett.

1. Introduction & Welcome

Jeff Blackett - President

- 1.1 The President welcomed the following to their first Council meeting:
 - a Board Chair, Tom Ilube, whose appointment was ratified at the AGM.
 - b The new Council Members (including Eddie Keal, who has replaced Rob Udwin as the second Middlesex representative).
- 1.2 The President also welcomed Tom Read and Zoe Goete (who are the Chair and Vice Chair of the RFU National Youth Council) as observers.
- 1.3 The President informed Council that he had written to Sara Cox on Council's behalf congratulating her on becoming the first female referee to take charge of a Premiership game.
- 1.4 No new conflicts of interest were declared.

2. Decisions made using Email Protocol since last Council Meeting

Angus Bujalski - Legal & Governance Director

The following decisions were approved by Council under the email protocol:

- 2.1 **New non-contact Regulations: The Touch Union**
Council approved and authorised the new non-contact rules of play as set out in the Council Paper dated 30 July 2021 and that any redrafting of the rules of play be delegated to the Legal & Governance Department.
- 2.2 **Council NomCom Recommendations re co-option to Council**
Council agreed that all volunteer recipients of World Rugby Women's Leadership Scholarship be co-opted onto Council for a period of two seasons following the award; and that Becky Davies, as the recipient of a 2021 Scholarship, be co-opted onto Council until the end of season 2022/23.
- 2.3 **Global Law Trials (GLTs) in Age Grade Rugby**
Council approved:
 - a the introduction of GLTs in the Age Grade Game from U15s and above only; and
 - b that the GLTs will not apply at U14s and below (and to the extent that any regulatory drafting required be delegated to the Legal & Governance Department).

3. Report from the Chief Executive Officer

Bill Sweeney - Chief Executive Officer

- 3.1 **Visits to Constituent Bodies & Clubs**
 - a Bill Sweeney & Steve Grainger (Director of Rugby Development) are undertaking a series of visits to Constituent Bodies & clubs to understand the effect of the lockdown on the Community Game. Bill Sweeney noted the





cautiously optimistic view of most of the clubs and the commitment of all to resuming competitive rugby.

- b Several clubs still face challenges, but most appear financially stable with many having come up with innovative ways to raise additional revenue whilst cutting costs wherever possible.

3.2 **Game Management System**

- a It is clear that there is considerable frustration concerning GMS, especially the changes to the system that were made over the summer.
- b Due to the importance of the system, a working group has been set up to consider the immediate issues and recommend solutions.
- c A further review is planned to consider the longer term needs of the Game and how they are to be delivered.
- d The Board has asked for regular reports to ensure that the concerns of the Game are being addressed.

3.3 **Autumn International Fixtures**

- a Plans are well advanced for the playing of the men's Autumn internationals at Twickenham in front of full crowd.
- b It is still unclear what COVID restrictions the Government will impose on those attending the matches, but the executive team is monitoring this closely.
- c The roll out of digital ticketing continues with the plan for the majority of tickets for the Autumn internationals to be digital.
- d The women's England team also have a full set of international matches this autumn, which will be played at various locations.

3.4 **Player Welfare/Head Impact Prevention and Management (HIPM)**

- a Player Welfare and HIPM is still a key priority.
- b The HIPM Steering and Working Groups will continue to meet regularly during the 2021/22 season to build on the considerable progress that has been made across Primary (Exposure Reduction); Secondary (Concussion Management); and Tertiary (Professional Player Support & Risk Estimation) workstreams.

3.5 **Championship Strategic Review**

- a The Championship Strategic Review has started.
- b Three subgroups have been formed to consider,
 - i. The competitive structure,
 - ii. Commercialisation, and
 - iii. Finance & Governance.
- c The RFU Board will consider the Review Group's recommendations in January 2022. Council approval will be sought in February 2022.

3.6 **Women's Game**

- a Alex Teasdale as the RFU's Head of Women's Game.
- b The Red Roses Six Nations review recommendations are being implemented and it is hoped that these together with the changes to the coaching group will put the team in a strong position to win the Rugby World Cup in 2022.

