



MIDDLESEX NOTES ON RFU COUNCIL MEETING

Hybrid meeting @ The Lensbury, Teddington on 17th June 2022 at 12.00 noon.
Fifth Council meeting of the 2021/22 season

The meeting was chaired by the President, Jeff Blackett.

The meeting was preceded by a closed meeting of Council members at which various issues were raised and debated, but no decisions made. None of the senior Executive were present during this meeting.

The President initiated changes to the structure of the meeting so that more time could be dedicated to those items requiring decisions.

1. **Welcome**

Jeff Blackett - President

- 1.1 The President welcomed three members of the National Youth Council to the meeting.
- 1.2 In addition the President welcomed back CEO Bill Sweeney, who had taken time off following a health issue, from which he has now fully recovered.

2. **Chief Executive's Report**

Due to Bill Sweeney's absence, the Chief Executive's report was compiled and presented by the senior executive team.

2.1 **Adult Male Contact Rugby**

- a. A task group has been set up to determine what action can be taken to address and hopefully reverse the sharp decline in participants in the adult male game.
- b. The task group reports into the Community Game Board.
- c. The objective is to implement strategies in time for the start of the 2022/23 season.

2.2 **Player Welfare**

- a. The Union has agreed to participate in the World Rugby Enhanced Graduated Return to Play Study.
- b. Work continues promoting the RFU funded Rugby Advanced BRAIN Health Clinic.
- c. It is hoped that the Waist High Tackle Trial will commence in the new season, although encouraging participating has been difficult.

2.3 **2025 Women's Rugby World Cup**

- a. England was officially announced as host of the 2025 Women's RWC.
- b. Work continues setting up the Local Organising Committee, which will run the event.

2.4 **Club Ecosystem**

- a. Several pieces of work are underway around support to/infrastructure of, clubs and these are being pulled together into one project to avoid duplication of effort.





- b. The Club of the Future Commission continues to progress its work on both the future landscape and key components of clubs.
 - c. A task and finish group on volunteer workload has made recommendations on a small number of regulations and identified a considerable number of other tasks for review.
 - d. Work is progressing on enhancing the Club Support Centre (CSC). The CSC is well used, continues to get helpful feedback and is an integral part of the Unions interface with clubs.
 - e. Significant short term (one year) funding has been obtained from Sport England/DCMS to undertake some Governance and Business Transformation work with a selection of clubs.
- 2.5 **World Rugby Meetings – May 2023**
- a. A series of meetings took place in Dublin in May to coincide with World Rugby's Annual Meeting, with a primary focus from an RFU perspective on the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup and the Global Calendar.
 - b. The development of a meaningful international competition in the autumn remains a major area of focus for World Rugby.
 - c. The Global Law Trials were all adopted into Law.
- 2.6 **Six Nations Strategy**
- a. Work continues on the development of a new Six Nations Strategy.
 - b. It is important that the Six Nations strategy and the Union's strategy dovetail together.
- 2.7 **Business Planning 2022/23**
- a. The 2022/23 Budget and Business Plan was approved by the Board at its May meeting.
 - b. The Union is in a strong position and has excellent financial resilience but given the enduring impact of the Covid pandemic and the enormous inflationary pressures the Union will continue to face over the coming years, it is essential that a tight control is maintained on costs and investments.
- 2.8 **Professional Game Agreement (PGA)**
- a. The Current PGA expires at the end of the 2023/24 season.
 - b. The Executive Team have undertaken some preparatory work to establish the Union's key aims for the professional and wider game ahead of formal engagement with PRL and other stakeholders.
- 2.9 **Head Coach Succession Planning Project**
- a. Nigel Redman is leading on this work.
 - b. The overarching aim and purpose of the project are:
 - i. **Aim:** To provide key decision makers with a high calibre selection of coaches informed by evidence-based research.
 - ii. **Purpose:** Identify, develop, and support the appointment of future England Head Coaches.

