Best Practice & Governance Report

Date – 4 July 2023

Report compiled by Gary Robson

I would like to begin by acknowledging the vital contribution of all members of the Governance panel and their respective support teams over the past season. The portfolio leads (Kingsley Hyland, Cathryn Clark, Mark Reade, Keith Atkinson) supported by Claire Sharpe, the discipline panel and the physio team. These are largely unseen roles which can often be thankless tasks. It can also be frustrating and upsetting when individuals performing vital voluntary roles are subject of unfair, unfounded, and often anonymous criticism and negative comment. Thank you to all involved in the Governance Panel for their support and contribution to rugby in Northumberland.

Key events, issues, and achievements since the last report.

Safeguarding –

- CSO / RS workshop held on 24 May 2023.
- One new safeguarding referral to RFU (not appropriate to share details)
- RFU investigation regarding coaching / safeguarding issues raised at a club continues
- Police investigation regarding allegations of assault by coach upon player ongoing.

RugbySafe –

- RS club reps workshop / networking event held with CSOs on 24 May 2023.
- Liaison with clubs and coaches preparing for Regulation 9 changes coming in next season (2023-24). Prompting clubs to complete First Aid Risk Assessments, and note the completion of these on GMS
- To help clubs meet the minimum standards of one First Aider per team, vouchers have been provided to cover the cost of a place on a RFU Emergency first aid in rugby union course. (Northumberland CB have issued 23 of these vouchers. These have been allocated to clubs on GMS on the basis of that club having completed the

First Aid Risk Assessment and having a club Rugby Safe Lead in place and both being recorded as such on GMS. This is a scheme that will be repeated next season.

- Assistance has been provided to Border Park to secure bursary funding to equip BP ground with an AED (defibrillator). BP is the most remote rugby club in the UK and this equipment could be a life-saver at that location.
- Northumberland CB are now in possession of two AEDs for use of Immediate Care Practitioners (ICPs) working with the Representative teams to carry with their trauma kit. These will also be available when large festivals etc take place and the CB ICPs are in attendance.
- Further discussions have taken place in relation to providing support around neurodiversity with the CB. (see items for decision).

Injured Player Welfare –

- Nothing to report

Discipline & Compliance - Despite the end of the season the Disciplinary Panel have had to deal with a further four cases and two further investigations are current.

- A charge was brought against an age grade coach at Novos for conduct prejudicial to the interests of the game following allegations of match official abuse. The individual concerned refused to engage with the disciplinary process. In his absence he was suspended for 18 weeks commencing at the start of next season and must attend a Referees' Course before he can re-start coaching. The panel also implemented the suspended five league points deduction imposed following a similar case last season.

- A further Regulation 15 breach involving a club playing of a 17-year-old in adult matches without the required CB authorisations. The aggravating feature of the case is that the two most recent offences were committed when the club was aware that it was already under investigation for the first two offences. The club were deducted 8 league points with a further deduction of 8 league points suspended until the end of next season. The individual who accepted responsibility for the club's failures was suspended from all rugby activities for 3 months (suspended until the end of next season).

1. A club fielded a player in a 7s tournament whilst he was still subject to suspension. The club were deducted 5 league points suspended until the end of next season. The suspended player who played in the 7s tournament had already received three red cards during the course of the season. He still had two weeks remaining on the ban. The panel decided on a further suspension of 4 weeks to commence when the previous ban has been completed meaning that the player will start next season with a 6 week ban.

- Two further potential regulation breaches have been reported an are under investigation

CB Medical –

- A successful end to the season with the CB physio team busy providing coverage at all rep rugby matches, competitions and festival events.

Current and impending issues, events, and work streams

All portfolio areas are currently examining 23 – 24 budget proposals, future activity and succession planning issues.

Issues requiring Decision, Discussion or Dissemination

Neurodiversity & Mental Health – For the past two seasons work has been ongoing, relating to Neurodiversity and Mental Health issues. This vital work is cross-cutting and impacts upon Safeguarding, Rugby Safe and CB Medical issues. It is suggested that this work is of such importance that it should be included as a separate portfolio area within Governance. The boards authorisation to create this portfolio area, to be headed by Claire Sharpe, supported by DoG, RS lead and CBSM is requested. The group will report to the board via Claire / DoG.

Safeguarding & Disciplinary Awareness – Recent events have highlighted that it may be beneficial for the board, Presidential Team and Club Representatives to have a greater understanding of Safeguarding and Disciplinary matters. It is strongly recommended that those performing these roles should attend RFU “Play it Safe” courses. However, as a minimum it is requested that inputs can be provided to each of these bodies regarding Safeguarding and Discipline to reinforce how vital it is that individuals, clubs, and the entire CB team recognise their statutory and moral obligations in these areas.

NB – This report must not include personal or identifiable data. If there is a need to report on Confidential matters, please forward communication separately marked ‘Confidential’