3.7 **Commercial Update**

- a Honda has signed a four-year partnership agreement with the Union. Honda will supply vehicles to the Union and will support the Volunteer Recognition programme.
- b CBRE have renewed their partnership with the Union for a further four years.
- c It is now looking likely that all three men's Autumn internationals will sell out.
- d Hospitality and Box sales are on target.



- e The Debenture renewals target has been met.

3.8 Inaugural Premiership Coaches Conference

- a Despite COVID restrictions, the inaugural annual Coaches Conference was held at Twickenham on 9th September 2021 with all Directors of Rugby from the PRL clubs in attendance, alongside the England Senior Coaches, Referees, England Performance Staff and Academy Managers.
- b It is hoped that these conferences will promote greater alignment, innovation and collaboration between the international teams and the professional game.

4. **Report from Chair of the Board**

Tom Ilube - Chair of the Board

- 4.1 Tom Ilube chaired his first RFU Board meeting on 8th September 2021. The meeting was held at Twickenham and was the first physical Board meeting for 18 months. Now that physical meetings have recommenced, the plan is to hold some meetings away from Twickenham; it is hoped that the first of these will be in early 2022.
- 4.2 The agenda for Board meetings have been rearranged to give more time to focus on rugby issues.
- 4.3 At the September Board meeting, the Board received safeguarding training from Vivian Rimmer, the RFU Head of Safeguarding.
- 4.4 At the Board meeting Genevieve Shore was elected as the Senior Independent Director, in succession to Dominic Proctor, who is stepping down from the Board at the end of the season having completed his second and final term.
- 4.5 Tom Ilube emphasised that he is keen to talk to as many stakeholders at all levels of the Game to hear their views, and to understand the problems and the opportunities out in the Game.
- 4.6 Tom Ilube's vision for the future is that:
 - a England must consistently win the Rugby World Cup (men & women).
 - b We must understand what the Game could look like in ten years' time and look to mould it.
 - c We must not be afraid to make brave decisions.

Note: Tom Ilube was the guest on Desert Island Disks on BBC Radio 4 on Sunday 3rd October 2021. [Click here](#) to listen.

5. **Referee Shortage**

Tim Miller - Council Member for the Rugby Football Referees Union (RFRU) & John Lawn - Head of Game Development

- 5.1 Tim Miller & John Lawn gave a presentation on the referee shortage that the Game had experienced in the first few weeks of the season. Whilst the situation had improved after week one, the shortage was masked by a reduction in games played.
- 5.2 It is believed that currently a third of all referees have yet to return to active refereeing and it is inevitable that some never will.
- 5.3 The situation is not uniform throughout the country; some referee societies are able to cover all their matches, whilst others are leaving over 20% uncovered.
- 5.4 The initial assumption was that it was the older referees who were being cautious about returning to the Game due to COVID, but this does not appear to be the case.
- 5.5 It may be that the situation will ease once referees return from late holidays, family commitments etc, but it is obvious that more referees will be needed to cover the growth in the women's Game and any return to normality in the men's Game.



- 5.6 Several Constituent Bodies & Referee Societies have already taken action to recruit more referees by putting on local courses and mentoring new referees.
- 5.7 With only 10% of those completing referee courses going on to join referee societies, more effort needs to be put into supporting new referees in the initial stages of their refereeing journey.

6. **Community Game Board (CGB) Report**

David Roberts – Chair of the CGB & Steve Grainger – Rugby Development Director

6.1 David Roberts updated Council on the work of the CGB.

6.2 **Pitch Up for Rugby Campaign**

The Pitch Up for Rugby campaign ran from 4th to 12th September 2021. The campaign was run in conjunction with the Scottish Rugby Union and the Wales Rugby Union (with support from the National Lottery) and was aimed at encouraging players to return to the Game after the easing of lockdown.

6.3 **Club of the Future Commission**

At its September meeting the CGB agreed to the establishment of a Commission to look at the “Club of the Future” work. This Commission will receive evidence and insight from across the Game as well as from other sports and other Unions and will conclude its work with a report on what it believes are the key components of the rugby club of 2032. This will help shape an investment strategy for the next decade.

