NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY RUGBY LIMITED.

COMPANY NUMBER 14063768.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR SEASON 2024/2025.

Presented to the AGM, 23rd June 2025.

Chairmans Address.

Having only recently accepted the role of Chairman of the Board of Directors for Northumberland County Rugby Limited following the disappointment of losing several Directors in a short period of time, I felt that it was critical to re-establish stability and provide continuity to drive Rugby forward in Northumberland.

I think it is important to put on the record, on behalf of the CB, our gratitude to those Directors who stood down over the last season and those who elected to remain in post or return, for all their efforts in moving Rugby in the County in the right direction.

It was obviously vital first of all that we had to identify and recruit new Directors, a task which took a little time, but which is now complete, and we welcome these new Directors to the NCR Board.

Our focus going forwards will be to engage fully with all our stakeholders – the clubs, our representative teams, our schools and higher education establishments, the Northumberland Referees Society, as well as the RFU Team, and cultivating a strong working relationship with the Trust(s). We will also maintain our strategic working relationship with Newcastle Falcons and produce a defined development plan which will enable us to continue to grow the game and provide a positive experience for all involved.

With the women's Rugby World Cup kicking off in the Northeast in a few weeks' time we have a golden opportunity to increase the profile of our game and grow our numbers in all formats of the game, for boys and girls, men and women across the County – an opportunity that we are determined to take full advantage of.

Peter O'Brien.

Pete

Chairman, Northumberland County Limited.

Finance Directors End of Year Report.

Brian Russell

Key events, issues, and achievements since the last AGM.

The CB started the year with no clear budget for the year. A basic budget was put forward in the Autumn and a comparison of that to the management accounts is attached.
The major elements of expenditure for the CB are Representative Rugby, Club Development, in conjunction with Newcastle Falcons, and running a busy office.
We are currently running seven county teams. A decision was taken, which was supported by the clubs, that we should ensure that the experience of playing and assisting a county team was a positive one.
This has meant that this is an area where we are heavily overspent. I think that all teams and coaches are now fully kitted out, which will mean that expenditure will be reduced in 2025/26. Consideration is being given to treating the team kit as a stock item for accounts purposes to reduce the deficit for the year.
We do not have adequate systems to ensure that we are obtaining value for money. It appears that our preferred suppliers are rarely price checked. A number appear to be overcharging us.
In addition, too often purchase orders are being made late due to bad planning, with requests being made for payments "today" to avoid missing delivery dates and on occasions directors have had to make payments from their personal resources.
Part of the shortfall in the grants received is that applications to the Youth Trust for £7,500 and main Trust for £20,000 are in the process of being made

Current and impending issues, events, and work streams

Current financial issues are around the level of RFU funding, funding for the Club development programme that is run in conjunction with the Falcon's Academy and ongoing grant funding from the Northumberland "Trust".
Value for money from suppliers Planning for the activities of the CB
Improvements to the operation of the CB accounting software (Xero) Automation of invoicing
Sustainable long, medium, and short term funding of the C B
Review of agreements with suppliers

Profit and Loss

Northumberland County Rugby Ltd for the 11 months ended 31 May 2025

Account	Jul 2024 - May 2025	Budget 2024/25 (Full	+ Overspend/ - Underspend
Turnover			
Disciplinary Fines	800 -	1,250	450
Grants Received	20,000 -	47,400	27,400
Hon. Members Subscriptions	2,753 -	2,500 -	253
International Tickets (Income)	877 -	300 -	577
RFU Support	- 56,388 -	56,388	-
Shop Income	2,118	-	2,118
Sponsorship Income	2,150 -	10,000	7,850
Sundry Income	6,237 -	3,700 -	2,537
Total Turnover	**91,322 -**	**121,538**	**30,216**
Cost of Sales			
Club Grants	26,250	25,400	850
Competitions	5,730	6,600 -	870
International Tickets (Costs)	2,014	900	1,114
Referees costs	3,008	432	2,576
Shop Costs	2,121		2,121
Events	3,509		3,509
Total Cost of Sales	**42,631**	**33,332**	**9,299**
Representative Rugby			
Coach Hire	9,350		
Physio	4,103		
Pitch Hire	5,759		
Tape	3,854		
Team Kit	16,986		
Food & Bar	5,357		
Other travel	1,470		
Other costs	90		
Total Representative Rugby	**46,968**	**32,750**	**14,218**
Administrative Costs			
Accountancy Services, software	- 76	1,830 -	1,906
Bank Charges	156	241 -	85
Depreciation	426	370	56
Employer Pension cost	570	620 -	50
IT Services	3,986	2,000	1,986
Marketing	1,008	199	809
Office Salaries	24,025	26,250 -	2,225
Photocopier Lease	810	540	270
Printing and Stationery	497	800 -	303
Rent	4,400	4,800 -	400
Staff Travel expenses	310	250	60
Sundry Expenses	754	4,100 -	3,346
Telephone	257	350 -	93
Website costs	11		11
Total Administrative Costs	**37,134**	**42,350 -**	**5,216**
Operating Profit	**35,411 -**	**13,106**	**48,517**
Other Income			
Bank Interest Income	- 1,142 -	1,200	
Total Other Income	**- 1,142 -**	1,200	58
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	**34,269 -**	**14,306**	**48,575**

