PENNY STEWART, RFU COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE FOR NORTHUMBERLAND

BRIEFING NOTES FROM THE RFU COUNCIL MEETING HELD 29th SEPTEMBER 2023

Please see below the briefing notes from the RFU Council Meeting held on 29th September 2023. As always, drop me a line or give me a call if you would like to discuss any matters or require more detailed information but please note that I am away abroad from the 8th October 2023 until the 26th October 2023 with limited access to emails. I will, however, respond to any queries when I return.

BRIEFING NOTES:

Meeting started at 11 am

1. Update on Jersey Reds

1.1 The Council received an update on Jersey Reds. The RFU had been informed that Jersey Reds had taken the decision to cease trading following unsuccessful discussions with both existing and potential new investors. This was not expected either by staff or players, the Championship Clubs Committee or the RFU, who had not received any prior notification. The Rugby Players' Association and the RFU are working to support the players and staff affected.

2. CEO's Update to Council

Bill Sweeney (CEO) updated the Council on matters being undertaken by the Executive Staff. These included:

2.1 Professional Game Partnership (PGP)

Work with the other stakeholders in the professional game continues at pace with the development of a joint strategy for the professional men's game. There is significant work to define the detail underpinning the PGP, including the future 2nd tier competition structure. In line with the timelines of the current Professional Game Agreement, which expires in June 2024, the new arrangements are set to come into force at the start of the 2024/25 season, with a new second tier competition due to start in 2025/26. This will continue to be brought back to Council for further consultation. A RFU/PRL aligned submission covering key principles, joint strategy, and key actions has been provided to the Dept of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS0 in line with the end of September timeline.

2.2 Community Game Future (CGF)

There is significant ongoing effort on the CGF project, led by an Oversight Group chaired by Rob Udwin (RFU Senior Vice President), to map out a ten-year plan (and investment strategy) for the Community Game, responding to current challenges but also looking ahead to how our game may need to evolve to meet a changing landscape and player preferences. Successful engagement and consultation period has taken place with numerous in-person and virtual listening events held across the country.

2.3 Game Management System (GMS) Performance

The season started well with GMS, with significant effort going into preparation and communication ahead of the first weekend. There have been over 120,000 Age Grade Registrations by mid-September, which is 15% ahead of this time last season; over 50 additional clubs have engaged with

the process this season. Aim to continue the work from the summer in providing support; the specialist GMS Support Trainers available to clubs being an example.

2.4 Tackle Height

All home unions have now adopted the same reduced height for the tackle in the community game, and there are regular calls with the other unions to share best practice as this is implemented. There has not been a rise in red cards during the start of the season. From an implementation perspective, there is a bi-weekly call with other unions to monitor progress.

2.5 England teams

There was reflection on the England men's team following the match against Chile, and the Red Roses following the first match against Canada.

3. Chair's Update to Council

3.1 Tom Ilube (Chair of the Board) updated the Council on the work of the Board, noting that two new Board members joined on 1 August: Kirsty Marlor (Council Elected Director) and Auriol Stevens (Independent Non-Executive Director). Much of the last Board meeting focused on the CGF and PGP work, and how through these the financial model of the organisation and the wider game can be balanced. Another significant topic was how the digital transformation of the RFU will provide a better platform for engagement with all those involved in the game.

4. Financial and People Planning

4.1 Sue Day (CFO/COO) presented to Council on the long-term financial forecasts of the RFU and the work being undertaken to ensure that operating revenues and costs balance in the long term. In particular, the RFU is in a strong cash position with no debt, with a strong P&L reserve position. The impact of the pandemic and the current economic climate brings challenges to the RFU, as it does to many other businesses. She confirmed that the Board is supporting the Executive in taking action to address the current deficit in the operating P&L. She also explained the investment through the Strategic Growth Fund which uses revenue received from the CVC investment in the Six Nations to fund revenue generating activities such as the Stadium, digital transformation and the women's game, and long-term investment in the community game.

5. Extension to Some Distinguished Members' Benefits (item for decision)

5.1 Council agreed to extend by one year the benefits given to certain selected Distinguished Members who had lost one year of benefits due to the pandemic.

6. Governance and Operations of the RFU (item for decision)

6.1 Council considered the resolution submitted by Gary Henderson (Sussex) which requested that the group of those submitting the resolution have a range of specific meetings with specified Board members. There were views expressed about the manner in which this resolution was made excluded many Council members. The resolution was withdrawn.

6.2 The Board, Council, and Executive agreed to a more collaborative working relationship which will include Council reviewing its ways of working.

7. Governance and Representation Review (item for decision)

7.1 Council noted the Council Nominations Committee did not believe that either of the applicants for the chair of this review met the role description. A resolution submitted by Gary Henderson (Sussex) and others to appoint one of these applicants nonetheless was not approved, and the process will be reopened to Past Presidents and Distinguished Members. It was noted that at least one other potential candidate is willing to stand.

8. Council Member Entitlements (item for decision)

8.1 Council heard the proposed resolution from Nigel Orton (ERFSU) and Robert Walsh (Oxfordshire) to seek an amendment and increase in the Council Entitlements for attendance at home and away fixtures for both men's and women's internationals and a change in the cap on the amount that may be claimed for flights had been withdrawn. However, this proposal would be taken to the Council Services Group first for consideration and brought back to Council later in the season if appropriate.

9. Community Game Future

9.1 The Council received a detailed presentation, and debated, the next steps in the CGF project. This included the consultation process with the game.

10. Tackle Height Lessons Capture Update

10.1 Council discussed the paper provided on actions taken following recommendations made by the group set up to review lessons learned from the process by which the decision to lower the tackle height in the community game was made and communicated.

11. President's Assurance Statement - RFU 2023 Annual Report and Accounts

11.1 In the RFU's Annual Report and Accounts, the President provides a statement setting out how the Council had fulfilled its constitutional responsibilities. The draft statement in respect of season 2022/23 was provided for comment.

12. 2022/23 Year End Report and 2023/24 Delivery Plan and Strategy Targets

12.1 Council was provided with a update on these and given an opportunity to ask questions.

13. Reports

13.1 Council received reports from the following groups and the opportunity to question their authors:

Community Game Board, Professional Game Board, Governance Standing Committee, Council Inclusion and Diversity Working Group, Council Nominations Committee, Board Nominations Committee, Head Injury Prevention and Management Sub-committee and a report on the wider women and girls' game.

Meeting closed at 4.45 pm

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