6.4 **County Championship Review**

CGB received recommendations from the County Championships Review Group. CGB agreed that further work needed to be undertaken to determine the long-term viability of the adult and U20s competitions. The CGB committed to running the competitions this season, whilst this further work is undertaken.

6.5 **Travel Funding Support**

A small subgroup of Council members and staff reviewed a substantial number of applications for travel funding support. Applications were received for over £1m of support and with a budget of £150k there were inevitably some difficult decisions. Unrestricted reserves were used as the basis for decisions.

6.6 **Winter Sport Survival Fund & Grants**

Following the successful government Winter Sport Survival Fund grants programme work has continued over the summer on the loans programme. This has been extremely challenging (mainly due to conditions imposed by the Government) but should result in over £12m of added investment being shared by over one hundred clubs.

6.7 **Game Management System (GMS)**

Jonathan Conn (Technology Director) has updated the CGB on GMS and the current issues. CGB recognised the challenging environment and acknowledged that other sports were going through similar issues. CGB was reassured that mechanisms are in place to address both the immediate issues and to initiate a full review of the requirements of both clubs, and the RFU and produce a long-term strategy.

6.8 **Rugby Football Foundation (RFF)**

Following the donation of gift aid to the RFF by many debenture holders as part of the Debenture Donation Scheme, it was agreed that CGB members would join RFF Trustees to prioritise three areas of work for the £700k available.

6.9 **Other Reports**

CGB received reports on both All Schools and the Future Competitions Structure, along with a report of the recent National Lottery supported research project on the



mental health benefits of community rugby.

7. **Girls Game Age Bandings Update**

Louise Latter - Council Member for Women & Girls

- 7.1 The Girls Game Review Group (GGRG) was set up in November 2018 to review girls age bands to ascertain whether they were still appropriate for the current landscape, as well as any future growth, of girls' rugby.
- 7.2 Louise Latter gave an update on the proposed new bandings for the girls' Game.
- 7.3 Extensive consultation has taken place; it is hoped to bring the revised age grade bandings to Council for approval at the November 2021 meeting.

8. **Professional Rugby**

Phil de Glanville - RFU Representative on the Professional Game Board (PGB)

- 8.1 Review of summer international tours and Lions
 - a **Summer Tests**

The PGB received an update on the summer tests played at Twickenham. England had used the tests to expose the next generation to Test rugby, several of whom will feature in the Autumn tests.
 - b **Lions Tour**
 - i. This was the hardest tour ever for the players with the COVID restrictions, and the view expressed at the PGB was that, with hindsight, it would have been better to play the matches in the UK.
 - ii. The Rassie Erasmus outburst has still not been sanctioned by World Rugby, creating a dangerous precedent for Domestic and European competitions
- 8.2 **EPS Squads**
 - a Eddie Jones selected a 45-man squad for the senior training camp, which took place in late September.
 - b Rest periods for Lions players will be managed on an individual basis player by player.
- 8.3 **EPCR Challenge Cup**

The South African teams have withdrawn from the Challenge Cup, citing player welfare and commercial reasons. The commercial implications of this are significant for EPCR.
- 8.4 **COVID Protocols 2021/22**
 - a COVID minimum operating standards will be relaxed for teams with over 85% of their players and support staff double vaccinated.
 - b Lateral flow testing will continue twice per week, with the second test two days before the game, rather than one day before.
- 8.5 **World 12s**

The PGB briefly discussed the World 12's concept was briefly discussed. Concerns were expressed about player welfare and where it would fit in an already congested season.
- 8.6 **Premiership Academy Audits**

The Premiership academy audits have been positive, notwithstanding that they have run with a reduced capacity due to COVID.