DECISIONS MADE

3. Premier 15s Redevelopment

Sue Day - Chief Operations Officer

- 3.1 Council received an update on the ongoing restructuring of the Premier 15s competition.



- 3.2 Council **APPROVED**:
- a. The proposed league structure.
 - b. The season dates and league calendar.
 - c. Beginning the league with either 8 or 10 teams.
 - d. Participation being dependent on compliance with the Minimum Operating Standards
 - e. Participation in the league will be for four seasons (commencing with the 2023/24 season) with review windows in year 4 and year 7.
- 3.3 Council also noted the proposed implementation timetable.
- 3.4 Expressions of Interest from clubs to participate in the new league will be sought later in the Summer.

4. **Regulation Changes & Safeguarding Template**

Angus Bujalski - Legal & Governance Director

4.1 **2022/23 Regulation Changes**

- a. Angus Bujalski referred Council the proposed changes to the RFU Regulations that had been circulated as part of the pack for the meeting.
- b. The main changes are:
 - i. The introduction of mandatory pitch side care in the Age Grade Game (Regulation 9) and
 - ii. the amalgamation of Regulations 13 (Adult Competitions) and Regulations 16 (Adult Women's Competitions) into a new Regulation 6.
- c. Council **AGREED** the changes to the 2022/23 RFU Regulations and delegated final drafting to the Governance Committee.
- d. These changes will take effect from 1st August 2022.
- e. Council also **AGREED** the changes to the Competition Regulations and, recognising that further changes will be forthcoming, delegated the finalising of these Regulations to the Governance Committee.

4.2 **Template – Safeguarding Code of Conduct**

- a. Angus Bujalski presented the draft Safeguarding Code of Conduct Template.
- b. This has been prepared by the RFU Safeguarding Team in response to requests from several clubs for guidance in preparing their own safeguarding policy and regulations.
- c. As this template does no change existing RFU Regulations, Council were merely asked to note and comment on its content.

5. **Supplemental Pot**

Steve Grainger - Rugby Development Director

- 5.1 Following a recommendation from the Community Game Board, Council **AGREED** that from season 2022/23 the Supplemental Pot will be replaced by a Community Support Fund targeted at those clubs, referee societies and CBs in the greatest financial need.
- 5.2 Although the size of the fund will be calculated by reference to genuine third-party ticket sales, the fund will be smoothed to eradicate year on year fluctuations.
- 5.3 The fund is expected to be £600k in 2022/23.
- 5.4 The Community Game Board will be responsible for setting the policy for the distribution of the fund.



6. **National Governing Body Review Group Recommendations**

Mike Waplinton - Chair of the NGB Review Group

- 6.1 The NGB Review Group was set up to consider the current structure of the RFU and to ensure that it is fit for purpose as the governing body of the sport in England.
- 6.2 Council **AGREED** several recommendations relating to the structure, composition and operation of the Community Game Board, other work groups that report to the Board and the operation of Council.
- 6.3 The proposals should ensure that the structure of the Union is more closely aligned to the Union's Strategic Plan.
- 6.4 This completes the first phase of the work of the Group. The next phase will be to consider the composition of Council. Depending on other workload priorities, this work is scheduled to start in 2023.

7. **Council Nominations Committee Report**

Ken Andrews - Chair of the Council Nominations Committee

7.1 **Distinguished Membership**

Council **APPROVED** the recommendation that the following Council Members should be awarded Distinguished Membership of the Union for services to the Game.

