



## MINUTES

### RFL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

**Location** Salford City Roosters, Hallsworth Road, Eccles, Salford, M30 7LS **Date & Time** Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024, 10.00 am

**Present** Simon Johnson, Sandy Lindsay MBE, Dr Cherrie Daley, Julia Newton, Tony Sutton, Robert Hicks – Company Secretary **Chair** Simon Johnson

**Apologies** Jamie Jones-Buchanan – RFL Board Observer

**In attendance** Ed Mallaburn – IMG Observer  
Michelle Maple – Secretariat (minutes)  
Rob Graham (Item 4)  
Alison O'Brien (Item 5)  
Marc Lovering (Items 7 & 9)  
Tom Brindle (Item 8)

Item No	Agenda Item	Who
1.0	<p><b>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Jamie Jones Buchanan.</p> <p>The Board thanked Salford City Roosters for hosting the meeting and providing an opportunity to view its clubhouse facilities, which were built following receipt of RLWC2021 CreatedBy funding.</p>	
2.0	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>Declarations of interest were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SJ – director of RL Commercial Ltd, director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and director of IRL Ltd. Chair of SIS, who has Betfred as a shareholder.</li><li>• EM – director of RL Commercial Ltd.</li><li>• TS – director of RFL Investments 2020 Ltd and of RLWC2021 Ltd.</li><li>• JJB – director of Leeds Cricket, Football &amp; Athletics Ltd, trustee of Leeds Rhinos Foundation, trustee of Leeds 2023, patron of Inspire North, pundit at Sky TV pundit.</li><li>• JN – chair of Women in Sport, chair of GB Taekwondo, SID at Capital Letters and board advisor at LCR Property.</li></ul>	
3.0	<p><b>MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING &amp; ACTION TRACKER</b></p> <p><b>3.1 Minutes</b></p> <p>The minutes from the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>The summarised minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024 to be published on the RFL website were agreed.</p>	

	3.2	<b>Matters Arising</b> Progress against the action tracker was noted. TS reported that the Board's annual evaluation process would take place or be in planning by the end of the year.	TS
4.0		<b>FINANCIAL &amp; FACILITIES MATTERS</b>	
	4.1	<p>The meeting was joined by Rob Graham, who provided a report on the management accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 and outlined the budget principles for 2025.</p> <b>Management Accounts</b> A positive variance to budget of £131k was reported for the period, which was attributed to the timing of costs in the overhead/central cost departments and the England Men's programme for the autumn internationals.  As instructed by the auditors, the loss from the sale of Odsal stadium would be recognised in the 2023 accounts at approximately £490k.  Discussion took place on the budget for the England programme and whether the Board should review more detail to ascertain whether aspects of the international programme were affordable. TS confirmed that both he and the Finance and Performance team were currently working to review detailed budget lines to manage costs for the men's programme.	
	4.2	<b>Budget 2025</b> The Board reviewed the proposed areas of budget focus for 2025. A detailed budget model would be developed and brought to the Board meeting in December for further discussion. It was recognised that the outcome of RL Commercial's budget preparation was still unknown and remained the biggest area of uncertainty for 2025.  In respect of the revenue growth assumptions for OuRLeague Active, SL pointed out that the donations element was specifically allocated for the Community Game, with the Community Board to determine where this was spent.  The savings in staff costs following the recent restructure were noted. Notwithstanding this, the Board was keen to ensure that departments were not cut back excessively, particularly in the area of administrative support, and that stakeholder expectations were managed around the delivery of further services amidst the central cutbacks. As such, the Board felt that an agreed overspend should be considered for the 2025 budget and discussed further at the meeting in December.	
	4.3	<b>Risk Management</b> JN provided an overview of the Audit & Risk Committee's review of the RFL's Risk Management system, and improvements to be made in the coming months to increase the Board's awareness of strategic risks facing the RFL.  Internal auditors, Mazars, had also completed their internal audit, including a detailed review of the RFL's recorded risks, scorings and mitigations. A detailed internal audit report would be provided in due course  The risk appetite area and ratings were reviewed by the Board. It was suggested that the current ratings for brain health and governance should be switched over, and that the area of brain health be split into two, with a separate category for 'brain health innovations'. It was also suggested that risk appetite should feature Rules/Regulations and Match Officials.	RG   RG   RG

5.0	<div><div>GRADING UPDATE</div><div><p>The meeting was joined by Alison O'Brien, who presented an update on the 2024 Club Grading process, together with suggested changes to the model for 2025.</p><p>Key dates for the 2024 grading process were noted as follows:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Data capture form submission deadlines:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Current League 1 clubs 5pm Monday 2nd September.</li><li>Current Super League clubs 5pm Monday 23rd September.</li><li>Current Championship clubs 5pm Monday 30th September.</li></ul></li><li>Clubs to be told their own score, grade, and rank on Tuesday 22nd October, under 24-hour embargo, to enable them to prepare their communications.</li><li>RFL to announce club rank, total score, and grade of all clubs on Wednesday 23rd October.</li></ul><p>It was agreed that the Board would receive the score, grade, and rank on the day prior to clubs being informed. JN suggested that some internal scenario planning take place to plan for any potential discontent amongst member clubs around their final grade. SL offered to assist with this process.</p><p>EM queried whether clubs wishing to appeal would be required to pay £5k upfront. TS confirmed that this would be paid upon lodging an appeal with Sports Resolution.</p><p>Proposed changes to Fandom pillar of the grading model in 2025 were outlined as follows:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Digital thresholds to reflect the two seasons of data accumulated from IMG as follows:</li></ul><div><table><tr><th>SOCIAL FOLLOWING</th><th>POINTS</th></tr><tr><td>&gt;300k</td><td>0.15</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;200k</td><td>0.1</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;100k</td><td>0.05</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;25k</td><td>0.025</td></tr><tr><td>10% YoY Growth</td><td>0.05</td></tr></table><table><tr><th>TOTAL ENGAGEMENTS</th><th>POINTS</th></tr><tr><td>&gt;20m</td><td>0.6</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;10m</td><td>0.4</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;2m</td><td>0.2</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;500k</td><td>0.1</td></tr><tr><td>10% YoY Growth</td><td>0.2</td></tr></table><table><tr><th>WEBSITE VISITS</th><th>POINTS</th></tr><tr><td>&gt;2m</td><td>0.375</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;1m</td><td>0.25</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;500k</td><td>0.125</td></tr><tr><td>&gt;100k</td><td>0.1</td></tr><tr><td>10% YoY Growth</td><td>0.125</td></tr></table></div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Viewership thresholds to be adjusted to reflect the new broadcast deals with Sky and the BBC, the launch of the new SuperLeague+ platform and the impact of all games being measured on average match audience viewing figures. IMG would produce a recommendation once the remaining broadcast viewing figures from the regular season had been obtained.</li></ul><p>It was noted that clubs would be informed of the proposed changes at the forthcoming Council meeting, with the Board to approve the finalised changes before the Council meeting in December.</p><p>The Board thanked AO for her considerable work on the grading project.</p></div></div>	SOCIAL FOLLOWING	POINTS	>300k	0.15	>200k	0.1	>100k	0.05	>25k	0.025	10% YoY Growth	0.05	TOTAL ENGAGEMENTS	POINTS	>20m	0.6	>10m	0.4	>2m	0.2	>500k	0.1	10% YoY Growth	0.2	WEBSITE VISITS	POINTS	>2m	0.375	>1m	0.25	>500k	0.125	>100k	0.1	10% YoY Growth	0.125	<div>AO</div> <div>AO</div>
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6.0	<div><div>BRAIN HEALTH &amp; MEDICAL MATTERS</div><div><p>The Board reviewed the latest data and insight available on concussive and sub-concussive injuries for the 2024 season, together with a summary of ongoing medical research projects and plans for 2025.</p></div></div>																																					

	<p>It was noted that that had been a 19% reduction in the rate of concussions within the men's game this year, with the increased sanctions for head contact reducing contact to the head. Sanctioning would continue in 2025 to remove head acceleration events, and coaches would be required to be aware of any players with a high probability of a head acceleration event and to subsequently manage their exposure.</p> <p>RH outlined proposals to be considered by the Laws Committee in 2025 at their next meeting, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackle Height – No changes to Tiers 1-3 Men and Tier 1 Women. Reserves to be taken to International Laws level.</li> <li>• Kick Off &amp; Restarts – Removal of penalty at restarts, as per NRL rules.</li> <li>• Green Card – Return for players in possession to act as deterrent to staying down.</li> <li>• Hand Off to Face – Community game make this illegal.</li> <li>• VR Protocols – Changes to include referral process and Captain's Challenge.</li> <li>• Offside – Changes to interpretation on offside at kicks down field to come into line with NRL/IRL</li> </ul>	
7.0	<b>WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE</b>	
	<p>The meeting was joined by Marc Lovering, who presented a comprehensive update on Wheelchair RL and progress against the current strategy.</p> <p>The Board considered a proposal for a new 'Wheelchair Rugby Premier League' competition.</p> <p>The Chair stated that the competition would need to be sanctioned by the RFL and fit within its current framework..</p> <p>It was agreed that a detailed proposal would be drawn up for further consideration by both the RFL and RL Commercial Boards.</p>	<b>ML</b>
8.0	<b>WOMEN's RUGBY LEAGUE</b>	
	<p>The meeting was joined by Tom Brindle, who updated the Board on the 2024 Women's Super League season and the next iteration of the Women's RL strategy.</p> <p>Significant growth had been achieved during 2024, with girls' teams and offerings now available at every age group. Men's Super League Clubs aspiring to achieve a Grade A or B status under Club Grading Criteria would also be required to have a women's team programme.</p> <p>From an international perspective, it was intended to introduce a home nations tournament, with a three team competition featuring the teams that have already qualified for the 2026 World Cup over the next two years, and the potential to expand this to a four team competition from 2027. The competition would be played over a three week window in June. A full proposal would be presented in due course.</p> <p>Discussions were also taking place with the Women's Super League clubs for a player payment framework for the 2026 season, with a full proposal to be produced for consideration by the Executive and clubs.</p> <p>Work was underway during the last quarter of 2024 to produce the next version of the Women's RL Strategy, covering competition structure, pathways, commercialisation, external investment and governance.</p>	<b>TB</b>     <b>TB</b>
9.0	<b>COMMUNITY GAME UPDATE</b>	

