An Open Letter from Sir Bill Beaumont

Dear Members,

Today the RFU Council ratified my appointment as Interim Chair of the RFU Board; it is a great honour to be taking on this role and I thank Council for their support.

I've had a busy few weeks engaging with the RFU Board and Council, and listening to players, volunteers, match officials and fans. From those conversations it is very clear the game wants and needs unity, and it is my priority to help to bring the game together.

Unity does not mean no challenge or debate. I hear and empathise with some of the concerns around the payment of a long-term incentive plan. I want to understand how decisions were taken, and it is right that an independent review of the process has been commissioned. The review should be allowed to run its natural course, and I look forward to its outcomes.

This is a serious moment for the game of rugby in England. There have been demands for change without clarity on the real reasons why, or proposals for an alternative vision. There has been a call for a Special General Meeting (SGM) and we will respect the right of members to have their views heard.

Our sport has a long history of in-fighting and we sometimes lose sight of what is best for rugby as a whole. Whatever we do next, it needs to be for the good of the English game.

We need to listen and be supportive of one another. That is why I will be hitting the road on a nationwide tour of rugby clubs in January and February, so we can debate and agree a united way forward.

We also need to reflect on how hard the last few years have been. I can offer a wider context on that from my recent position as Chair of World Rugby. The impact Covid, inflation and a cost-of-living crisis has had on the game around the globe has been significant in terms of participation, confidence, and finances at every level.

Objectively, we should ask whether English rugby, in the aftermath, was managed effectively. Having seen all countries wrangle the same problems, I can say with confidence in comparison to many other countries the RFU has come out of this period very well.

The RFU did not receive any government or World Rugby loans. It did, however, successfully negotiate support on behalf of community clubs, and facilitated professional clubs' access to government loans, which ensured rugby received more financial support in England than any other sport.

There is much work needed to reset and come together as a united game, and I am committed to supporting that. In the short time I have been back in this role, I have also seen that rugby in England has lots of positives to build on.

The RFU has committed to an investment programme in the community game that will see more coaches, more resources for clubs, and accessible forms of rugby being taken into thousands of schools.

We are set to host the Women's Rugby World Cup – a generational opportunity to get more women and girls playing rugby. Participation in the men's game has also bounced back close to where it was pre-Covid.

When I'm on the road I will be listening to your feedback and input so do please sign up to join one of the sessions which will be announced in next week's Community Game Update.

We all want winning men's and women's England teams, and this can't happen without a thriving community game. I want us to have unity, and the stability required to deliver this. If we work together, we will succeed. If we work against each other, English rugby will not be the winner on or off the pitch.