- a. **Chris CUTHBERTSON** (Middlesex)
- b. **Peter WHITING** (RAF)

7.2 **Rose Award**

The Rose Award is a new award to be granted annually to those who have given exceptional service to the Game at a national level. Council **APPROVED** the recommendation that the following should be given the Rose Award for services to the Game at a national level:

- a. **Paul ASTBURY**
- b. **Sir James DINGEMANS**
- c. **Carol ISHERWOOD**

7.3 **Council Appointments**

Council **ACCEPTED** the recommendation of the Council Nominations Committee regarding appointments to:

- a. Governance Standing Committee
- b. Community Game Board
- c. Sub-committees

8. **Aide Memoir 2022/23**

Nigel Gillingham - Senior Vice President

- 8.1 The Aide Memoir sets out the responsibilities and entitlements of the President, Past Presidents, Council Members and Distinguished Members and is review annually.
- 8.2 Nigel Gillingham presented the 2022/23 version to Council for approval.
- 8.3 As there were no significant amendments to the Aide Memoir, Council unanimously **APPROVED** it and delegated the finalising of the drafting to the Presidential Team (President, Senior Vice President, Junior Vice President & Past President)



REPORTS & UPDATES

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

Tom Ilube - Chair of the Board of Directors

9.1 **Board Meetings**

- a. The Board continues to discuss and address a broad range of challenging, important and strategically focused topics. At its recent meeting, the Board received an update from Nigel Redman on the Head Coaches Succession Project.
- b. The Board will receive an update from Simon Middleton on the women's impressive 2022 Six Nations performance, and the preparations ahead of the Women's Rugby World Cup in New Zealand later this year.

9.2 **Community Game Update**

- a. The May Board meeting included a detailed update and discussion on the community game and in particular the challenges of the adult male game.
- b. Although it was positive to get the first full season of community rugby completed since 2018/19, the Board noted it had not been without its challenges.
- c. Prior to the pandemic and the cessation of rugby activity there were already concerns about decreasing numbers of matches, teams, and players in the adult male game. The situation appeared to have been exacerbated during the Covid pandemic and the subsequent return to rugby.

9.3 **Board Finance Review Group (BFRG)**

- a. In January 2022, the Board established a task and finish group to consider several key financial questions 'post-Covid' to feed into the 2022/23 budget and long-term financial planning. The BFRG addressed the following questions.
 - i. Are the RFU's long-term revenue assumptions reasonable and which should be used as the 'base case'?
 - ii. Is there a different way of looking at debentures and depreciation planning to 'free up' more operational rugby investment?
 - iii. What percentage of the Strategic Growth Fund should be set aside for game assets?
 - iv. How should the RFU measure efficiency? How efficient is the RFU?
 - v. What is the right narrative for explaining the complex financial situation to the game?
 - vi. Identify early indicators of a downside revenue scenario emerging
- b. The outcomes from the work of the group have been incorporated into the 2022/23 business plan and long-term planning.

9.4 **Council and Board Meeting**

- a. The final Board meeting for the 2021/22 season will be on Thursday 28th July 2022 (Twickenham).
- b. Council and Board meeting dates have now been set through to December 2023 to avoid conflict with the Women's RWC in 2023 and the Men's RWC in 2025.

9.5 **New Board Directors**

- a. **James COOK** (Council Elected Director) and **Yasmin DIAMOND** (Independent Non-Executive Director) will, subject to ratification by at the AGM, will join the Board on 1st August. Both have been invited to attend the Board meeting on 28th July.



- b. Recently, the Board Nominations Committee has been chaired by an INED. Given the complexities of the nominations process and the need to understand the key stakeholders, it is proposed that next season Tom Ilube will chair the Board Nominations Committee before Yasmin takes the chair of that committee the following season.

10. **Governance Standing Committee Report**

Angus Bujalski - Legal & Governance Director

10.1 **Regulations**

The recommendations from the Governance Standing Committee were incorporated into the proposed changes that were put to Council earlier in the meeting

10.2 **Adult Competition Advisory Group**

- a. This group was set up in 2020 to advise Governance on what changes should be made to maintain the integrity of the men's & women's competitions due to the impact of Covid.
- b. In the light of the reducing impact of Covid on the game, Governance agreed to a recommendation from ACAG that the group be disbanded.
- c. The group will be re-established when necessary.