9. **Premiership Minimum Standards Criteria (MSC)**

Angus Bujalski - Legal & Governance Director & Conor O'Shea – Director of Professional Rugby



- 9.1 The MSC lays out the criteria that should be met by clubs joining (or wishing to join) the Premiership.
- 9.2 The new MSC are more succinct than the current criteria. The main changes aim to:
 - a focus on areas for improvement, and
 - b move away from areas under the remit of other regulatory authorities.
- 9.3 The key areas of the new MSC are:
 - a Promotion Criteria
 - i. Administration, Management & Finance
 - ii. Off-field – Stadia
 - b Spot Check Criteria
 - i. Medical Provision
 - ii. Community Plans
 - iii. Safeguarding
 - iv. Diversity & Inclusion
 - v. Stadium
- 9.4 The new MSC have been distributed to Championship clubs, which will enable the latter to decide whether to apply to be independently audited to assess their eligibility for promotion.

10. **Women's Performance Management Group (WPMG) Report**

Conor O'Shea - Director of Professional Rugby

10.1 **England Coaches**

10.2 Louis Deacon has been appointed as Forwards Coach, replacing Mark Luffman, who has become Head Coach at Darlington Mowden Park.

10.3 **API5s Consultation Work**

- a Discussions are continuing on how best to structure, grow and market the competition.
- b Work is also ongoing on the possible introduction of a salary cap.

11. **Governance Standing Committee Report**

Chris Cuthbertson - Chair of the Governance Standing Committee

11.1 Primarily for the benefit of the new members on Council, Chris Cuthbertson provided an overview of the work of the Committee and circulated its terms of reference and work plan for the season.

11.2 **World Rugby Global Law Trials (GLTs)**

- a The World Rugby GLTs came into force worldwide on 1st August 2021. The Laws Subcommittee sought clarification from World Rugby on a number of issues (some of which resulted in changes to the GLTs) and this delayed communication to the Game in England.
- b Whilst these GLTs apply to all levels of the Game in all Unions, Governance had recommended to Council that they be disapplied at Under 14s and below. Council approved this recommendation using the email protocol.
- c Work will now focus on clarifying World Rugby's decision timetable for these GLTs and determining how their effect on the Game will be assessed by the RFU.

11.3 **World Rugby Game-on Proposals**

- a In August WR launched a consultation on its proposed variations to Laws of the Game to facilitate games being played at community level.
- b The RFU submitted a response that was broadly in support but emphasised that the decision as to whether to not to adopt the Game-on proposals (in



whole or in part) must rest with the Unions and not with the competition organisers or clubs (unless delegated by the Union).

11.4 **Tackle Height Trial**

Governance received an update on the age grade Tackle Height Trial being undertaken in England, whereby the tackle height is reduced to waist level and the processes for the timely monitoring of injuries incurred during the trial to ensure that the Game remains safe for the players.

11.5 **Project Touchstone (Mandatory Player Affiliation)**

- a Governance received a brief update on the work of Project Touchstone (Player Affiliation) and the issues relating to the GMS data cleanse. The adult player affiliation process is being trialled in three geographic constituent bodies in 2021/22 with a view to being mandatory in 2022/23.
- b Governance will receive a report from one of the trial areas at its next meeting.
- c Discussions have already started (in conjunction with the CGB) on whether there will be a need for both Player Affiliation and Player Registration in the adult Game. A priority to any decision will be the maintenance of competition integrity.

11.6 **Future Adult Male Competition Structure (FCS) Implementation**

- a At its last meeting Governance received a verbal update on the work of the FCS Implementation Group. Although there are several significant issues to be resolved, the work is on schedule for implementation to be completed in time for the start of the 2022/23 season.
- b Recommendations from the FCS Implementation Group will be considered Governance's October meeting.

11.7 **2021/22 Season**

Governance is very aware that, with COVID infection rates rising following the easing of lockdown, this could be a very disrupted season in the Community Game (Level 3 & below). To this end the Adult Competition Advisory Group (ACOG) and the Age Grade Age Grade Restart Options Group (AGROG) will continue to meet and advise the Adult Competition Management Subcommittee and the Youth Governance Subcommittee respectively on how to provide meaningful competitions if the situation deteriorates.

11.8 **Regulation 9 – Immediate Pitch-side First Aid Provision**

Governance will shortly be discussing the practicalities of making the Immediate Pitch-side First Aid Provision mandatory in the Community Game in 2022/23.