Club Development Directors End of Year Report.

Keith Atkinson.

End of season overview: How well have we done?

Our School to club development programme which includes the Newcastle Rugby Foundation, Coastal Project, RFU at North of Tyne and the RGS RSM has delivered to 4818 individual young people.

The team have fulfilled 13 transition events attracting 68 new players. An overall transition rate of 1.41%

The respective groups had varying transition success:

The Community Foundation transitioned at 2.84% and the Coastal Partnership at 4.9%. The North Tyne partnership was (at this time) unable to provide numbers whereas the RGS RSM's remit at this time was about school delivery.

Of interest the greater degree of success was achieved with a more focused localised rather than a blanket approach. This will affect our development thoughts as we progress into Year 2.

Our transition hope was to achieve a transition rate of between 4 and 10% this hope was hampered by:

The reluctance of some schools to participate and the necessity of a DBS for each individual school and the cost of travel to transition events:

Where there has been unexpected success has been the creation of new school teams for example Burnside High School playing fixtures. Thoughts around Festivals and alternative venues for transition events will affect development of the scheme going forward.

We have also managed 6 Teacher CPD sessions with more planned this month and into the summer.

Overall, a mixed bag of results with lots of learning. There is a better focus on what we aim to achieve and with real club collaboration we are establishing a strong foundation on which to build into Year 2.

Current and impending issues, events, and work streams

Nil

Issues requiring Decision, Discussion or Dissemination

Year 2 School to Club Development proposal

Director of Comms, Marketing and Sponsorship End of Year Report.

Dean Gray.

It is now four years since my appointment as Northumberland's Director of Marketing, Communications and Sponsorship and we started a process to modernise the way we communicate with, educate and inform. That process continues to move forward.

However, in the last year or so we have seen major changes and disruption in the structure of the Board, with a number of resignations and new Officers and Directors stepping in to replace those who have moved on, often after some considerable period of delay.

This impacted on all our ability to move forward with some of the initiatives we had planned, which of necessity have been placed on hold until the Board is once again quorate and the situation stable.

I am confident that next season we will see that stability with all the new Board members enthusiastic and committed to growing our wonderful game.

Areas of Responsibility and Achievements

Communication and Marketing- Website

Despite some teething problems, the website is now being well used and, as practice makes perfect, is bedded in.

It is relatively easy to use, bar the odd glitch on the mobile phone app version, which has been worked through.

The website has good functionality and capacity and should last us around another fifteen years.

At the moment we don't have any Referee Society input on the website – something I am keen on pursuing to develop closer links between the CB and NRURS. As I have said before and well know, without referees we simply don't have games!

Social Media

Northumberland should be relevant to it stakeholders – namely its constituent clubs and all their members. If we follow that logic, we should therefore not solely promote the CB, its events and matches on our social media but also share anything directly Rugby related posted by our clubs in order to increase our engagement with and promote them.

This is what we do and the results of that are below in the latest figures (as of 13th June 2025) we have-

54,200 website sessions in the last 12 months (up 120% on previous year)

27,900 sessions came from the Google search engine results pages (Up 106%)

11,700 sessions came from social media (up 399%)

The website appeared as a listing on Google 713,000 times in the last 12 months with click through rate increasing from 1.7% to 3%.

1,290 website form workflows completed

4,270 documents downloaded from the website (123.5% increase on previous period)

The number of people looking at our Facebook pages as a result has also increased hugely and continues to grow- from 1,035 in Nov 21 to 2,300 (as of 13/6/2025)- an increase of 122%

X (Twitter) users have also rise from 1,416 three years ago to 2,748 – an increase of 194%.