10.3 **Women's Season Structure 2022/23**

Governance approved the Women's Structured Season for 2022/23 and delegated to Terry Burwell, Alys Lewis & Paul O'Leary the final review and approval of the composition of the leagues.

10.4 **Women's Game - Lichfield / Leicester Tigers Agreement**

- a. a. Governance had previously set up a working group to consider the proposal that Leicester Tigers take over the position of Lichfield Ladies in the Women's Championship. League positions are the property of the RFU and any proposal to transfer a league position requires the approval of Governance. Following an in-depth local consultation, this group set several conditions to be satisfied, both for the benefit of Lichfield and the wider local game.
- b. The working group reported that they were happy with the agreement between the clubs, and an undertaking in favour of the CBs and the RFU that had been presented.
- c. The arrangement has the formal support of both CBs.
- d. Governance therefore approved the proposal.

10.5 **National League Rugby – Terms of Reference**

- a. Governance considered the proposed new NLR Terms of Reference.
- b. As the proposed ToR's have not been reviewed by the Legal & Governance department, the decision was deferred.
- c. As Governance has delegated authority to approve these, they will be reconsidered by Governance at its July meeting.

10.6 **Ealing 1871 Voting Membership Application**

- a. Having satisfied itself, that Ealing 1871 is a separate club from Ealing Trailfinders as required by Regulation 3, Governance approved the application of Ealing 1871 to become a voting member of the RFU, subject to an amendment to their constitution to state that the objects of Club is the playing of Rugby Football Union in accordance with the Laws of the Game, World Rugby Regulations and RFU Rules & Regulations.
- b. The application was supported by Middlesex County RFU.



10.7 **Buxton RFC**

Governance noted that NLD have readmitted Buxton RFC to membership of the CB. An application to be readmitted as a Voting Member of the RFU will be made once Buxton RFC meet the playing requirements.

10.8 **Jersey RFC**

- a. Governance have been informed of a proposal by JRFC to hive off the professional team off into a new club.
- b. RFU approval is required to permit the transfer of the club's Championship position to the new club.
- c. Paula Carter and Alys Lewis are reviewing the proposal and will be making a recommendation to Governance on the issue.
- d. As Governance already has delegated authority from Council to determine the issue, it does not need Council's approval.

10.9 **Next Meeting**

The next full Governance meeting will be on 6 July 2022. This is the last scheduled meeting of the 2021/22 season.

11. **Community Game Board Report**

David Roberts - Chair of the Community Game Board

- 11.1 The last CGB meeting was on 26th May. This was due to be the last scheduled meeting of the season, but an additional meeting will be scheduled in July.
- 11.2 CGB received an update on planned communications activity, both internal and external, over the next few months. This included a heavy focus, at the start of next season on a re-run of the "Back in the Game" campaign.
- 11.3 A report was received on this season's Club Support Fund. The fund was open to clubs with a turnover of less than £75k. A series of communications (through different channels) was issued to clubs, resulting in standard payments of £440 to 35 clubs and enhanced payments of £660 to a further 46.
- 11.4 CGB received an update on the challenges of securing investment game (those fixtures where subsidy is required to enable operating costs of the stadium to be met eg Community Game Cup Finals, County Championship Finals) slots at Twickenham in 2023 due to the compression of the calendar due to the 2025 Men's Rugby World Cup.
- 11.5 Through the business planning process CGB has prioritised, with Sport England funding, commitment to establishing a trial of a Club coaching workforce. This comprises full time community coaches, employed by a local club with a contributory grant from the RFU.
- 11.6 CGB is considering holding a Game Congress in early autumn. This would bring together Council Members, CB reps and Club reps and the focus would be to discuss a new blueprint for the community game.
- 11.7 The CGB received updates from the Contact and Non-Contact working Groups along with a progress report from the Club of the Future Commission.
- 11.8 A report was received from the Player Development Sub-committee outlining the proposal to capture data, via age grade affiliation, of those DPP players not in membership of clubs. This will allow better tracking of drop-off and progression.
- 11.9 Reports were received from the other sub-committees.



12. **Community Game Direction**

Steve Grainger - Director of Rugby Development

- 12.1 Whilst it has clearly been great to get the first full season of community rugby completed since 2018/19 it has not been without its challenges. Whilst activity in the women's game and the age grade game (boys and girls) appears to have bounced back reasonably well the situation in the adult male game does not appear so healthy.
- 12.2 Prior to the pandemic and the cessation of rugby activity there were already concerns about decreasing numbers of matches, teams, players here and this situation appears to have been exacerbated significantly through lockdown and the subsequent return to rugby.
- 12.3 It is therefore important that the Union considers both the short and long term implications of this and hence work has been initiated to:
 - a. respond to the immediate issues and assess what actions may be possible ahead of the start of next season to mitigate decline in adult male contact rugby and
 - b. consider the long-term picture for both contact and noncontact rugby for boys, girls, women, and men.
- 12.4 Further information is provided in Appendix 1.

13. **Future Competition Structure (FCS) Implementation**

Stephen Pearson - Chair of the FCS Working Group

- 13.1 Stephen Pearson updated Council on the work of the FCS Implementation Working Group.
- 13.2 The league restructure has been completed and the fixtures for 2022/23 have been published.
- 13.3 There have been some challenges and it is acknowledged that not every club will benefit from the changes.
- 13.4 Overall 103 new teams have joined the leagues and 45 teams have re-joined.
- 13.5 It is important that the league structure is reviewed again in 3 years to address any issues that may have become apparent.

14. **Professional Game Board (PGB) Report**

Phil de Glanville - RFU Senior Representative on the PGB

- 14.1 The PGB met on 8th June, which was the last meeting of the 2021/22 season.
- 14.2 **Preview of Summer International Tour**
 - a. The squad held a 3-day camp (without any players playing in the Premiership semi-finals), which gave the England coaching team a chance to look at a wider group.
 - b. There was discussion of the squad size differences amongst the home nations countries going on summer tours, and the increasing challenge of players being picked off by other Home Countries.
- 14.3 **Premiership Cup 2022/23**
 - a. PGB has already signed off a Cup competition for 2022/23, accepting that pool games would be midweek due to the condensed Premiership season due to the Men's RWC 2023 preparations.
 - b. Discussion continues around the lack of match playing time for young (18-23) contracted players which remains the biggest structural weakness in English



rugby. A Premiership A league and/or the Championship evolution remain options to help solve this issue.

14.4 **Club World Cup**

The format for the competition has been agreed amongst European Unions and is now being negotiated with Super Rugby in the Southern Hemisphere. The key aspect is that the competition will replace existing matches in the calendar so there will be no additional matches.

14.5 **Academy Review**

The full set of academy audits was presented in detail. Most were positive with many showing significant growth in financial investment by the Premiership Clubs across recent years and a higher number of players progressing into Premiership senior squads.

14.6 **Minimum Standards Criteria (MSC) - Spot Checks**

Club by club issues with not meeting MSC criteria and associated fines across both Premiership and Championship were listed, with key issues remaining around the size of medical rooms. The Medical Advisory Group (MAG) has been asked to make a recommendation in season 2022/23 on the rationale for the current size requirements and whether there should be any change.

14.7 **MSC January Audit**

The annual audit of MSC criteria for prospective Premiership clubs was reviewed and there was considerable discussion around 3 options for reaching the 10,001 ground capacity at which point statutory local authority ground safety policies and procedures had to be met. This remains a key aspect for 'why 10,001' and will be communicated clearly to Premiership and Championship Clubs in the subsequent consultation over the next 2 months.

14.8 **Head Coach Succession Planning**

Nigel Redman presented the coaching framework for succession planning and coach development for high performance coaches for the women's and men's games. It was hoped that this framework could be used inside Premiership clubs for younger coaches working in the pathway.

