General Committee Meeting – 18th November 2024 at Cochrane Park

Attendees: Graham Crozier (Hon Secretary / VP), Noel Mather (President and Chairing Meeting), Ricky Handa (Dir of Governance), 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: John Davidson (Alnwick), Paul Tanney (Ashington / VP), Jimmy Norris (Blyth), Andrew Hodgson (Border Park), Neil Jamieson (Gosforth), Al Dawes (Medicals), Duncan Hutton (Morpeth), Ron Borley (Northern), Jack Pellew (Novos), Mark Carr (Percy Park), Chris Davy (Schools VP), John Atherton (Seghill), John Austin (Tynedale), Peter Hamil (Wallsend), Tom Knott (West End), Ian Richardson (WBR)
Past Presidents: Ruth Scott, Ken Fairbairn, Pete O'Brien, Jim Coulson, Richard Appleby, Terry O'Neill
Vice Presidents: Craig Wrightson and Howard Ingram
Claire Sharpe

Apologies: Keith Atkinson (NRU Dir of Club Development), Ken Fraser, Graham Ward, Peter Jones, Douglas Hamilton, Dougie Hall, Andy Thomson, Lee Weatherley and Robin Davies.

Amendment to September minutes – apologies need to be recorded for Claire Sharpe, John Atherton and Terry O'Neil (not recorded in minutes).

Under section where vote took place to approve roles for Dir of Finance and Independent Director, John Atherton needs to be replaced with John Austin.

1.Presidential Team – election
A question has been asked around procedure on election of Vice Presidents.
Nominations for Presidential Team is the responsibility of the Presidential Team and not the remit of the Board. This was passed to the Presidential Team by the previous Board with Lucy and Henry informing the Presidential Team a nominations committee was no longer needed due to business set up.
Some discussion around past procedures against current procedures and reference to the Articles and nominations committee.

It was finally agreed that on a set date, clubs would be asked for names of suitable candidates which would then be submitted and discussed by the Presidential Team with Ruth Scott, as the Immediate Past President, Chair of the nominations process. This should include Presidential Team positions, JVP, and Board positions.

2.Presentation of Rugby Plan (Ian Moralee)
The RFU Inclusivity and Diversity plan notes that female coaches and referees should be appointed where possible.
It is pleasing to note that this season we have recruited 10 female coaches and 1 female Team Manager. Four of these 10 coaches are signed up to take the ERCA course which will also give a benefit to the clubs that these coaches come from.

Competitions Committee has been re launched and met recently.

County Cup rules have been amended in line with RFU Regulations.
CANDY rules have been amended to cover registration and eligibility processes.

Womens RWC 2025 – Penny is leading on some of the opportunities being afforded by this event.

An Academy structure is to be introduced at U17/U18 Girls – better quality players, better coaching, better clubs – working alongside Durham.

Vets Rugby – the No4 and No5 Cups are now the Vets Cups.

Walking Rugby is growing with another 2 potential clubs setting up walking Rugby teams.

There is discussion around re introducing the Centurions programme for the Men (at Levels 6, 7 and 8) to play Durham / Cumbria.
Same concept for the Women who this year will be playing in Division One (last year we played in Division Two).

CANDY is going well with 86% of matches played in CANDY1, 75% in C2N, 93% in C2S, 72% in C3N and 72% in C3S. RFU target is 75%.

Proactive is going to be used as a trial for County Teams. Licence is £55 and includes risk assessments.

Coaching Resources – upskill club and county coaches.
UK Coaching gives free licences to over 2,000 coach development resources.

Falcons CPD being discussed with Fletch and James Ponton.
Coach Development will include S&C and nutrition. This is being piloted at U16 and U18G with Kevan Bucas doing some work with these teams on S&C.

Rep Rugby Girls Programme – looking to recruit players to referee.

Schools – has met Rob Snow and is looking to do some Friday night lights with schools. Also helps to introduce schools players to local rugby clubs.

County Centurions – Levels 6, 7 and 8 – being re introduced. Will play outside of the RFU county championship structure.
Senior Men to play Cheshire, Durham and Cumbria
Senior Women to play Yorkshire, Lancashire and Staffordshire
U20s to play Cheshire, Yorkshire, Durham and Lancashire.
Clubs to be invited to bid to host matches.
Dates of matches to be distributed by Ian.

3.Presentation of Budget (Brian Russell)
Budget papers presented for information.
Papers can be found here
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-november-2024/
Figures are based on "worst case" and hoping to come in well under the final figure.

4. Innovation Funding Projects (Graham Crozier)
Bids for funding were submitted to the RFU, with £15k worth being awarded. This splits to £8.5k for Rugby projects and £6.5k for referee projects.
For reference, the two bid documents can be found here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-november-2024/
Work is now underway to get the projects started.
Graham Crozier is looking after referee projects and walking rugby.
Ian Moralee is looking after player retention projects.

5. Club Development Report (Keith Atkinson)
Club Development documents can be found here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/northumberland-club-development-information-and-updates-season-2024-25/

In Keiths absence, Claire, who had been at a Clubs/Schools Steering meeting that afternoon with Keith, gave an update:
Strong delivery at schools – 18 clubs involved.
Starting to see transitions to clubs from schools – 10 recruited at Morpeth and further update on figures to come.
Jack Smith has been recruited to the NTP so there are now 3 people delivering on the ground – Charlie (RGS Scheme), Nyle (Coastal Scheme) and Jack (NTP Scheme).