Instagram figures are also up over twelve months – from 1817 to 2039 (up 12%)

The more traffic we get through our social media and especially our website, the greater the opportunity we have of marketing the CB, attracting sponsors and selling our goods and the better the relationships we can foster with our clubs.

The Northumberland RFU Gilbert Shop.

The revenue from sales has increased substantially over the last couple of years following renegotiation of the contract, but I want this to grow even more- especially at key times of the year- i.e. the start of the season, Christmas and during the County season with special offers including bundles of kit.

In the last year under of old Gilbert contract the CB just achieved target and received a 15% Gift of Kit- some £l ,800.

It is worth remembering that, had we not hit the minimum figure we potentially would have received nothing.

Since the renegotiation of the contract, we now receive a GoK on a sliding scale, irrespective of sales figures. This ensures that we have revenue coming in when our sales are lower in any one season.

Although accurate figures aren't available from Gilbert yet, the GoK is likely to be in excess of £3,000 (an increase of 67%).

We have managed to increase revenue by instituting a number of simple things, such as asking County players to buy a Gilbert Photon T shirt to travel to games in. These sort of small initiatives all added up can make a substantial difference.

The unified Gilbert contract also offers a range of supplementary benefits, including occasional complimentary tickets to some international games and tickets for Falcon's home matches, all of which have been distributed to our Volunteers to say thank you. Another advantage is Gilbert also offer supplementary benefits such as free returns, special offers and discounts through their shop.

It is my intention to look at increasing the revenue streams through the shop, focusing on particular times of the year, such as the start and end of the season and Christmas.

As I mentioned last year, an RFU Official remarked that the Northumberland website and social media presence in general is now amongst in the country to the extent that other CB's are now mirroring what we do.

Sponsorship

Penny Petroleum continues to be our largest single sponsor, and we are indebted to Dave Penny for his continued support.

We have also managed to secure a number of smaller, but still hugely valued, sponsors, including Henry Cave, Cathryn Clark Physiotherapy, Total Business Group (Rob Winter) and Aspire Digital Marketing (James Barnett) and Vertu Honda (who sponsor the Value the Volunteer Awards regionally and nationally).

We are very grateful to them all for their ongoing support too.

We are talking to a number of potential sponsors and the Sponsorship Agreement has been redrafted and modernised, and a new client facing Sponsorship Document will be ready to launch soon.

Lottery

The CB launched a Small Lottery to enable the CB to raffle International Tickets the CB had purchased. This made a small profit, but the decision was taken not to carry it forward, as it was felt that the profit margin was too slim to justify continuing to run it.

Other Marketing

The Team of the Month Award was once again negotiated with the Falcons this season with the successful entrants winning 20 tickets to a Falcons match of choice.

The ToM has now been running for a number of years in its current format, and we will look with the Falcons at refreshing the concept over the Summer as the concept is possibly becoming tired. Of course, the potential investment of Red Bull into the Falcons may change that.

I write a Northumberland County Rugby page in every Falcons home programme highlighting clubs and individuals who have done something special and deserve mention as well as special events at Clubs, County matches and the results of Team of the Month.

County Membership

Since the separation of companies, County membership has slumped. There are a range of options we are working on to increase the number of County members which will be launched over the Summer in an attempt to arrest the decline and to make membership more valuable to the holder.

I have spoken to other CB's in the country to get an idea of what they offer/ charge for County membership and I have a number of ideas from those conversations I would like to pursue.

Other

In one of my "other" rugby jobs, I commentate on Newcastle Falcons matches for BBC Radio Newcastle and Radio 5 Sports Extra, I try to promote local rugby by interviewing officers from local rugby clubs at half time in our live coverage.

This past season I have spoken to representatives from Ashington (for their Midnight 7's and Walking Touch Initiatives), Gosforth (for resurrecting their second team), Whitley Bay Rockcliffe (for their efforts in remembering and honouring their war dead), Wallsend (for their work in securing a new clubhouse), the Ravens, to promote LBTQ+ Rugby and their excellent Hadrian Rugby Festival and Mel Magee of the Falcons Foundation about the wonderful work she and her Community Team do.