12. **Board Nominations Committee (Board NomCom) Report**

Dominic Proctor - Chair of Board Nominations Committee

- 12.1 The Board NomCom makes recommendations to the Board concerning appointments that are the Board's responsibility.
- 12.2 Dominic Proctor outlined Board NomCom's current workplan and how the Committee collaborated closely with the Council Nomination Committee in arriving at its nominations.

12.3 **Board**

During the 2021/22 season the Board NomCom will make recommendations to the Board relating to the following positions:

- a **Independent Non-Executive Director (INED)**
Dominic Proctor's final term of office concludes at the end of the current season when he will leave the Board.



b Chair of Governance Standing Committee

Chris Cuthbertson is standing down from the role at the end of the season, when he will leave the Board and Council.

c Senior PGB Representative

Phil De Glanville is currently the Senior PGB Representative; his term ends at the end of the season, but he is eligible to serve for a further two-year term.

d Council Elected Director

Peter Whiting's final term of office ends at the end of the season, he will not be replaced to reduce the size of Board to bring it in line with the Sport England Governance Code.

12.4 Subsidiary Companies

a Board NomCom is also responsible for making recommendations for the appointment of Council members as RFU representatives on the boards of subsidiary commercial companies. (RFU Hotel Limited, RFU Health & Leisure Limited, TEL and England Rugby Travel Limited).

b These roles will give Council members a development opportunity to broaden their corporate and board skills.

12.5 International Representatives

Board NomCom is currently considering (in conjunction with the International Relations Advisory Group) the roles of the RFU's international representatives and who should fulfil them.

13. Council Nominations Standing Committee (Council NomCom)

Ken Andrews - Chair of the Council Nominations Standing Committee

13.1 New Council Members

Since the start of the season, the Council NomCom has met all twelve new members of Council to learn of their hopes and aspirations during their time on Council and to assign them mentors from Council.

13.2 Independent Member on Council NomCom.

Council **APPROVED** the Council NomCom recommendation that Rosie Ranganathan be appointed as the independent member on the Council NomCom for a period of three years until 31 July 2024.

13.3 World Rugby Women's Leadership Scholarship - Becky Davies

Prior to the Council meeting, Council approved by email vote that Becky Davies be a co-opted full member of Council for a period of two years until 31st July 2023. The purpose behind the scholarship programme is to support talented women to further develop their Rugby Leadership potential.

13.4 Co-opted Council Members

a Council NomCom is seeking to find up to four individuals to join Council as full co-opted members to improve the diversity on Council.

b Job descriptions and person specifications have been prepared and widely circulated and the positions have been circulated widely and shortlists are being prepared.

c Council NomCom hopes to be able to recommend successful candidates to Council for approval at the November Council meeting.

13.5 Junior Vice President 2022/23

Invitation to apply for the Junior Vice-President post will be issues in November with interviews scheduled for early January 2022.

13.6 Meeting with Board NomCom

Council NomCom continues to meet regularly with the Board NomCom.



14. **Diversity & Inclusions (D&I) Implementation Working Group**

Genevieve Glover - Chair D&I Implementation Working Group

14.1 **Update**

Genevieve Glover updated Council on the work of the D&I Implementation Working Group in delivering the ten recommended actions that Council had previously approved.

14.2 **Constituent Body – D&I Leads**

- a 25 CBs have appointed D&I Leads.
- b The first D&I lead forum was held on 23rd August 2021 and was attended by 23 D&I Leads. Hopefully, these will be held on a quarterly basis and will be supported by the RFU CB Relationship Managers.

14.3 **Next Steps**

- a Continue to plan and implement recommendations through 2021/22 season.
- b Plan for 2023 onwards – evolution of the Group in line with RFU D&I strategic objective.

15. **Finance Report**

Sue Day – Chief Operating & Financial Officer

15.1 **2021/22 Month 1 Results**

Sue Day presented a written report on Month 1 (July) of the 21/22 season. As this is the first month of the financial year and there was little rugby activity, there are few conclusions as to how the year will progress financially.

