



MINUTES

RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Location RLHQ, Rowsley Street, Manchester, M11 3FF **Date & Time** Tuesday 3rd June 2025 10.00 am

Present	Lord Jonathan Caine, Joanna Coates Martin Coyd OBE, Abi Ekoku, Rob Graham, Dermot Power, Emma Rosewarne, Tony Sutton (from Item 5)	Chair	Nigel Wood OBE & Jo Coates (in part)
Apologies	Jamie Jones-Buchanan		Chris Rostron, RL Cares – Item 6
In attendance	Jo Drapier, Sport England Ed Mallaburn, IMG Alison O'Brien, Company Secretary (Interim) Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes) Rhodri Jones, RL Commercial – Item 4		Steve McCormack, RL Cares – Item 6 Tim Adams, RL Cares – Item 6 Laura Fairbank, RFL – Item 7 Dave Elliott, RFL – Item 8

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES It was agreed that the meeting would be chaired by Nigel Wood. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted from Jamie Jones-Buchanan.	
2.0	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Declarations of interest were noted as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NJW – director of RL Commercial Ltd and minority shareholder in Bradford Bulls RLFC.• TS – director of RFLI Ltd, director of RLWC2021 Ltd and director of the RFL Facilities Trust & RFL Foundation Trust.• JC – director of RL Commercial Ltd, Women's National League board member, Interim CEO of England Hockey.• LJC – vice chair of the All Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group.• JJB – director of Leeds Cricket, Football & Athletics Ltd, trustee of Leeds Rhinos Foundation, trustee of Leeds 2023, patron of Inspire North, pundit at Sky TV.• RG – director of RFL Facilities Trust.• JD – chair of Scunthorpe Touch RL club.• MC – coach Medway Dragons RL club.• ER – OuRLeague member and potential witness in the brain injury claim.• AOB – Interim Company Secretary, Company Secretary of RFL Facilities Trust	
3.0	MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING & ACTION TRACKER 3.1 Minutes	



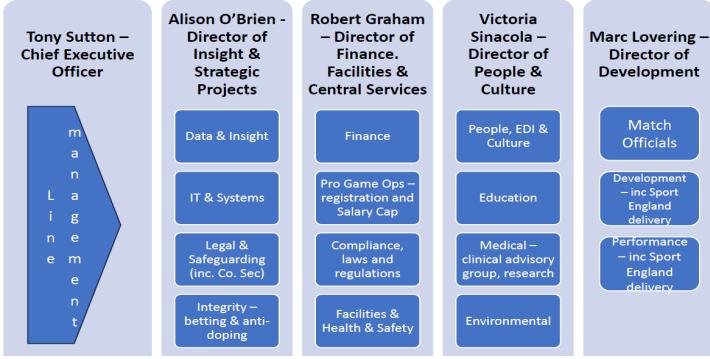
		<p>The minutes from the meeting held on 6th May 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record.</p> <p>The summarised minutes of the meeting held on 6th May 2025 to be published on the RFL website were also agreed.</p>	
	3.2	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>No matters arising were noted, other than those already on the agenda.</p> <p>It was agreed that an agenda item on OurLeague Active would be scheduled for a future Board meeting.</p>	AOB
4.0		<p>RL COMMERCIAL UPDATE</p> <p>The meeting was joined by RL Commercial MD, Rhodri Jones (RJ).</p> <p>RJ summarised the activity taking place ahead of the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley. A crowd of approximately 63,000 was expected.</p> <p>AE queried whether any money had been spent on advertising to attract the London market to Wembley. RJ stated that Challenge Cup activity in London was predominantly organic and organised through the London Foundation to access local schools and clubs. Activation for the London market would take place in July for the Ashes series.</p> <p>It was suggested that RG include an update on RL Commercial finances as part of his overall finance report to the Board, with an overview of the balance sheet for each entity.</p> <p>The Board also requested a copy of the joint venture agreement between the RFL and RL Commercial for information.</p>	RG TS
5.0		<p>FINANCIAL & FACILITIES MATTERS</p> <p>5.1 2025 Management Accounts and Forecast Outturn</p> <p>RG provided an overview of the RFL's management accounts for the period to 30th April 2025, with key variances noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall forecast had improved by approximately £78k against the previous update.Our League Active was performing well, with target net revenue tracking ahead of budget by £7k, and the forecast position currently £17k ahead of budget for the full year. This was attributed to higher than expected membership revenues.Central and fixed costs were £18k over budget, and were forecast to be £91k higher than budget at the year-end.The Executive Board met recently to review each area of the business, and concluded that no further cuts to staff costs could be made without significantly negatively impacting the functions delivered. <p>The Board briefly discussed the current structure of the organisation and flow of monies between the RFL and RL Commercial. It was recognised that the majority of the sport's income sat within RL Commercial Ltd, with the RFL Board having limited influence over this element of the sport's finances.</p>	
	5.2	<p>2024 Statutory Financial Accounts</p>	



