General Committee Meeting – 14th April at Gosforth RFC

Attendees: Noel Mather (President), Pete O'Brien (Chairman), Graham Crozier (Hon Secretary & Vice President), Brian Russell (Dir of Finance), Dean Gray (Dir of Mktg, Comms & Sponsorship / Ponteland Rep), Keith Atkinson (NRU Dir of Club Development)
Club Reps: John Davidson (Alnwick), Ian Blacklock (Ashington), Dougie Hall (Berwick), Jimmy Norris (Blyth), Andrew Hodgson (Border Park), Neil Jamieson(Gosforth), Al Dawes (Medicals), Duncan Hutton (Morpeth), Mel Magee (Newcastle Falcons), Robin Davies (Newcastle Ravens), Ron Borley (Northern), Jack Pellew (Novos), Mark Carr (Percy Park), John Atherton (Seghill), John Austin (Tynedale), Andy McDonough (Wallsend), Ian Richardson (WB Rockcliff)
Past Presidents: Ken Fairbairn, Jim Coulson, Richard Appleby, Chris Davy, Ruth Scott, Trevor Morrison, Graham Ward, Andy Thomson, Douglas Hamilton
Additional Attendees: Howard Ingram (Vice President), Kingsley Hyland (CB Discipline Secretary), Mel Vecsey (Northern Hon Sec), Jim Pollock (Northern President), Andrew Neal (Chair of Age Grade), Andrew Sugden (WB Rockcliff Hon Sec), Jon Nugent (Chair of Gosforth)
Claire Sharpe (County Administrator and Office Manager)

Apologies: Ken Fraser, Penny Stewart, Peter Jones, Craig Wrightson, Peter Hamil and Terry O'Neil

Notes:
Ian Blacklock representing Ashington in place of Paul Tanney
Andy McDonough representing Wallsend in place of Pete Hamil

The President, Noel Mather, opened the meeting welcoming those in attendance and then invited the Acting Chairman / Hon Secretary (Chair), Pete O'Brien, to address the floor.

The Chair began by making it very clear that he was not going to accept any denigration of individuals or nor accept critical comments from the floor.

The meeting this evening had been called following a Board Meeting the previous week where a number of issues had been discussed.
(minutes here: https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-april-2025/)
It was felt necessary to call this additional General Committee meeting to appraise the clubs of the matters discussed and the actions taken by the Board, allow for any questions and then draw a line under matters and events that have taken place this season, with a view to moving on as there is much to be done over the summer.

The Chair continued, recording his thanks to those who had stepped down from roles, but noted that it was unfortunate that issues had overshadowed the excellent work done, but several issues had to be addressed. Action has to be taken with collective responsibility within the Board to address matters in hand and move things on.

An issue of Match Official Abuse (MOA) received at the end of September and passed on to the RFU in early October had taken some 5 months to resolve. The RFU have apologised for the delay as this had compounded the issues within the CB.

There had also been a misunderstanding of litigation process – which would never have been against the CB as the discipline matter had been passed to the RFU.

There was also a threat of personal litigation against the CB Discipline Secretary. Any potential litigation would have been a matter for the RFU, not the CB or CB personnel.
These issues and the way they had been handled, led to the first two resignations of Directors.

It was disappointing to note that due to pressures of work the previous Chair had confirmed that he was standing down from the role.

The Chair of Rugby then also resigned on 2nd April 2025. The issues around this resignation were addressed at the Board meeting on the 7th April.

Having given the above summary of matters, questions were then invited.

In answer to a question around whether or not the lead coach of the U16 Girls DPP had resigned or been removed from role, the Chair confirmed he had resigned.

In answer to a question around work practice towards the County Administrator, there was confirmation that there were issues with communication with Claire which have been addressed.

Having confirmed there were no further questions, the Chair asked that the clubs now consider this matter closed so the County can move on.

Vacant Roles in County

The Board has taken steps to fill vacant roles. The Chair had spoken to Graham Crozier to ask him to return as Hon Secretary and this had been agreed with the caveat that Pete stayed on and moved over to the role as Chair. This was agreed and ratified at the Board on the 7th April. Asking the clubs for their endorsement of the two changes in personnel to role, with a view to ratification at the AGM (in the summer), the clubs indicated their approval of Pete O'Brien taking on the role of Chair and Graham Crozier returning as Hon Secretary.

With regard to the Dir of Governance role, a person has been approached, but as noted in the Board Minutes, the discipline matter needed to be concluded before further discussion could take place. This will now be moved on.

With regard to CB Discipline Secretary Kingsley Hyland stepping down, again someone has been approached and talks are progressing. Kingsley has assured that he will mentor the new CB Discipline Secretary until such time as that person is happy to go solo. All those present wished to record their thanks to Kingsley for the sterling and professional job he has done over the years.

With regard to the Director of Rugby role, there was some discussion about "splitting" the role and having two Directors of Rugby – one for the Girls and Women's game and one for Boys and Adult Male. The view of the board (also endorsed by the clubs) is that role of Director of Rugby (male and female) is too big for one person and needs to be split to allow the workload to become more manageable. The Chair agreed to progress discussions on this and would revert back to clubs with a proposed model in due course.

Match Official Abuse

Match Official Abuse is becoming a major issue in the game. As a CB, we - the CB and the Clubs - need to work together to eradicate it from the game. MOA is also having a detrimental impact on the Referees Society. (Durham Referees Society is now talking about not appointing referees to certain clubs due to issues around MOA.) There is a need to educate players, officials at clubs and parents as MOA goes against the core values and ethos of the game.

The Code of Conduct has been re written and will be circulated to all clubs and the referees society members shortly.

For age grade games the CB recommends respect barriers or at very least, a coned area for spectators and if necessary, risk assess the game.

MOA is a national issue not just a local issue.

There will be a Club Development Day in the summer (date to be confirmed – likely in August) and this is for club based referees (targeting age grade coaches who referee) with an aim to help increase their knowledge when "in the middle". The day will be co-ordinated by Dave Charlton, Lee Fish and Graham Crozier. There will be more on this event in due course.

Any Other Business

Proposal from the Board to accept **Newcastle Ravens as a full voting club of the County** at the next AGM. This was endorsed by all clubs present and will be ratified at the AGM in the summer.

Womens North East Rugby team – this is a "nomad" team and at this time it is understood that funding for the team will be from private funds.
There is a need for more information as there has been no discussion with current board members and if this is a North East team then Northumberland should have more information and representation in any discussion groups.
Having carried out some more research, Pete noted that Steve Coldwell (Durham CB) has offered to come to a General Meeting to present the project vison to the clubs. This will be progressed.

Stem Cell Register (referring to the January General Minutes)
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Gen-Comm-Meeting-Jan-25-Final.pdf
A general reminder to continue to push our support with the efforts of Niall Head Rapson. Lots of people at clubs are signing up which is fantastic, but lets not let momentum drop off now we head into the end of the season. Please continue engage with Niall – get him down to pre season (get dates in now!), get him to your AGMs and your summer events as this simple test and registration onto a national database can save a life.

A reminder that the **funeral of John Reid (JDR**) is taking place tomorrow and anyone attending is encouraged to have a piece of tartan with them as a reminder of Johns Scottish heritage.

RWC Funding Bid – Mel Magee noted that the bid submitted was successful and part of the bid includes funds for the Women's North East Rugby team.

T1 Rugby Taster Session – Friday 9th May with a social after.

More information here:
https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/t1-taster-session-at-percy-park-rfc-on-friday-9th-may/

Meeting closed at 8pm

Next Meeting – Monday 12th May at Alnwick