Problems being encountered:
School participation at festivals – schools allowing staff the time out.

Combat: Big Branded Festival planned for February at Falcons.
A promo video will be produced, alongside fliers, posters and banners – going big on promotion to encourage buy in to the event which will also provide an opportunity for the schools to meet Charlie, Nyle and Jack.

6. CB Engagement Meeting re Regional Bodies
6 or 7 Regional Bodies bringing CBs together.
For our "Regional Body", we are partnered with Durham, Cumbria and Yorkshire.
Each Regional Body will have an employed Chair and an employed Fundraiser (employed by the RFU) with funding available for the first three or four years before the roles become self funded.

There will be "Regional Growth Boards" sitting within the Regional Bodies. The Growth Boards will not interfere in rugby that CBs already do, rather they will look at the funding in the region and work with businesses.

Growth Plans are now being developed and forums will be held across the CBs to discuss focus.

The Regional Bodies / Growth Boards will be adding to CBs, not taking anything away and are due to start next season.

For more information please follow these links:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CGF-Delivery-System_CB-Engagement-Sessions_Presentation-Content.pdf
and

https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CGFDS-Regions_North-v2.0.pdf

7. Lower League Vote

Thank you to the clubs who voted.
In Northumberland two clubs voted yes, while thirteen voted no.
Durham and Yorkshire CBs also voted no.

8. RFU Social Report

This is a report highlighting the value of rugby both nationally and locally.
Rugby in the North East is worth around £74.5M - the smallest nationally, however the North East produces the best return on investment pro rata on players.
A copy of the report can be found here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-december-2024/

9. Governance Update (Ricky Handa)

Companies Act – processes to follow (appointment / removal of directors)
Directors are accountable to the members

Howdens Insurance
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/insurance-for-clubs-players-coaches/

Proactive is being used for Rep Teams. Some clubs are using it too. Reminder that any clubs who do use it still need to complete the CB concussion forms as the Proactive system does not talk to the CB and does not have the joined up links that the CB systems have.

There have been a number of concussions this season. Ricky recently watched a video of a Level 5 game where a head injury occurred and the player was allowed to continue.
Player safety is paramount – if you see something and player welfare is not being managed correctly, challenge it.

Website Forms – there are to be some changes to forms being used on the County Website (a switch over from NRU forms to RFU forms). While the change over work is effected, current NRU forms will still be accepted. A communication will be sent out to clubs when the transition work has been completed.

GMS – please can clubs check their GMS records. Please look at coaches registered against teams, DBS status etc as information at a number of clubs is out of date and reality on the ground seems to be different to what reports are showing on GMS. It is appreciated that there are challenges in updating.

10. Papa Johns Cups

Currently two clubs (Medicals and Percy Park) have applied.
Cut off date for applications to participate is 24th November.

11. Volunteer Funding

Speaking to Liam Nicholls (RFU) the previous weekend, Graham noted that no clubs in Northumberland had applied for this RFU funding.
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Volunteer-Grant.pdf
Application window closes 22nd November.
Post meeting Note – Seven clubs applied before the application process closed. Clubs who are successful will be contacted by the RFU in the New Year.

12. Pitch Encroachment

Kingsley Hyland asked that clubs be made aware that information around Un-authorised Pitch Encroachment (an issue that seems to be increasing) will be circulated to clubs tomorrow.
Letter sent out after the meeting:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Discipline-Unauthorised-Pitch-Encroachment-Letter-19.11.24.pdf

A further update was then received from the RFU and this update can be found here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/RFU-Pitch-Encroachment-Guidance-updated.pdf

13. West End and Prudhoe & Stocksfield

Tom Knott (West End) reported that they have tried to work with both Prudhoe & Stocksfield and with Jarrovians but have not been successful. Social Media campaigns have not worked, and they now have no players and are pretty much a "ghost club".
They are still trying hard to get players in and they are working with the Universities to try and get intra mural players to come to them.
If anyone has any ideas that may assist in recruitment, please get in touch with Tom as we don't want to lose the club.

With regard to Prudhoe a suggestion on support to the club was being worked through (Tynedale players being loaned to Prudhoe for a year) however this fell through with the caveat that Tynedale insisted was in place.

14. AOB

i. Terry O'Neill asked if the Financial Statements were available. Director of Finance reported that there are a number of issues that need to be resolved so they are not yet finalised.

ii. Pete O'Brien asked if there were any issues for pitchside adverts promoting betting firms. Agreed no issues.

iii. Referees Society – Niall Head Rapson had recently presented to the Society Refs on Cancer and use of Stem Cells for treatment and how 18 to 30 year olds can help with those who are suffering illness. Graham asked for support from the floor if this was to be presented to clubs at a future General Meeting – this was agreed. It is hoped that if we can get buy in from our clubs and universities, this could be rolled out to other CBs via the RFU as it could help save lives.

15. Proposed Tour

Graham, in his Presidential Year (two years time) would like to have a tour to either Spain or Sweden (we have links with both) for the Men, Women and Under 20s. If Spanish, the tour groups would play an Andalucian team, if to Sweden, we would play the national team. We want buy in from players and clubs as this would be a fantastic opportunity to play for County.

Meeting closed at 9.05pm

Next Meeting – Monday 20th January at Tynedale.