	<p>The Board reviewed the 2024 statutory accounts, following their detailed review and approval by the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>On behalf of the Committee, DP reported that no material items were raised during the meeting or in the closed session with Hurst LLP, and no Going Concern issues were reported.</p> <p>The Board approved the 2024 Financial Statements, which would be presented to RFL members at the AGM on 15th July 2025.</p>	
6.0	<p>RUGBY LEAGUE CARES</p> <p>The meeting was joined by Chris Rostron, Steve McCormack and Tim Adams, who presented a comprehensive update on the work of Rugby League Cares and the Charity's achievements in recent years. Most recently, this included establishing 'Sport Cares', providing support to other sports with player welfare provision, with profits coming back into Rugby League Cares.</p> <p>As chair of the Charity, TA presented the income and expenditure position, the split of funds between Rugby League Cares and the RFL Benevolent Fund, and allocation of current resources. The Board was informed that significant NHS funding to the Charity had been delayed due to the reorganisation of NHS England.</p> <p>CR stated that the call on resources had increased with the expansion of the women's and wheelchair games.</p> <p>AE commended the work of the Charity and its growth in recent years, and suggested that it would be useful for it to consider its future remit and any areas it could cover on behalf of the sport, together with its priorities, which could then be proportioned against the RFL's current resources.</p> <p>In terms of other assistance from the RFL, CR requested that the Board consider reconstituting the President's Ball, which had previously raised funds for the Charity, and asked that the RFL actively promote the RL Cares annual bike ride and other activities. It was also noted that the Board had previously dedicated a round of Super League to Rugby League Cares, and could consider reintroducing this next season.</p> <p>CR expressed concern at the recent formation of a separate charity, the Rugby Football League Foundation Trust, and any potential crossover in activity with Rugby League Cares. TS clarified that the Foundation was not yet significantly operational, and had been constituted to obtain grant funding in different areas of the sport. It was not expected that there would be any crossover between the two charities.</p> <p>TA requested that the RFL encourage any club setting up separate charity for a seriously injured player to contact the Benevolent Fund, as this entity had the authority to run these types of funds and obtain the necessary gift aid for the sport.</p> <p>The Board thanked CR, SM and TA for attending the meeting. MC also thanked Rugby League Cares for their significant work with the International Rugby League Players Association.</p>	
7.0	<p>ANTI-DOPING UPDATE</p> <p>The meeting was joined by Laura Fairbank and Victoria Sinacola, who presented a summary of the latest anti-doping activity, UKAD testing figures, and updated on changes to the sport's medical team.</p>	



		<p>The RFL was arranging significant player education, and it was hoped to attract more ex-players to become educators to deliver the training, with a view to having a greater impact on current players. At present, Player Welfare Managers were unable to deliver this training without becoming qualified.</p> <p><i>Nigel Wood left the meeting for the remaining items, and Joanna Coates took the Chair's position.</i></p>	VS
8.0		TACKLE CURRICULUM UPDATE <p>The meeting was joined by Dave Elliott, who provided a detailed overview of the Tackle Curriculum education plans.</p> <p>The Board was informed that a comprehensive review had taken place of the coaching courses and CPD learning requirement and delivery. A new learner management platform had been introduced alongside the current Game Day platform to deliver education and training for coaches, and opportunities were being explored to collaborate with other partners to deliver education within the prison service. It was also proposed to introduce a pricing strategy review as part of the Year 2 strategy, including a suite of new courses to generate revenue.</p> <p>Both the courses and membership would be a key aspect to diversify the RFL's income going forward, thus reducing reliance on the share from RL Commercial and Sport England funding.</p> <p>The Board was supportive of the plans, and it was suggested that it would be beneficial to have ex-players delivering some of the courses.</p>	
9.0		DIVERSIFICATION OF RFL INCOME <p>As part of the RFL's plans to diversify its income and increase its long-term sustainability, AOB outlined proposals to raise Our League Active membership prices, and requested some initial feedback from the Board.</p> <p>It was noted that inflationary costs to the RFL were continuing to rise, and increasing the fee would not create sufficient funds to cover the current shortfall. Additionally, the RFL remained behind some other NGBs in terms of its membership prices.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to reach a figure that would suit all participants, with students and Armed Forces players competing on a less regular basis. JD felt that any increases should be accompanied by significant communication around the value proposition, what was included in the membership offer, and how this would benefit the sport of Rugby League.</p> <p>It was agreed that AOB would consider these points and put together a more detailed proposal for discussion.</p>	AOB
10.0		GOVERNANCE MATTERS <p>The Board received an update from TS on the following governance issues.</p>	
	10.1	Executive Board structure and areas of responsibility <p>The current Executive Board structure and responsibilities was confirmed as follows:</p>	

