Best Practice & Governance Report

Note to All,
The content of a letter sent on 28th March 2024 to Lucy Armstrong by **Harry Cornforth, Tynedale RFC CEO, on behalf of the following clubs - Alnwick, Ashington, Berwick, Blyth, Border Park, Morpeth, Percy Park, Seghill, Tynedale, West End and Whitley Bay Rockliff** is noted.

Many of those involved in Governance Panel functions are currently considering their positions and future involvement with NRU. Additional resilience was already needed around Discipline, Rugby Safe, Injured Player Welfare and CB Medical. It is already apparent the content of this letter will exacerbate that situation.

We look forward to new people volunteering to undertake these vital CB functions from across Northumberland, especially from these aforementioned clubs, who feel that current strategies have not met with their needs**.**

Date – 6 April 2024

Report compiled by Gary Robson

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

- Governance Portfolio representatives were present at Club Development Day on 4th March 2024 to advise clubs around Safeguarding, RugbySafe, and Discipline issues. Feedback was positive.

Safeguarding –

- Potential serious safeguarding issue in an NRU club, currently with the police and RFU.
- Berwick – Consultation ongoing following a failure to follow RFU regs as club have been following SRU procedures. (They prefer to use SCRUM instead of GMS, this causes issues when conducting safeguarding checks.)
- Northern – ongoing issues at club level following the resolution of reported safeguarding issues, raised by a former parent of age grade player, in conjunction with the RFU.

- Following the finalisation of a long-running RFU investigation into an allegation of assault upon an age-grade player the NRU club involved have been asked to respond to RFU concerns about the initial handling of the allegation by the club.
- Safeguarding concerns regarding a player who has estranged parents and complex family circumstances. Cooperation is ongoing with the police, club and the RFU.
- A potential serious safeguard concern has been passed to the police and the RFU following the exclusion of an adult from a club in Northumberland.
- Allegations of Racist abuse have been referred to RFU.
- A complaint of discrimination against a player with neurodiverse issues has been referred to the RFU.
- Liaison with RFU safeguarding and discipline, ongoing support to two schools and players following report of serious safeguarding concern after allegations of racist comments during a game.

RugbySafe –

- Clubs have been reminded about Regulation 9 and the requirement to complete first aid risk assessment and update GMS accordingly
- Completion and having an identified RugbySafe Lead in post is a pre-requisite for clubs to receive vouchers for Emergency First Aid Rugby Union (EFARU) course.
- Northumberland has had 24 EFARU vouchers this season. There are still a small number to allocate. Some clubs do not seem to have allocated vouchers to named individuals yet.
- Two vouchers were allocated after an incident in girls club rugby highlighted an urgent need for first aiders. These individuals are now attending a course at North Shields later this month.

Discipline & Compliance –

- On 20th February 2024 NRU chair and DoG had a detailed meeting with David Barnes (Head of RFU Discipline). There they highlighted concerns regarding the length of time which the RFU were taking to deal with referrals and investigations. (Two recent cases have taken over 12 months to be resolved), General communications between the RFU, CB, clubs and individuals, Age Grade Discipline procedures and several specific cases involving individuals or Northumberland clubs which had caused concern. Some action has been taken, however, a full update from David addressing all concerns is awaited.

- Since the last report the Adult Panel has dealt with five cases following on-field red cards (2 x Dangerous Tackle, MOA, striking, kicking).

- Adult coach and parent dealt with following inappropriate behaviour during U16 game toward players and referee.

Neurodiversity –

- Neurodiversity working group have continued to meet and have developed a draft policy and procedures to assist Northumberland Rugby in providing equally opportunities for all, whatever an individual's Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) and / or Neurodiversity needs.
- The group presented to the General Committee meeting. Feedback from that audience was mixed. Feedback from coaches and those involved in delivery of the game was very positive and has been used to develop draft policy and resources for clubs and coaches. Others had a less open approach to this issue. It is suggested this highlights a need for further education in some areas of the game.
- A draft policy and and a 'player on a page' procedure have been drafted and are circulated with this report for consideration by the board.
- Several cases across Northumberland identified where neuro diversity support was required. The work this group is undertaking is beginning to show tangible benefits supporting players, clubs, and coaching teams.

