

Executive Report RFU Council and chair of Kent County Executive Committee

The KCRFU Executive Committee met 6 times in 2020-21, 5 times virtually and once physically at the Annual Strategy Day held at the Nevill Golf Club, Tunbridge Wells. This was not the best way of working, but the attendance record of all of those on the Executive was outstanding.

1. Liaison and Partnership with the RFU

During the season, the RFU undertook the completion of a fundamental staff structural review, which saw many furloughed under the Government scheme and a major change in the way that the staff are structured at CB (Constituent Body) level. We said goodbye and thanks to our 2 RDOs Gareth Jackson and Mike Hollis, and to our 4 CRCs. After a break for selection purposes, we welcomed: Adam Cottingham as our new CB Relationship Manager for London and the Southeast; Tim Holmes, our Club and Volunteer Support Manager; and Mark Finnis - well known to all of us in the County as an ex-CRC, as our Club Developer. With all these staff having responsibilities for up to seven Counties, ways of working have inevitably been different with all of our contact being by virtual meeting/webinars and CB briefings, and with all three RFU staff starting to attend our briefing meetings with Kent clusters after Christmas as they returned from furlough. Ways of working will be clearly different in future with far fewer boots on the ground and advice being accessed by the new RFU Club Support Centre on the RFU website. It's early days, but there was little choice but to adopt these new ways of working due to the loss of revenue caused by the pandemic as a result of no spectators at the Autumn and Six Nations games, which together provide some 85% of the RFU's annual revenue.

The County also suffered from the financial position, losing some 75% of its normal local funding from the Governing Body and all its income from sponsorship, hence the need for a slimmed down work programme during 2020-21 and 2021-22.

2. Major Activities for the Executive during the Year

2.1. Covid 19 Relief Fund

The County Executive concluded early in the pandemic that communication would need to continue through the medium of Zoom and led the field in opting for this way of working. This enabled Kent to swing into action in setting up and administering a Covid 19 Relief Fund of well over £100k made up of unspent RFU money and County reserves. Nigel Fray chaired this Fund and has been ably assisted by our new Treasurer Ben Ashby and our office Manager Tracy Pettingale. It is pleasing to note that in terms of immediate sustainability, only one grant of £5k has been required to be paid out due to the outstanding job that our 59 RFU voting clubs did to control expenditure in general, maintain income streams such as subscriptions from sympathetic members and to Government and local authority income streams. More detail about the Fund is provided later in this Report (see 'Club Development Committee' section).

2.2 Administration of the RFU Winter Survival Fund

Kent worked with the RFU to ensure that this Government-funded scheme benefitted as many Kent clubs as possible. Over 35 clubs received financial support from the Fund, which, added to other Government and local government funding ensured that our objective was achieved of seeing 59 clubs into the pandemic and all 59 clubs survive the pressures placed on them by the pandemic. As we approach 2021-22, the challenge has changed to one of ensuring that we retain and recruit players, referees and coaches in enough numbers to closely match where we were before the game closed down in March 2020. We will be monitoring this very carefully through our regional cluster groups, our cluster leaders and through our RFU Club Developer.

2.3 Future Competition Structure (FSC)

Prior to the close down of the game, Kent clubs and the CB were consulted on what they require of the RFU structured competitions offering for XV-a-side Senior Men. During 2020-21 that has taken

shape, with the key objective being to cut travel distances and costs, to look at what the players want in terms of total games and to ensure that the structure provides a safe environment. For 2021-22, the structure remains as before, but from 2022-23 it will change, with additional leagues being added at various levels, in some cases a reduction in games and the addition of more RFU cup competitions up to level 5. In addition, lower sides will - if they satisfy a range of criteria set down by the London and SE Competitions group - be allowed to play in the RFU leagues. We do not anticipate too many Kent clubs wishing to do this given soundings made during the early part of 2021.

2.4 Work Programme

As we start 2021-22, Kent like many Counties will have less available funding with which to provide as full a work programme as we would like. We will of course provide the core activities of Discipline under Tim Fagg and Andy Gent at Age Grade level. So, too, the competition's structure and the administration of our Kent Merit Tables, under John Day and his band of Local Competitions' Secretaries.

We plan also to focus on Safeguarding, which is of increasing importance to our game, and to reflect this we are appointing a new Safeguarding lead and team along with our Rugby Safe Officer. We will also, through Taff Gwilliam and our Coaching and Refereeing Sub-Committee, look to provide a clear support programme to recruit new coaches and referees, whilst retaining those we already have. We will put emphasis on the recruitment of new club and CB volunteers through our new Leadership Academy, which is to be led by Trevor Martingell, our Volunteer Manager for the County. As we move to a post-pandemic environment, we hope to return monies from the Covid Relief Fund back to more 'business as usual' programmes, including for small facilities grants whilst we wait for the RFU to be able to resume funding major facilities improvements. We will continue with our Cluster consultation and communication, where, over the past year and across the 5 Geographical and the Women's and Girls' Groups, we have been able to engage 85% of clubs.

Where the Women's and Girls' game is concerned, we will work with the RFU and our own Committee, under Graham Withers, to add to the 1300 (as at March 2020) active players in Kent and to play our part in helping the RFU achieve its target by 2027 of 100,000 active participants in the Women and Girls game.

2.5 The Executive Committee

Thanks to all those who served on the Executive and our subcommittees as volunteers during the last, difficult year. It is hard to maintain motivation for the game we love when no matches are being played and we have been unable to visit our clubhouses for banter and social interaction. In 2020-21, we saw Ben Ashby replace Peter Dessent as the CB's Honorary Treasurer. We are extremely grateful to Peter for his long and valued service and are pleased to report that Ben has settled in well into the job, bringing his investment expertise to our table, and a shrewd knowledge of our finances, aided by the diligence and hard work of Tracy Pettingale in the County office. Nigel Fray has taken on the key role of Director of Governance, overseeing what we do from the corporate side to safeguarding and discipline. Nigel has also represented us on the RFU's CB liaison groups on potential club insolvency and financial monitoring, and on the RFU's Diversity and Inclusion Group.

Finally, I would like to record the Executive's thanks to Sylvia Taylor, who having retired as County administrator took on the mantle of Mike Cordell as County Secretary. Many thanks to you, Sylvia, for going a distance further as you and Tracy developed the new style County Awards Dinner at the Ashford International and for all of your work on our behalf over the years.

And.....finally, finally, our thanks to John Nunn, our outgoing President, for sitting through our meetings both physical and virtual over the past 3 years and making his contributions to our decision making. Also thank you, John, for representing the County at a number of club lunches and matches and being at all of the County Championship games when you were able to do so. Greetings to our

incoming President Doug Hursey who, since the turn of the year, has already brought commercial acumen and knowledge of the game to our meetings and to our Strategy Day.

Roger Clarke