Board Meeting Minutes

Monday 7th April 25 and Novos RFC

Present: Pete O'Brien (Chair), John Austin, Dean Gray, Paul Tanney, Graham Crozier, Howard Ingram, Noel Mather and Claire Sharpe

Apologies: Craig Wrightson, Brian Russell, Penny Stewart and Keith Atkinson

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The Chair (Pete O'Brien) began the meeting noting that since returning to an active role in the CB, the last eight weeks have been far from enjoyable. In an effort to address some of the issues, questions, misinformation and speculation currently circulating around the County, Pete gave an overview of events which have led to the situation the current Board now finds itself dealing with.

The Chair also wished to acknowledge those Directors who had resigned recently and expressed his thanks for their contribution to the ongoing development of Rugby within the CB.

Graham Crozier and Ricky Handa resigned 2 months ago with the issues leading to their resignations were compounded by the fact that the RFU protracted the issue by taking 5 months to address the matter and reach a conclusion, with regard to a disciplinary matter relating to a senior coach in Northumberland. In addition ill-advised actions and a lack of cohesive approach compounded the process. The inordinate delay in dealing with the Disciplinary process contributed to the misunderstanding of potential litigation against the CB, as the matter was an RFU Disciplinary process and not the CB's, any litigation would have been handled directly by the RFU.

Kingsley Hyland as CBDS has remained professional in his dealing with this case and continues to act in this manner.

The resignation of four Directors, in such a short period of time, reflected negatively on the CB as a whole and with Clubs losing faith in the Board had the potential for major difficulties for the CB.

It should be noted that at the request of the RFU Head of Discipline, David Barnes, the RFU are fully aware of events in Northumberland. Dialogue continues with David whilst the current situation is resolved.

It has been reported to the Chair by the RFU staff that since the new Board were appointed last summer, the CB has gone from being the second best CB for responding and reacting to RFU mails, requests, and information, to bottom out and one of the worst.

Giving further background on other issues that have become apparent while the above matters have been discussed and investigated, it has also become clear that there has been a lack cohesive working practice. The RFU staff confirmed that they were instructed not to attend the County Office or liaise directly with Claire Sharpe. Claire has also been isolated in other areas

of work and has been subject to unprofessional practice with regards communications towards her.

Referencing Director Only meetings, the Chair stated that this practice would cease with immediate effect as those not included in these meetings are being undermined. Going forward, the Board is "the Board" and is fully inclusive of Directors, RFU CB Rep, Andrew Souter and the Presidential Team.

Moving on to address the points listed in the Director of Rugbys resignation letter received last week, the Chair confirmed in relation to point one (three points were made), nothing was formalised (ie a grievance put in writing) so an investigation was unnecessary. Conversations have since been had and Claire is happy with what has been discussed and the actions that the Chair has taken since coming into role some 8 weeks ago. The Chair noted to all that due to the breakdown of working practice and lack of positive communications he had found it necessary to step in and act as a buffer to communications being sent to the office by individual Directors.

In relation to point two of the letter, it was agreed that the Articles do need reviewing.

The Board is working to the current version as best it can, with the Chair noting that the review process underway early season then stalled with the resignations of Ricky Handa and Graham Crozier. Graham Crozier agreed to contact Ricky to see if he would be prepared to pick this piece of work up again with Graham to get the review completed.

The final point in the letter noted "interference in a Directorate". The Chair confirmed that this related to a conversation with the DOR over the need to ensure all outstanding matters with regard to the Northumberland Senior Womans team and agreed with the DOR that the Chair and County Administrator would process the requirement and revert back to the DOR for confirmation.

Following a Directors only meeting on Monday 31st March, which was fractious but a positive meeting, it was agreed that progress was being made, but by Wednesday lunchtime (2nd April) it was apparent that this was not the case following the receipt of the DOR's resignation.

The Directors meeting held on the 31st March also discussed the outcome of the recent RFU Disciplinary sanctions issued against the Lead coach of the CB PDG girls team.