I have also spoken to others further afield, such as members of the Andalucian Referees Society on their exchange trip here and John Jeffrey, former Scotland International and ex of this parish at Newcastle University (where I played both with and against him) and Northern. If I don't have any guests lined up, I preview local matches or go through their results.

In summary

I will continue with the work to engage all the partners within the CB to try to ensure that Rugby in the County generally is promoted in the most favourable light possible.

I will expand my committee so that we have more people taking responsibility for the separate areas within the portfolio to spread the workload and bring in fresh ideas and thinking.

Northumberland Rugby should be relevant to its stakeholders – namely its constituent clubs and all their members. If we follow that logic, we should therefore not solely promote the CB, its events and matches across our social media channels, but share anything directly Rugby related posted by our clubs to increase our engagement with them and help promote them.

In essence, the more traffic we get through our social media and especially our website, the greater the opportunity we have of marketing the CB, attracting sponsors and selling our goods the better the relationships we can foster with our clubs.

I have been tasked with organising a Former County Players Reunion which we will look to do next season to enable us to promote the benefits of County Membership and look at potential sponsorship opportunities.

I still want to grow the revenue streams coming into the CB by focusing on opportunities for income generation and sponsorship to a greater extent with Sponsorship packages tailored to appeal to the corporate world.

I want to include targeted approaches to professionals such as Lawyers, Financial Advice firms and or Mortgage Brokers in particular, as well as looking at other ideas such as individual player sponsorship deals.

As I said some little time back, I feel that we are still a long way short of marketing the enormous positives in playing sport in general, and Rugby in particular, to the wider public.

We need to work hard to unlock partnerships to promote our game - which has undoubtedly taken a battering with internecine warfare raging within factions in the RURS and the RFU and the ongoing knock-on effects of the two C's - Covid and Concussion still being felt.

We have an enormous opportunity to grow the game in all its formats, from Walking to 15 a side full contact, and every stop along the way, with a British and Irish Lions tour to Australia on the horizon, the WRWC in this country in the Summer and a potential major investment into the Falcons looming (hopefully).

Inclusion and Diversity policies will be key factors in securing sponsorship, and I welcome the appointment of Howard Ingram and Robin Davies as joint D and I champions.

I think it is important for County Officials to be known and recognised in the rugby fraternity and I intend to continue to be as visible as I can amongst the Clubs by either referring or when free,

going to local games to talk with volunteers about their experience and communication with the CB and how we can improve that.

It is vital that we keep The County relevant to the youth of today- they are the senior players of tomorrow and the administrators in years to come.

Many younger people in the game will undoubtedly regard us as being middle aged (at best), male, pale and stale -and we need to combat that viewpoint to reinforce our relevance.

Governance Directorate End of Year Report.

Due to there being no Director of Governance all individual reports from those who report to this Directive are as below.

Kingsley Hyland, CBDS, Adult Rugby Report.

The 2024-25 season has once again proved a challenging one in terms of adult discipline. The number of red cards and citing's in adult matches resulting in appearances before the Disciplinary Panel rose by approximately 20% on the previous season and reflected a return to more normal numbers following last season's drop. The total number of such cases was 20 broken down as follows:

Punching	(6)
Dangerous tackles	(2)
Dangerous clear outs	(2)
Reckless act – Law 9.11	(2)
Match Official Abuse	(4)
Two yellow cards	(4)

The vast majority of cases before the Panel were uncontested by the offending players and so a number of cases were disposed of without a formal hearing. Dealing with Saturday afternoon red cards is now the most routine aspect of the Discipline Secretary's caseload.

The number of dangerous tackle cases was again relatively low when compared with the elite professional game and further supports the view that the change in the tackle height law at community game level has had a positive effect. It may also reflect the fact that referees in the community game get only one view, in real time, of possible head contact cases and so it is understandable if they are reluctant to impose the ultimate on field sanction without a high degree of certainty as to what has actually occurred.

The increased use of Veo to film matches has been both a boon and a challenge. Veo is intended primarily as a coaching aid and the quality of the footage can be variable having regard to weather conditions and the distance from the camera at which incidents of possible foul play occur. From a disciplinary perspective the footage provided is often inconclusive either way and RFU guidance has made clear that footage which does not clearly show what the referee has described in their report should not be interpreted as providing support for the player.