		 <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Tony Sutton – Chief Executive Officer</td><td>Alison O'Brien – Director of Insight & Strategic Projects</td><td>Robert Graham – Director of Finance, Facilities & Central Services</td><td>Victoria Sinacola – Director of People & Culture</td><td>Marc Lovering – Director of Development</td></tr> <tr> <td>m a n l a i n e m e n t</td><td>Data & Insight IT & Systems Legal & Safeguarding (inc. Co. Sec) Integrity – betting & anti-doping</td><td>Finance Pro Game Ops – registration and Salary Cap Compliance, laws and regulations Facilities & Health & Safety</td><td>People, EDI & Culture Education Medical – clinical advisory group, research Environmental</td><td>Match Officials Development – inc Sport England delivery Performance – inc Sport England delivery</td></tr> </table>	Tony Sutton – Chief Executive Officer	Alison O'Brien – Director of Insight & Strategic Projects	Robert Graham – Director of Finance, Facilities & Central Services	Victoria Sinacola – Director of People & Culture	Marc Lovering – Director of Development	m a n l a i n e m e n t	Data & Insight IT & Systems Legal & Safeguarding (inc. Co. Sec) Integrity – betting & anti-doping	Finance Pro Game Ops – registration and Salary Cap Compliance, laws and regulations Facilities & Health & Safety	People, EDI & Culture Education Medical – clinical advisory group, research Environmental	Match Officials Development – inc Sport England delivery Performance – inc Sport England delivery	
Tony Sutton – Chief Executive Officer	Alison O'Brien – Director of Insight & Strategic Projects	Robert Graham – Director of Finance, Facilities & Central Services	Victoria Sinacola – Director of People & Culture	Marc Lovering – Director of Development									
m a n l a i n e m e n t	Data & Insight IT & Systems Legal & Safeguarding (inc. Co. Sec) Integrity – betting & anti-doping	Finance Pro Game Ops – registration and Salary Cap Compliance, laws and regulations Facilities & Health & Safety	People, EDI & Culture Education Medical – clinical advisory group, research Environmental	Match Officials Development – inc Sport England delivery Performance – inc Sport England delivery									
		<p>The Executive Board continued to meet on a weekly basis to discuss key issues, and all executives were currently operating in some functions that are outside their core areas, given the current staff budget resource constraints. The CEO confirmed it was also his plan not to replace Robert Hicks and that this was required in order to help reduce the current loss-making position.</p> <p>JD raised and it was noted that the Sport England Governance Action Plan required some clarity of those members of the Board that are executive , which would be addressed and the difference between them and members of the Executive Board (being a meeting of the CEO's direct reports). DP also requested information on the which subcommittees supported the Board structure.</p>	TS										
10.2	<p>RFL Summer Council Meeting</p> <p>An agenda was being drafted for the forthcoming RFL Council meeting and AGM. This would include approval of the 2024 financial statements, confirmation of each Non-Executive Director on the Board who had joined the Board in March, and a resolution to cover numerous minor changes to the Articles of Association.</p> <p>It was also proposed to issue a resolution to members removing the requirement for the RFL's Chair to be independent, enabling Nigel Wood to act as chair during his co-opted term. Permanent recruitment for a Chair and Non-Executive Directors would take place later in the year through an open recruitment process.</p> <p>The Board agreed that Nigel Wood should replace Simon Johnson as the second RFL director on the RFL Investments 2020 Ltd Board, which was a wholly owned subsidiary of the RFL and the vehicle by which club loans were delivered.</p>												
10.3	<p>Strategic Review</p> <p>TS provided a brief update on the ongoing strategic review. Topics under discussion included the competition structure, plans for the women's game, the current governance structure of the sport, and the IMG partnership and the impact of grading on the sport.</p> <p>It was recognised that Council members would be seeking some clarification on the priorities of the strategy review, and an update would be provided at the forthcoming meeting.</p>												
10.4	<p>Sport England</p> <p>TS thanked JD and colleagues at Sport England for their support throughout the recent governance changes. A formal response would be provided to Sport England within the next week on the Governance Action Plan they had proposed.</p>	NW											



11.0	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT The report from TS was taken as read.	
12.0	EXECUTIVE REPORTS The following reports were taken as read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chief Executive Officer's Report• Finance, Facilities & Central Services Report• Operations Report• People & Culture Report• Medical Matters Report• Performance Report• Development Report• Match Officials Report• Operational Plan & Insight Report• Safeguarding Report• Information Technology Report• Compliance Report• Litigation Report	
13.0	BOARD SUB COMMITTEES Reports from the following subcommittees were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audit & Risk Committee – 22nd May 2025	
14.0	RISKS No new risks arising from the meeting were noted.	
15.0	AOB It was agreed that dates would be circulated for Board meetings for the rest of the year, with a view to meeting every four to five weeks in the first instance.	TS
16.0	DATE OF NEXT MEETING There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.30.	