	<p>ML presented a summary of the 2024 mid-year participation figures and Sport England contractual reporting outcomes, together with an update on the 'More Than a Sport' Community RL review. Key points were noted as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of active participants remained broadly the same as mid-year in 2023.</li> <li>• The men's competitions remained stable, albeit with less players. Following the Women's Super League restructure, participation in the women's game had increased by 22%, including the new U18s league.</li> <li>• There were no initial indications that the brain health recommendations had affected participation.</li> <li>• Girls' school activity had increased by over 18%.</li> <li>• There had been an increased focus on more specialised offers across Wheelchair RL, Learning Disability RL and Physical Disability RL.</li> <li>• The RFL's National Community Facilities Strategy had now been published.</li> <li>• The RFL Community Trust was awaiting approval from the Charities Commission, with a decision expected by the end of September. This would be launched around the autumn international series.</li> </ul>	
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10.0		<b>LEAGUE ONE NEW CLUB APPLICATION AND STRUCTURE</b>	
		<p>The Board reviewed the application process for a new club to be admitted into League One for 2025. TS reported that three parties had presented their applications to the panel, and it was subsequently recommended that Goole Vikings be admitted to compete in League One from the 2025 season.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Board <b>approved</b> the recommendation for Goole Vikings to play in League One in 2025, and to recommend to Council that they be accepted as a member club.</p> <p>The Board also considered the broader principle of promotion and relegation between League One and the Community Game, and agreed that the Executive should expand this to a wider consultation with key stakeholders to investigate the most appropriate mechanism to achieve this.</p>	
11.0		<b>RL COMMERCIAL MD REPORT</b>	
		<p>The recommendation not to launch the GB Lions in 2025 was considered by the Board. Whilst recognising the retail merchandise benefits of the GB Lions, it was felt that focus should remain on building the England brand ahead of the RLWC2026 competition.</p> <p>The update on discussions with the NRL on Las Vegas, the future international calendar, and potential future collaboration between the NRL and RFL/RL Commercial was noted.</p>	<b>SJ</b>
12.0		<b>RFL GOVERNANCE</b>	
		<p>The Board considered the paper outlining proposals for RFL President, Vice President, the Articles of Association and Council representation. Three proposals were outlined, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upon conclusion of the current Presidency of Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, Adam Hills would be recommended to Council as the sport's next President, with Vice President's to include Danika Priim and Stephen Wild. This would be formally presented for a vote in December.</li> <li>• To ensure a greater representation of the sport, the RFL Council would include a wider range of members to include representatives from a Foundation, Match Officials, people with a disability, Wheelchair RL, Women's Super League, and the Women's and Girls game.</li> <li>• That the Articles of Association be updated to highlight and enhance the RFL's responsibility for inclusion and diversity and for Women and Girls' Rugby League.</li> </ul> <p>The full proposals would be presented for a vote at the RFL Council meeting.</p>	
13.0		<b>HALL OF FAME</b>	
		<p>The Board <b>approved</b> the induction of the following nominees into the RFL's Hall of Fame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James Lomas</li> <li>• Alan Prescott</li> <li>• Paul Sculthorpe MBE</li> <li>• Jamie Peacock MBE</li> <li>• Michelle Land</li> <li>• Jane Banks</li> </ul>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1996 GB Women's team.</li> </ul>	
14.0		<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT</b>  The report from TS was taken as read.	
15.0		<b>OPERATIONS &amp; LEGAL REPORT</b>  The report from RH was taken as read.  The Board <b>approved</b> the Salary Cap recommendations for 2025.	
16.0		<b>OPERATIONAL PLAN &amp; INSIGHT REPORT</b>  The report from AOB was noted.	
17.0		<b>FINANCE &amp; CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT</b>  The report from RG was noted.	
18.0		<b>PERFORMANCE, DEVELOPMENT &amp; MATCH OFFICIALS REPORT</b>  The report from ML was taken as read.	
19.0		<b>PEOPLE &amp; CULTURE REPORT</b>  The paper by VS was noted.	
20.0		<b>LITIGATION</b>  The report was taken as read.	
21.0		<b>RL COMMERCIAL</b>  The summarised minutes from the RL Commercial Board meeting held on 21 February 2024 were noted.	
18.0		<b>BOARD SUB COMMITTEES</b>  Reports from the following subcommittees were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clinical Advisory Group – 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024</li> <li>Remuneration Committee – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024</li> <li>Performance and Coaching Sub-Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> May and 16<sup>th</sup> August 2024</li> </ul>	
19.0		<b>RISKS</b>  No risks arising from the meeting were noted.	
20.0		<b>AOB</b>  None	
21.0		<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>	

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024

**There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.35.**