The nature of disciplinary proceedings in adult red card cases has changed markedly from 15-20 years or so ago. Historically, the referee was deemed to be right even when they were wrong unless it was a case of mistaken identity and disciplinary panels had a much wider discretion to impose a sanction based on a panel's instincts as to the. seriousness of the offence. This has all changed with the World Rugby mandated introduction of a prescriptive three stage process to determine the appropriate sanction. This has meant that in cases where there is little dispute as to the fact's hearings can be disposed of on consideration of the papers without the need for a formal hearing. This has lightened the burden on the Discipline Secretary. The RFU supports the move to deal with straightforward cases without a formal hearing and details of approved processes will be included in an amended Appendix 5 to Regulation 19 which will be circulated prior to the commencement of the 2025-26 season.

Whilst dealing with Saturday afternoon red card is now relatively straightforward the same cannot be said for adult cases arising from alleged misconduct cases in age grade matches on Sunday mornings. Young players new to the game receive their schooling in the Game's values from their coaches and parents but it is those same coaches and parents whose conduct has caused a significant increase in the overall workload of the CB Discipline Secretary. On the evidence of this season, it is no exaggeration to suggest that respect for the Games' TREDS values is collapsing at a time when young players are at a particularly formative stage in their rugby journey. This is storing up problems for the future of the community game and needs to be addressed by the CB as a matter of urgency. From the point of the Discipline Secretary these cases provide a disproportionate amount of work, are often conducted by clubs in an antagonist manner and create a lot of ill-feeling.

The problems arising from Sunday morning misconduct have proved a major factor in my decision to step down as CB Discipline Secretary having fulfilled the role for a total of 22 years in two stages dating back to 1998. I am pleased to report that an able successor has been identified in Frazer McDermott. I will continue to provide assistance to Frazer until he is fully up to speed.

Thanks as always are due to the Panel Chair, Alan Beddis, who chaired the overwhelming majority of the hearings and to all Panel members who did sit on hearings. Richard Stubbs has performed an increasingly influential role as Deputy Chair and has now been added to the RFU Panel of Judicial Officers. Finally, thanks are due once again to Claire Sharpe for her administrative assistance and to Northern FC who continue to host disciplinary hearings at no cost to the CB.

Chris Davy, CBAGDS, Schools/Youth Rugby Report.

Noticeably fewer cases season 2024-24 possibly due to less age grade rugby?

Fewer cases reported due to most age games being officiated by school/club/college teachers/coaches rather than NRURS members. This is due to the progressive rules for age grade which are appropriate BUT many NRURS members are used to officiating adult games and not familiar with age grade rules even if they were available. Regulation 19 appendix 6 and red cards must be reported. I have discussed this with the RFU, and they are preparing a suitable explanation to go to all involved in age grade before next season.
NB September 2024 there was a "fear" of a traumatic increase in red cards due to the tackle height restriction. This has not materialised in Northumberland or England - the game is safer.

Cathryn Clark, NRU RugbySafe Lead Report.

RugbySafe is the RFU's overarching initiative to support player welfare at all levels of the game. It covers the elements of Playing Environment, Research, The Game, Education and Development, Values and Culture. Over recent seasons women's and Girls Health has also come under RugbySafe with the development of a Women's and Girls Toolkit. This and all other RugbySafe Toolkits came over to the new RFU website this season, meaning that all player welfare resources are under one roof: https://www.englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/rugbysafe

The RFU Emergency First Aid in Rugby Union course was delivered across our clubs again this season with all clubs receiving some vouchers to cover the cost for some of their volunteers. Unfortunately, not all of these were taken up. In the last few weeks, the RFU have withdrawn this course which has been a valuable resource to all clubs, improving first aid cover and thus standards of player welfare. This has been due to issues out with the control of the RFU around HMRC, new employment laws and the changing requirements of qualification awarding bodies

that come with delivering a national qualification. Moving forwards current RFU Educators are being supported with materials to enhance Emergency First Aid at Work courses to ensure that rugby specific material can still be delivered. I am personally in the process of trying to have a course accredited through an awarding body so please watch this space. If you require a course before I am "up and running" then you can still find information regarding RFU endorsed trainers on the RugbySafe pages. I am also hoping that some funding support for clubs will be announced at the years RugbySafe conference later this month.

This season did also see the launch of online First Aid CPD modules to provide those who have completed their First Aid training with refresher training before they have to compete the course again. These are accessible on the RugbySafe pages of the RFU website. You may recognise one of the presenters!