Injured Player Welfare Officer – (Vacant)

- This position continues to be vacant. Thanks to Claire Sharpe for carrying out this function in addition to county administrator role.
- 143 Concussions reported this season. (Reiterate reminder to all re necessity for reporting).
- Ongoing liaison by Claire with injured players. No particular issues to highlight.

CB Medical –

- NRU Ferno scoop (spinal) recently purchased by NRU was used for an U16 girls player, to facilitate the safe transfer of an injured player to the ambulance service and hospital.

Active Bystander Training (Coach & Spectator Behaviour) -

- In January an issue was highlighted by NRURS relating to an RFU project to deliver training relating to Coach and Spectator behaviour. It was acknowledged that this was a cross cutting issue and was not the sole responsibility of referees. Several potential stakeholders were invited to

participate in a Northumberland initiative and the Presidential Team were invited to lead on it.

- Although the Presidential Team have not accepted the invitation to lead, a small working group comprising Lee Weatherley (NRURS), Kingsley Hyland (Discipline) Mark Reade (Safeguarding) and Cathryn Clark (RugbySafe & Coach Educator) has been formed to be supported by Ruth Scott and Noel Mather. The Terms of Reference are to be agreed.

Current and impending issues, events, and work streams

Safeguarding –

- Reminders to all clubs regarding the submission of concussion forms. Some clubs and schools are not completing the forms. Several cases where a player has had multiple concussions within a short timeframe.
- Reminder to clubs to submit tour forms in accordance with regulation.

RugbySafe –

- Ongoing liaison with clubs re risk assessments and EFARU course allocation.

Discipline & Compliance –

- An investigation is ongoing following complaints from county coaches regarding the conduct of a club coach.
- The CBDS is part of the national RFU Regulation 19 Review Group. It is reaching a critical stage with four meetings scheduled in the next three weeks. A first draft re-write of Regulation 19 has been received and it is intended that this will be circulated to CBs and Clubs for comment on 10th April.
- On 8th April NRU will receive the 'headline findings' from the recent CB Discipline Audit.

Active Bystander Training (Coach & Spectator Behaviour) -

- A Terms of Reference (ToR) for this time fixed, 'Task and Finish' working group will need to be established (for discussion at the board meeting).
- Cathryn Clark is due to attend RFU Coach Educator Training for the Active Bystander Training on 18th April 2024

- It is suggested given the composition of this group they would be well suited to consider the following linked issues, in addition to the Active Bystander project and to make recommendations to the board
  - Active Bystander Training
  - Updating and review of local procedures and guidance (in relation to Discipline and Safeguarding).
  - Consideration of Regulation 19 review.
  - Communication between Discipline, Safeguarding, Neurodiversity and Administration functions.
  - Age Grade Discipline and Role of AGDS

Neurodiversity –

- Communication and interaction relating to Neurodiversity issues with Safeguarding representatives has been excellent. This good communication and close cooperation has been less evident in links with referees and discipline (primarily relating to Age Grade cases). This area requires further work. In many cases there is a direct correlation between cases involving neurodiversity, safeguarding and discipline issues.

- Despite efforts to improve communication between portfolios, risk and vulnerability remains when activity between portfolios is not fully coordinated.

- Presentation planned to Age Grade Forum.

Injured Player Welfare –

- No issues to highlight

CB Medical –

- Ongoing liaison to cover immediate care cover for senior men's training and some rep rugby gaps.

Issues requiring Decision, Discussion or Dissemination

Decision –

- Ratification of draft SEMH and Neurodiversity Policy
- Ratification of the use of Player on a Page

Discussion –

- Terms of Reference & Timescales – Active Bystander Task & Finish working group

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'