Following a second sanction for Match Official Abuse (MOA) and a previous written warning against the same individual, issued by the CB, it was agreed that these action were against the Core Values of the game and it was therefore agreed to ask the Coach in question to stand down from the position, with immediate effect, which they subsequently did. The CB's decision relates to Representative rugby only and club coaching appointments currently held remain the individual clubs prerogative.

Director Roles

Currently vacant are the roles of Chair, Hon Secretary, Dir of Governance and Dir of Rugby. The role of CB Disciplinary Secretary also needs to be filled as Kingsley Hyland is retiring.

Hon Secretary is currently being covered by Pete O'Brien.

In the last week, Pete has approached Graham Crozier and after some discussion, Graham has agreed to return to the role of Hon Secretary on the understanding that Pete O'Brien remains on the Board and moves into the role of Chair. Pete has agreed to this acknowledging there is a lot of work to be done to get the CB back on track.

All those present agreed this move and also wished to put on record their thanks to Pete for the incredible job he has done managing matters, investigating issues and steering things to where we are now, where we can move forward.

To that end it was agreed that a **General Committee meeting would be called for Monday 14th April** so that matters from the last 6 months could be addressed once and for all and put to bed as we need to put plans in place for the new season.

With apologies for the short notice, the **General Committee Meeting will be held at Gosforth RFC, 7pm start** (and the bar will be open after to allow for some social chat post meeting).

Moving the conversation on in relation to other vacant roles, Dean agreed to speak again to the person approached previously for the role of Dir of Governance. (The person although interested, would not consider the role due to a conflict of interest. The disciplinary matter had to be concluded before this could be re visited.)

It was also agreed that given the rise in participation numbers of the women's and girls game and given the size of the rugby portfolio, it made sense to seperate Women's and Girls rugby and create a separate Directorate for Women's and Girls in both Club and Representative Rugby. Graham Crozier agreed to meet with an individual who may be interested in taking this on as a full directorate.

Clubs are also invited to make suggestions they may have for volunteers who may be interested in any of the vacant positions.

Any Other Business

County Kit – In relation to senior men, there was then also some discussion around the content of the letter sent out in December noting the kit bundles to be offered to players. Given this had not been discussed at any level with Board this was reviewed as potential costs were alarming. Being cognisant of costs, an agreement was reached on what was and was not appropriate, removing some items from the list. This also led to discussion around kit provision for the U20s and Senior Women – with agreement reached for these groups as well. Graham Crozier agreed to feed back to Adam Hay re the kit provision for the Senior Men.

Secretary of Discipline – (replacement for Kingsley Hyland) – Graham Crozier noted that he had interest from two people one of whom was really keen. Having spoken to Kingsley, and updating those present on potential candidates, Graham agreed to continue with discussions with a view to hopefully being able to announce a replacement for Kingsley next week. In the meantime, Graham also confirmed that Kingsley had given an undertaking to stay on and assist with discipline matters for the next year.

North East Womens Rugby Ltd – information had been received regarding this team which is a "nomad" side. The Durham Board are considering their application to become a team of Durham CB at their Board meeting on 08.04.25. The team has a Constitution, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Safeguarding Officer and RugbySafe Lead named on their approval form. The rugby offer is "initially senior female with an academy for U18s". Ian Moralee is listed on the documentation as Treasurer. Board Members knew nothing about this. Pete is following up on the information received.

Newcastle Ravens – The Board would like to propose that Newcastle Ravens be considered for full membership of the CB. This is to be formally agreed at the next General Committee Meeting (14th April) so that membership can be progressed to ratification at the AGM in the summer.

Concluding discussion, the Chair recorded his grateful thanks to the remaining directors for their support since taking on the Acting Secretary role. There had been frank discussion at this meeting tonight and he reminded all of the "collective responsibility" they have with their role and hopes that moving forward we can continue to improve communication and focus on the he development of rugby within the county.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm