General Committee Meeting – 20th January 2025 at Tynedale RFC

Attendees: Graham Crozier (Hon Secretary / VP), Noel Mather (President), Lee Weatherley (Chair), Brian Russell (Dir of Finance), Ian Moralee (Dir of Rugby), Dean Gray (Dir of Mktg, Comms & Sponsorship / Ponteland Rep), Penny Stewart (RFU Council Rep)
Club Reps: Becky Dyson (Alnwick), Paul Tanney (Ashington / VP), Jimmy Norris (Blyth), Richie Gledson (Border Park), Neil Jamieson (Gosforth), Robin Davies (Newcastle Ravens), Ron Borley (Northern), Jack Pellew (Novos), Mark Carr (Percy Park), Cris Davy (Schools VP), John Atherton (Seghill), John Austin (Tynedale), Tom Knott (West End), Ian Richardson (WBR)
Past Presidents: Ruth Scott, Pete O'Brien, Jim Coulson, Richard Appleby, Terry O'Neill, Graham Ward, Andy Thomson, Peter Jones, Ken Fraser, Douglas Hamilton
Additional Attendees: Harry Cornforth (Tynedale), Mel Magee, Newcastle Rugby Foundation, Stephen Savage, Project Director/Strategic Lead WRWC, Niall Head-Rapson (NRURS)
Claire Sharpe

Apologies: Keith Atkinson (NRU Dir of Club Development), Ricky Handa (Dir of Governance) John Davidson, Peter Hamil, Ken Fairbairn, Duncan Hutton.

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1. Stem Cell Presentation (Niall Head-Rapson)
A very emotive presentation was delivered by Niall Head-Rapson.
Presentation Slides:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Stem-Cell-Presentation-20.01.25.pdf
Follow up e-mail to Clubs (sent to Club Reps 21.01.25)
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Stem-Cell-follow-up-mail-to-Clubs-21.01.25.pdf
Headlines from the presentation:
Only 7% of the UK population is registered on the national Stem Cell register and of that number only 14% of those registered are male.
There is a 30% chance of a match to an immediate family member.
If 100 people are tested one of these will be a match to someone.
It is a simple process of swabbing first and if you are a match a simple blood donation.
Antony Nolan Trust target 16 to 30 year olds.
DKMS target 17 to 55 year olds.
Once tested you remain on the register until you are 61.
Unanimous agreement within the room to support the efforts of Niall and get him access to people at clubs and CB events.
Contact details for Niall: 07881 504903 / nhr@mcdanielslaw.com
Action – LW follow up mail for clubs.
Action – CS to send appropriate CB dates (incl Future Colts, County Matches, County U20s dates) to Niall.

2.Womens RWC (Steve Savage, Mel Magee and Penny Stewart)
Copy of Presentation is here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Womens-RWC-Presentation-20.01.25.pdf
Celebrating Women's Elite Sport.
26,000 tickets have been sold so far.
Group sales open on the 4th February.

The event may be in Sunderland but it is for the whole of the region, bringing approx. £20m into the region.
TV - 40m UK viewers and 40m worldwide viewers.
There will be two open training sessions and 2 community engagement events in the week around the opening match.
There will be a fan village.

Mel reported that a joint Northumberland and Durham bid for funds is about to be submitted to the North East Combined Authority. Events around for instance "50 days to go" will be held at KP (raising profile of the event).

Penny reported that the Northumberland RWC committee had met recently. They have a number of events and ideas that they want to implement if the funding bid is approved. Ideas include T1 Beach Touch Festivals (a number of events at beaches down the Coast from Berwick to Sunderland, culminating on Sunderland beach) and holding a Women's match at the Tynedale Girls Festival (40+ teams entered so would showcase women's rugby) so watch this space!

There was an appreciation that promotion material and information around the event needs to ramp up and increase. The RFU are currently working on Club Packs (resources to help promote the game).

