

RFU COUNCIL MEETING

21 February 2025

Post-Meeting Council Briefing Note

1. Presidential matters

- 1.1 Rob Udwin (President) welcomed Council members to what was a scheduled meeting of Council.

2. CEO update

- 2.1 Bill Sweeney updated Council on the current matters facing the game and the Union, including:
- Updating on the preparations for RWC 2025 with fewer than 200 days to go before the tournament starts.
 - The current Nations Cup negotiations, and the tender for Six Nations broadcast rights. Council engaged in a detailed discussion about the importance of matches being broadcast other than behind a paywall, but it was noted that the age profile of free-to-air broadcast viewers was increasing, whereas younger fans engaged with live sport in a very different way.
 - The current head injury litigation, following the most recent hearing in early February.
 - Stadium events at the Allianz Stadium, and the positive reaction of the local community to a greater number of non-rugby events.

3. Interim Chair update

- 3.1 Sir Bill Beaumont provided an update on the recent work of the Board. He also provided a detailed update on the feedback received from the community roadshows undertaken over recent weeks. Much of the focus was on the challenges of community clubs, including participation, communication to and from the community game, and challenges with the Game Management System.
- 3.2 The Council discussed the feedback in detail. It was noted that the participants in the roadshows did not necessarily represent the breadth of participation throughout the game, most notably the age game and women's game, and it was recognized that the issues raised in the roadshows are not exhaustive. It was noted that it was clear there was a need to expedite the Governance and Representation Review, and for the wider game to be more involved in developing proposals for change.
- 3.3 Next steps will be a formal report following the roadshows which will go out to the wider game.

4. Special General Meeting and LTIP Review

- 4.1 One Council Member registered a conflict as an organiser of the Whole Game Union which was campaigning for removal of the CEO. The Council discussed the upcoming Special General Meeting. Paula Carter, speaking as a member of the Board reaffirmed the support for Bill Sweeney, believing him to be the person with the skills and the energy to deliver the RFU's strategy and deliver the reform that the game demands.
- 4.2 The Council had held an informal meeting the previous evening to discuss the findings of Freshfields' independent review. It was noted that the review had found the Long Term Incentive Plan to be appropriately designed and implemented, but made a number of observations and recommendations in particular around communications. These will be taken forward by the Board.

5. Adult Player Registration

5.1 James Cook (Council Member) provided an update on the implementation of the Adult Player Registration project. Over 100,000 players had been registered, and recognised the very significant effort undertaken by volunteers in clubs throughout the country. The number of players registered at more than one club was smaller than expected.

5.2 Council approved that:

- a. Electronic Match Cards will not be mandated further next season - but strongly encouraged.¹
- b. Mandatory registration for non-contact players will be delayed at least a year.
- c. The oversight group for Adult Player Registration stands down and hands over responsibility to the Community Game Board, the Governance Standing Committee and their respective committees.

6. Rugby World Cup 2025

6.1 Alex Teasdale (Executive Director of the Women's Game) updated on the plans to maximise on the Rugby World Cup, including around targeting and engaging with younger fans.

6.2 John Mitchell (Red Roses Head Coach) updated on the preparations for the Red Roses, including learnings from other sports. This included the culture and leadership of the squad, and how this was developed.

7. Regulation 10 Review

7.1 James Cook led a discussion on work to be done to consider the most effective and proportionate way to regulate tours and shorter formats of the game, including festivals and other activities run by third party operators. This brings a range of challenges, including the burden on Constituent Body volunteers and what any insurance considerations will be. It was also noted that players of shorter formats often do not have a voice in any decision-making structures.

8. Governance and Representation Review Update

8.1 Penny Stewart and Paula Carter (Council Members) updated Council on the project, in particular the need for this to be expedited and other feedback from the roadshows. The discussion focused on how to ensure representation of the wider game within decision-making structures. The key themes from the roadshows included having direct consultation with clubs on key decisions, increased devolution of decisions and a more simplified structure.

8.2 Options are being refined swiftly consultation with the wider game needs to happen swiftly.

9. Finance update

9.1 Francesca Pierce (CFO) provided an update on the RFU finances. The Council discussed the nature of the four year men's Rugby World Cup cycle. The RFU is on track to meet its budget for 2024/25.

10. I&D Update

10.1 Jatin Patel (Inclusion and Diversity Director) and Matt Webb (Council Member) presented on the current progress to make the game as inclusive as possible. There was discussion of how to articulate the work clubs do around social diversity. The Council also discussed options to ensure the most effective way of co-opting members to help improve the diversity of Council.

¹ EMCs remain mandatory for all RFU leagues, but will remain discretionary for Merit Tables next season but with the expectation that an increasing number of clubs will see the benefit from using them - building on this season's circa 65% voluntary completion.

11. Ticket pricing

11.1 The Council discussed ticket pricing at Allianz Stadium, particularly in the context of increasing match costs (such as National Insurance contributions which present significant costs).

12. Reports

12.1 Council received reports from the following groups and the opportunity to question their authors: Community Game Board, Men's Professional Rugby Board, Every Rose Update (including RWC25 and Women's Performance Advisory Group), Council Nominations Committee and Governance Standing Committee. In particular, the Council discussed the current status of the Tier 2 process, and was briefed on the work of the Head Injury Prevention and Management Sub-committee which met earlier in the week.