15.2 **2020/21 Financial Statements**

- a The financial statements will show an operating loss of £20m, which although £30m less than would have been expected pre the COVID pandemic for the year, is nevertheless £21m favourable to the budget. This favourable variance was primarily by stronger performance on broadcast and sponsorship, a much lower cost of sales for games held behind closed doors at Twickenham and reduced spend on Rugby Development due to the lack of rugby activity and the contribution of government loans and grants.
- b There is a £40m benefit to reserves, due to many debenture holders waiving their loans, which turns the £20m operating loss into a £21m reserve improvement. The £40m is a loan waive and not a cash inflow.
- c Due to refinancing at the start of the pandemic, the Union had sufficient facility headroom throughout to meet all its obligations.

16. **Debenture Donation Campaign Update**

Simon Massie-Taylor - Chief Commercial Officer

16.1 Simon Massie Taylor verbally updated Council on the Debenture Donation Campaign.

16.2 Debenture holders receive a guaranteed right to buy tickets at Twickenham. The payment they make is in the form of a loan that is repayable in 75 years' time. These loans are on the Union's balance sheet at their monetary value and not their current cost value.

16.3 The campaign is aimed at persuading debenture holders to waive their loans, which would:

- a Reduce the Union's long -erm liability; and



- b Be eligible for Gift Aide, which would generate funds for the Rugby Football Foundation (the RFU's charitable arm) for investment into Community Game projects.

16.4 To date debenture holders have waived £40m of loans, which has generated £1.7m for the RFF to invest in the Community Game.

17. **Review of the RFU as National Governing Body (NGB) - Update**

Mike Waplinton - Chair of the NGB Review Group

17.1 Council **APPROVED** the Terms of Reference and Membership for the Review Group. The approval had been delayed until the first meeting of the new Council, to ensure that Council, with twelve new members, remained committed to the work.

17.2 A representative from the Game is still being sought to sit on the Review Group.

17.3 The Review group will now start work with its first meeting in October 2021.

18. **RFU National Youth Council (NYC) Update**

Tom Read - Chair of the RFU National Youth Council

18.1 The RFU National Youth Council is a voluntary consultative body made up of people from across the Game aged 18 – 25 years old.

18.2 Each member of the NYC sits on one of the RFU Subcommittees.

18.3 Tom Read updated Council on the changes to the National Youth Council.

18.4 **NYC Projects**

Council was advised that each year the National Youth Council will be collaborating with the main standing committees on two substantial pieces of work. This year work has started on the following projects:

- a CGB Project – Young Volunteers

The NYC will look to assess and collate current studies, models, and best practice used for engaging young people within sport and at club and CB level, with the aim of developing a toolkit to guide clubs and CB's when engaging young people and volunteers.

- b PGB Project – Released Academy Players

c The NYC will work to understand the behaviours, attitudes, and engagement in Rugby Union of players released from PRL academies in 2020/21 season.

18.5 **Youth Match Officials**

The NYC continues to help support the work, led by the RFU Match Official team, by promoting YMO programmes using innovative & engaging methods to reach the required audience of young people within the Game.

19. **Other Matters**

19.1 **Presidents 150th Anniversary Walk**

Between 22nd October and 5th November 2021 the President is undertaking a 150-mile walk. The walk will visit 14 CBs. The walk is to celebrate the RFU's 150th anniversary, and hopefully raise £150k for the Injured Players Fund.

19.2 **150th Anniversary Dinner**

The 150th Anniversary Dinner will be immediately after the South Africa game at Twickenham Stadium; on 26th November 2021. Unfortunately, the teams will be unable to attend due to the COVID restrictions, but it is hoped that each table will be hosted by an England Captain.



19.3 **150th Exhibition**

The World Rugby Museum is holding an exhibition to celebrate “150 Years of English Rugby”. The exhibition opened on 17th May and will run until 31st December.

Meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

The next Council meeting is on 19th November 2021.

Chris Cuthbertson & Eddie Keal

8th October 2021

These notes are our personal recollections of the meeting and include those matters which will be of interest to Middlesex Clubs. No attempt has been made to convey all the opinions expressed during the debates.