A question was asked about T1 rugby (in relation to the beach festivals)
What is T1 Rugby:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/T1-Rugby-1.pdf
There is an open invite to anyone who wants to attend a T1 training session being run by Ash Smith at Percy Park on 9th May.

3.Regional Bodies Update (Graham Crozier and Penny Stewart)
The finalised "North" area has been agreed.
Final North Map:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Final-North-Map-Regional-Bodies.pdf
North Region comprises Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria and Yorkshire.
Each of the 8 Regional Bodies will have a paid Chair, Fundraiser and Administrator, with 2 years of funding being allocated by the RFU with an expectation that the Bodies become self funding in year 3, potential funding for year 3 though. Funding is through the CVC money that the RFU received.
Money raised stays in the region and is in addition to any current RFU funding to CBs.
The RFU is devolving decision making to the Regions - what we need and see as our priorities up here in the North Region is not necessarily what a Southern Regional Body will see as a priority.
Questions were asked as to how the Bodies would be regulated as there is a feeling that the three smaller CBs we will be the "poor relation" against Yorkshire.
Although a final decision has not been made as yet, it appears that the Bodies will be accountable to the RFU Community Game Board.
It is expected that the Bodies will be up and running for September 2025.
We now need to begin thinking about a rugby plan – CB forums feeding in to create a Plan which the fundraiser works to.
It was stressed that this is not the end of CBs, but is in fact giving CBs more devolved power and more funding.
The question was asked as to why the RFU did not chose to support clubs more with direct funding – fund clubs to pay people honorariums and many volunteers give up hours of their time and get

nothing back for it and it is harder and harder to recruit new volunteers when the image of the game is not being helped with the "PR fiasco" of the tackle height implementation and the current issues around renumeration of staff.
It was agreed we have a single meeting when the rules and regulations have been issued by the RFU and we can discuss this and agree or not agree going forwards.

4. Development Plan (Lee Weatherley)
Copy of the Plan is here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Northumberland-Development-Plan.pdf
Lee introduced the plan describing the vision behind it to help take the CB forward.
Three headings – "In the Game", "On The Pitch" and "In the Clubhouse"
Baseline data is needed so we can see what the starting point is in terms of looking to the future – getting new players and volunteers into clubs, getting new forms of the game played, making other forms of the game more accessible to those who want to play it.
Examples of information from GMS (anonymised training reports) from four clubs indicates that data is wrong.
We need correct data to build the Plan and from that develop projects and budgets.
There was some quite vocal opinions expressed about GMS with a suggestion that clubs be allowed to cleanse their own data and then re load it knowing that what is re loaded is the correct data. A question around whether we can do this will be asked, in the meantime, it was agreed to ask clubs to complete a spreadsheet which would give us stage one baseline information and return this to County before Friday 28th February so this can be worked on.
Action – All Clubs to complete the data information request.
Note – Follow up e-mail asking for the baseline data was sent to Club Reps on the 21st January. The mail included an easy to complete spreadsheet with request for return by 28th February.

5. Club and other NRU voting rights update (Ricky Handa)
Given the absence of Ricky and as he would have been delivering on this topic, subject matter was deferred to the next meeting.

6. AOB
It was with great pleasure that Immediate Past President, Ruth Scott, was finally able to present to Ken Fraser his Honorary Life Membership of Northumberland Rugby Union.

Reminder to clubs – Honda Value the Volunteer – so far only one nomination has been submitted (from Morpeth). Closing date is 14th February.
3 Categories for nominations and more information here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/honda-value-the-volunteer-awards-2025-is-now-open/

Reminder to clubs – The Referees Dinner is on the 20th March 2025 and is at the Gosforth Park Grand Hotel. 19:00hrs start and tickets are £38.00. Contact Graham Crozier to reserve tickets, 07930 375143, graham@advancedadhesives.co.uk .

Meeting closed at 9.25pm
Next Meeting – Monday 17th March at Seghill