I will just take this opportunity to remind all clubs that under Regulation 9 it is recommended that all teams have a First Aider who has completed an Emergency First Aid at Work qualification or equivalent, which the RFU course was.

Also under Regulation 9 is the requirement that ALL clubs MUST complete a First Aid Risk Assessment and record that this has been completed on the Player Welfare pages of GMS. This season Howden's launched an online Risk Assessment Tool which is excellent and takes clubs through a step-by-step process for their Risk Assessment, compliant with Howden's the RFU Insurers. This can be accessed on the RugbySafe pages also.

This season I completed Regulation 9 Audits on two clubs as requested by the RFU. This is something that will be happening each season now. If any clubs would like a copy of the audit tool please do get in touch. It serves as a good way to check that your club is regulation 9 compliant.

This season we adopted the Proactive Injury Reporting Tool for CB Representative Rugby. This has proved a valuable tool, allowing the CB Physios to record injuries and share that information within our team as necessary. Proactive is something that I would still encourage clubs to look at to make sure they are meeting the requirements of injury and incident reporting and being GDPR compliant.

Concussion continues to be a very important issue. The online Headcase modules have been extended to now have options specific to players, coaches, parents and soon First Aiders. The Suspected Concussion Reporting process has continued in Northumberland with facilitated communication between players, parents, Clubs, Schools, Universities and Representative Rugby. The process continues to be very positive and goes above and beyond what the Proactive concussion tracker can do by having information disseminated, with consent, outside the club that the injury occurred in where required. It saves a lot of leg work for players, coaches and parents and ensures that players are kept safe from further harm when these events occur. I must thank Claire Sharpe the County Administrator for her good work and support as without her this protocol of reporting and dissemination would most certainly not be possible. I also thank all coaches, teachers, first aiders, physios, Club RugbySafe Leads, and others who have submitted forms this season. However, I do think we have had massive under reporting this season, either that or some clubs have players with canny hard heads! I will therefore be making a renewed effort to spread the word amongst clubs, schools and universities next season.

This season the RFU partnership with Loose Headz mental health charity continued. Loose Headz have produced further resources for clubs and introduced the role of a Loose Headz

Ambassador in clubs. I would encourage all clubs to do access the resources through the Player Welfare pages of the RFU website.

Last reminder for all; the role of Club RugbySafe Lead is a Golden Role and as such every club must appoint a RugbySafe Lead and ensure that role is updated on GMS. If this position is vacant in your club, please reach out for some help guidance.

Next season I will continue to support Club RugbySafe Leads in ensuring they meet their requirements under Regulation 9.

***Mark Reade, CBSM Lead*, Safeguarding Report.**

A fairly quiet season, several cases of match official abuse and pitch encroachment. There were reports of clubs allegedly breaching regulations around combining teams and playing up/down especially in the younger age groups. I have reiterated the rules to the clubs via their CSO.

A couple of cases of coaches breaching the 50% game time regulation, the coaches involved have been dealt with locally.

There are two cases currently being investigated by the RFU but hopefully they will be concluded by the start of the new season.

Director of Rugby End of Year Report.

Due to the director of Rugby's resignation, the report is short and sweet I'm afraid.

A lot of new appointments to many Coaching roles were carried out early season with some great results and experiences by all being the resulting factor in this.

Senior Men. Played 3 games, away to Cheshire, loosing narrowly against a better side but a lot was learned. Second game was at home to Cumbria with a great win and a great performance from the guys. The final game again was at home but against Durham with a great win and performance which put us in position for the next round, but unfortunately other results went against us.

Senior Women. Played 3 games, first away to Yorkshire and took a heavy loss against a very strong Yorkshire side. We then played Lancashire at home loosing narrowly. We then played Staffordshire at home and the ladies produced a great performance, winning by over 50 points. As these were Sunday fixtures this presented challenges on availability of the ladies which was in turn though helped by having the development squad and the team was supported by this Development Squad.

Under 20's. Played 4 games, first game away to Cheshire where we won, followed at home to Yorkshire losing this outing. We then travelled to Durham and had a great win, followed by a narrow defeat at home to Lancashire. Of the squad, 7 were selected for the North of England U20's wider training squad, a great achievement from the boys. From this 7, 3 have been retained for the North of England U20's games.

Under 18 Girls. We played 4 games, 2 games at 2 separate festivals, one at home and one away. The festival at home we lost both of our games against both Cumbria and Lancashire. We had the second festival cancelled but the third festival, our second set of games, again we were beaten but by a single score in each of the games.

Under 18 Boys. The objective of the County U18 Management & Coaching team was to field the best team available of eligible players to represent Northumberland at U18 level with a view to getting as many players as possible recognised by the North 18 selectors and therefore to be invited to the follow on North u18 Assessment Day. Played 2 games loosing away to Yorkshire by 1 point, 33-32, and wining at home against Durham. 6 Northumberland players were selected for the North Under 18 Assessment Day.

Under 17 Boys. The objective of the County U17 Management & Coaching team is to review eligible playing resource from across Northumberland County with a view to identifying talented players who the coaching team believe have the potential to represent the County at U18 level the following year. Played 3 matches and unfortunately lost all 3 although the standard of rugby was excellent and impressed the coaching team. 40+ players were involved and represented Northumberland.

RFU Council Member for Northumberland End of Year Report.

Penny Stewart.

It continues to be an honour to serve as your RFU Council Member. This season has once again showcased the dedication and passion of our rugby community, as we navigate evolving challenges, societal changes and seize new opportunities.**National RFU Highlights**

Governance & Representation Review: I've taken a lead role in this critical review, aimed at ensuring the RFU is robust for the future with an improved, modernised governance structure and inclusive, skilled and appropriate representation. The consultation remains open until 30th June 2025, with recommendations due in the autumn.

Special General Meeting: A motion to remove the RFU CEO was decisively rejected. While disruptive and time consuming, it prompted important conversations about engagement, representation and communication.

Engagement Roadshows: Held nationwide in response to the SGM, these sessions will shape both the Governance Review and Community Game of the Future (CGF) work. Further roadshows are planned.

Community Game of the Future: While the Regional Growth Board element is paused for the findings of the Governance Review, initiatives like placing over 100 School Rugby Managers into state schools continue.

RWC 2025: Planning for the Women's Rugby World Cup is well underway, with funding and webinars available to help clubs grow their women and girls' sections.

Player Welfare: Research and policy work on concussion and long-term health remains a core priority.

Finance: Despite external pressures, the RFU has committed £30m annually to the community game for the next four years. At my request, the new CFO now provides quarterly one-page summaries for transparency.

Communications: A review is underway, led by the RFU's new Public Affairs Director.

Inclusion & Diversity: Progress continues with growing visibility, including the inaugural I&D Conference in June. I'm delighted that Northumberland now has it's own I&D leads in Robin Davies and Howard Ingram and look forward to supporting their work.

England Teams: Our national teams had a good Six Nations—13 wins from 15 games—with the Red Roses claiming another Grand Slam.

Northumberland Focus

Club Engagement: Visiting clubs remains a highlight for me. I managed to visit 75% this season, and I aim to reach the remainder at the start of next season. Remember, I'm always just a call or email away.

Women & Girls' Rugby: Exciting growth continues. I'm delighted with Ruth Scott's appointment as our first Director of Women & Girls Rugby and wish her good luck.

RWC 2025 Legacy: As chair of our Northumberland lead-up group, highlights include a Women's Rugby Lunch at Morpeth RFC, a T1 Taster at Percy Park, and upcoming beach festivals at Bamburgh and Tynemouth. A girl's festival at Tynedale (Aug 24) and a WAGs celebration after the final to help capture any post RWC 25 interest.

Volunteer Recognition: Our volunteers remain the heart of the game. Ongoing initiatives focus on support, retention, and celebration, aligned with RFU programmes.

Looking Ahead

I remain committed to ensuring your voice is heard nationally. With major events ahead and structural change underway, our collective focus must remain on supporting grassroots rugby and creating a thriving, inclusive game for all.

Thanks, and Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the volunteers, players, coaches, match officials and supporters who make Northumberland Rugby what it is. Thanks also to Noel for your enjoyable company and chat whilst visiting many of the clubs and good luck to Craig for his forthcoming year as President.

I'm remain proud and humbled to represent Northumberland across regional, national, and international stages

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END OF REPORT.

I'd personally like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all our volunteers for their hard work and efforts this season and beyond, your work is invaluable to the CB and without you our CB would not function as well as it has and continues to do so. We look forward to another great season next year, and your continued support. Thank you for your service to Northumberland County Rugby Limited!

Regards

Graham

Graham Crozier.
Honorary Secretary.

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