14.9 **Review of Rest & Loading Principles**

Keith Stokes presented recommendations from the Sports Science Advisory Group (SSAG) around changing the definition of 'being involved in a game' from the current 20 minutes to effectively stepping on the pitch and reducing the Full Game Equivalent game times. Rather than mandating this, this was agreed to be a key part of the education process at the Premiership Conference in September.

15. **Women & Girls Game Update**

Lou Latter - Women & Girls Representative

15.1 **Allianz Premier 15s**

The league was won by Saracens, who beat Exeter in the final.

15.2 **Red Roses 6 Nations 2022**

- a. England won the Grand Slam.
- b. Record crowds were seen across all matches, which is promising for the development of the competition.

15.3 **Women's Competition Review Group (WCRG)**

- a. Discussions continue, particularly around the role of Championship 1.
- b. Recommendations will be brought forward in 2022/23.



15.4 **Girls Game Age Bands**

- a. The new age bands for the Girls Age Grade game come into effect from September 2022 and will be Under 12s, Under 14s, Under 16s and Under 18s.
- b. Progress has been made in the following areas:
 - i. Regulation changes
 - ii. Playing opportunities
 - iii. Girls National Cup 2022/23
 - iv. Player Pathway
 - v. Volunteering
 - vi. Coaches & Match Officials
 - vii. Schools & Colleges
 - viii. Technology

16. **Diversity & Inclusion Implementation Working Group**

Genevieve Glover – Chair of D&I Implementation Working Group

16.1 Genevieve Glover updated Council on work done to date on implementing the agreed recommendations.

16.2 Whilst progress has been made, there is further work to do.

16.3 The Group will meet over the summer to progress the planning process ahead of work beginning again in September

17. **National Youth Council (NYC)**

Tom Read - Chair of the National Youth Council

17.1 Tom Read updated Council on the work of the National Youth Council.

17.2 The NYC is a voluntary consultative body made up of people from across the game aged 18 – 25 years old.

17.3 NYC members are embedded in several RFU sub-committee as well as the D&I Implementation Working Group.

17.4 During the season, the NYC have undertaken two discrete pieces of work:

- a. Youth Volunteers

Working with the CGB, the aim of the work has been to produce a tool kit to assist the game in engaging with young players and volunteers.

- b. Released Academy Players

The aim of this work is to get a greater understanding of what happens to released Academy players with a view to ensuring that they remain involved in the game. This work has been conducted in conjunction with the PGB.

17.5 A recruitment campaign is underway to replace leaving NYC members. The campaign has been timed to ensure a smooth hand over, although it is hoped that those stepping down will remain involved as mentors.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

18. **Q3 Finance Report**

Sue Day - Chief Operating Officer

18.1 March YTD shows an operating profit of £22.7m compared with a budgeted loss of £5.1m. The variance of £27.8m arising due to the return to full capacity for international matches at Twickenham.



- 18.2 The full year outturn shows an operating profit of £0.7m compared with the budget loss of £24.9m, a favourable variance of £25.6m.
- 18.3 The profit on the sale of part of the Union's interest in the Six Nations to CVC Equity Partners will boost the retained earnings by £88.5m.
- 18.4 The Union continues to operate well within its available banking facilities.

19. **Business Plan 2022/23**

Sue Day - Chief Operating Officer

- 19.1 Sue Day presented the 2022/23 Business Plan to Council.
- 19.2 Although full stadiums had returned, revenues have not returned to their pre-COVID levels. This coupled with high inflationary pressures, not least related to energy consumption and insurance, means that there is an ongoing long term need to keep costs down – this will not be easy to achieve.
- 19.3 Despite these financial pressures a decision has been taken not to reduce the CGB budget (compared to 2021/22).
- 19.4 There is also concern about future broadcast income, which if that falls will result in less money being available for investment in the game.
- 19.5 The Board has taken the decision that the profit from the sale of shares to CVC Equity Partners must not be used to underpin routine expenditure but must be invested strategically for the long-term benefit of the Union. To this end the funds have been earmarked as a Strategic Growth Fund, which will be used in the following strategically key areas:
 - a. Long term strategy for Twickenham Stadium
 - b. Digital, Data and Content Strategy
 - c. Accelerate and grow the Women's game
 - d. Club of the Future (including National Facility Strategy)
- 19.6 The Union's working model, particularly in the Community Game has moved from being a field base support to a centralised service support one. This has resulted in an increase in head office staffing.
- 19.7 Work is ongoing to ensure that the Union remains an efficient and financially resilient organisation.

20. **International Ticket Prices – Six Nations 2023**

Sue Day - Chief Operating Officer

- 20.1 Following the recent dramatic rise in inflation the Board has revisited ticket prices for the 2022/23 season.
- 20.2 It is important that ticket prices continue to rise with inflation, otherwise the Union suffers a real drop in income.
- 20.3 It is acknowledged that the price of the Autumn International tickets cannot be changed as the tickets are already on sale.
- 20.4 Even though ticket prices had been set for the 2023 Six Nations, the Board has readdressed the ticket prices for these matches and agreed to the following increases:
 - a. A further increase of £5 on all tickets for the Scotland and France games; and
 - b. A further increase of £2 on all tickets for the Italy game.
- 20.5 These increases will bring in a further £0.8m.



OTHER BUSINESS

21. **Valete**

Jeff Blackett - President

21.1 **Council**

The President paid tribute to the following Council members, who are stepping down from Council at the end of the current season:

Phil ATTWELL (Students)

Chris CUTHBERTSON (Middlesex)

Peter WHEELER (Past President)

Peter Whiting (RAF)

21.2 **Board**

The President also paid tribute to **Dominic PROCTOR** (Independent Non-Executive Director), who is stepping down from the Board.

22. There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 4.50 pm.

This was the last scheduled Council meeting of the season, but it may be necessary to hold another Council meeting before the end of July.

The first Council meeting of the 2022/23 season is scheduled 23rd September 2022.

Chris Cuthbertson & Eddie Keal

27th June 2022

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



APPENDIX 1

Community Game Direction – Background Information

1. **Current Position**

Headlines relating to the current position of Rugby Union are:

- 1.1 Team sports have been significantly impacted by Covid and participation remains below pre-pandemic, although it is starting to show signs of stabilising.
- 1.2 Rugby Union's participation decline was more severe than most (except Netball) and recovery will be harder, due to a disproportionate Covid impact resulting in more restrictions being in place for longer.
- 1.3 Male participation in rugby is more impacted than female, and Covid has exacerbated the challenges that already existed in participation in some areas of the game e.g. lower XV adult male rugby.
- 1.4 Age Grade rugby (especially minis/juniors) and the more structured / formal playing opportunities in schools (national cups), colleges and universities (AOC and BUCS competitions), have been more robust and rebounded well.
- 1.5 There has been a decline in the volume of matches scheduled, declining match completion and a continued increase in the number of players required to field 1st XVs vs 2018/19, especially in adult male rugby. Matches in RFU leagues were 12% down on 2018/19, representing a reduction of 1400 matches.
- 1.6 The decline in match volume and completion and the challenges in some sectors are because players are playing less often. Work, social, family, and other sporting commitments are all impacting availability.

2. **Conclusions from Available Data**

The following is a summary of data drawn from Sport England's Active Lives survey and from RFU data:

- 2.1 A clear move towards increased participation in individual sports at the expense of team sports, a position which appears to have been exacerbated through the pandemic.
- 2.2 A continued decline in regular participation in Rugby Union.
- 2.3 Male rugby is disproportionately impacted.
- 2.4 Age Grade rugby does not appear to have been unduly affected.
- 2.5 There has been a decline in both absolute numbers and completion rates in adult male rugby.
- 2.6 The data and anecdotal evidence both show significant increases in the number of players used in first XV teams, with a significant knock-on impact on lower XV teams (and their ability to undertake a match).
- 2.7 Whilst there is no single set of data around individual player frequency the data that is available does suggest that the overall size of the playing pool may not have shifted significantly but the frequency of play means less rugby is being played. This is backed up by data illustrating that there is a greater proportion of players playing a lower number of matches.
- 2.8 The change player habits (in many cases exacerbated by the impact of Covid, lockdown and changing family/work arrangements) is significantly impacting on frequency of participation.



3. **Reasons for Decline**

Potential causes for the decline are:

- 3.1 Societal change over the last decade which is leading to people wanting to consume their sporting activity in diverse ways – more ad-hoc, less organised, shorter time commitments. This is exacerbated by increasing family and work pressures post pandemic.
- 3.2 The long layoff period that Rugby Union had to endure during Covid lockdowns led to many players simply finding other, often less time intensive and demanding, activity in which to engage. Further exploration on geographic trends is important here – it is possible that certain areas of the country (e.g. London with highly transient population) could be disproportionately affected.
- 3.3 Greater awareness of/fear of injury. This is exacerbated by larger numbers of people being self-employed and hence not wanting/being able to take the risk of not being able to work due to injury. In addition many employers are now less tolerant of sport related injury.
- 3.4 The lengthy time commitment still required by Rugby Union – unlike many other activities it is not easy just to travel a short distance, turn up at a local venue, play and go home.
- 3.5 Continued significant drop off in the teenage years – age grade affiliation data showing c.50% less players affiliated at Under 18 than Under 14 level. This questions whether our overall age grade offer is appropriate.
- 3.6 Players wanting to play less often. This leads to a team needing to use more players during a season and impacts on the lower XV's in clubs.
- 3.7 As a physical sport requiring many players, Rugby Union has additional challenges. Unlike, for example football or hockey, where players of vastly different strengths and abilities can participate in the same team or against each other, this has player welfare issues in Rugby Union.

4. **Mitigation and Action**

- 4.1 As the National Governing Body and as a national membership organisation it is crucial that the RFU establish a clear leadership position, demonstrate that we care and ensure our resources are effectively deployed to address the serious issues. At the same time, the Union must be conscious of what change can be affected nationally and where the Union can only encourage and persuade others to do the same.
- 4.2 There are several actions underway, and others being actively considered.

Initial activity is being considered under the 5 broad headings below and against 3-time frames:

- a. immediate – ahead of next season
- b. next 12-18 months (ahead of 23/24 season) and
- c. midterm (3-5 years):

Structures & Playing Opportunities

Implementation of Future Competition Structure, Further Examination of Lower XV's competition provision, Recommendations from Contact working group (particularly around Game On) and Non-contact working group (which is where some growth may be possible in the adult male space), enhanced work with competition



organisers and exploration around the role of Fixtures Secretaries in clubs, exploration of new and innovative playing opportunities/expansion of existing ones – midweek activity, festivals etc.

Regulations

Further examination of existing regulations including recommendations for removal/reduction/freezing from the Volunteer Workload task & finish group.

Campaigns

Continuation/additional focus on start of season activity and encouraging players to return to the game. Building on existing collateral from “Return to Rugby” and “Back in the Game” along with the insight we now have on how Rugby Union may be presented differently to a teenage/early 20s audience

Sharing of Good Practice

Concerted effort to profile and promote the work of those clubs that are bucking the trend and seeing success. Commissioning of 15 “Recipes for Action” – looking at clubs who have increased the number of players/teams and are playing more matches – identifying the key ingredients in this and sharing more widely

Player Pipeline

Further examination of the state of rugby in the traditional feeder environments of schools, colleges, and universities. Consideration of the volume and type of rugby and an assessment on the degree to which this is a causal part of the overall adult male decline.

End