Minutes of Board Meeting held on Monday 7th July at Gosforth RFC

Present: Pete O'Brien (Chair), Graham Crozier (Hon Secretary & Vice President), Dean Gray (Director), Penny Stewart (RFU Council Rep), Tony Lenderyou (Director), Craig Wrightson (County President), John Austin (Director), Paul Tanney (Vice President), Tom More (Data Officer), Ben Drury (Deputy Director for Womens and Girls), Howard Ingram (D&I and Vice President), Alan Gardiner (Colts Rugby), Brian Russell (Director), Noel Mather (Imm Past President), Cathryn Clark (RugbySafe & CB Medical Lead) and Claire Sharpe (Office Manager and County Administrator).

Apologies: Andrew Neal (Age Grade Boys), Mark Reade (CBSM), Ruth Scott (Director), Keith Atkinson (Director), Craig Johnston (Adult Male Competitions, James (website and digital) and Rob Gibson (Director).

The Chairman opened the meeting welcoming everyone and welcoming Craig as the new County President.

The Chair, reflecting on the AGM and the new additions to roles within County, feels there is quality on the Board which will drive rugby forward.

Board Aim - focus on the development of the game and engage with clubs more.

Board Reports are being re-instated. They will be requested 2 weeks prior to Board meetings to allow those who sit in a supporting role to a portfolio, the time to report to the relevant Director. All Director Reports once completed should be sent to Claire who will then send out as a bundle one week prior to the Board meeting. Claire will update the County Diary schedule to show target dates for this admin. (Next Board Meeting is 8th September, Board reports will be requested 22nd August (25th being a bank holiday), reports received will then be sent to Board members on 1st September.) *Action – Claire (diary notes)*

Board Reports with comprehensive updates on activity will allow for discussion at meetings to focus on other rugby related issues and not the content of reports (unless discussion around a flagged issue is required).

The invite mail to the Board Meeting being held today went to a wider group than normal to allow for introductions and to allow those new to role to understand the roles of others within the County.

Tom More, Data Officer, was invited to outline his role in County. Please see Appendix One. Current focus is on the summer role out of the Acceptable Use Policy for those who access Northumberland Rugby systems and information. Now all roles on the Board are filled, the roll out, initially to Board Members and key support volunteers will begin. Rollout will then continue to Team Managers and Lead Coaches and those who access Club Digital Folders. If someone in a role declines the sign off process of the AUP they will not be allowed access to CB systems and information. This is non negotiable. *Action Claire & Tom – AUP roll out*

Brian Russell, Finance Director, updated those present on current finance work. The County now operates through "Xero" and invoices can now be added to the software systems. Expenditure on kit last season was high and needs reviewing.

In addition the Board will conduct a full review of expenditure to identify core savings. Recent discussions with transport companies enabled the CB to reduce the cost of buses for Representative teams saving over £1000. In addition the CB will also focus on expanding sponsorship packages to maximise income.

Funding must be used to develop rugby in Northumberland and we must not operate at a loss. We need to map out as a CB what we want to achieve. Example – core image for County Representative players, ie, a kit bundle. Acknowledging that whilst feedback this year from players who received the kit bundles was really good, and there is now a renewed desire to play County rugby, the bundles have a cost associated with them this has to be managed going forward.

Funding received from the RFU was explained along with the funding received from the Trust. The £40K from the Trust includes the agreed budget of £20k to support the Falcons Foundation Schools project.

The new Board now needs to work with clubs to agree the direction we wish to take the County. Discussion has to be interactive as the rugby landscape has changed at club and CB level with new forms of the game and a continued rise in costs to run rugby as a sport. Small working groups may need to be formed to work through some ideas and thoughts.

Action – Chair (to drive initiatives)

There is an acknowledgement that there is a drop off in numbers in the boys game U16s up to Colts and then Colts into Adult rugby. There was also acknowledgment that Academy players who are released from Academy programmes do not return to home clubs so are lost to the game. This is a nationwide issue. The RFU has put in place procedures for Academies to follow as they should liaise with CBs on their players to be released. Tony, having listened to the views being expressed, noted that he would follow this up as part of his "fact finding" in his new role as Dir of Age Grade and Adult Rugby (male).

Tony Lenderyou then introduced himself noting part of his new Director role is new to him, but some aspects are familiar having previously held the role of Chair of Representative Rugby.

Ben Drury also introduced himself. Ben is working with Ruth Scott in the new Womens and Girls Directorate and is Ruths Deputy Director.

Howard Ingram also introduced himself with dual role of CB Vice President and joint Diversity and Inclusion Lead working with Robin Davies.

Cathryn Clark was invited to give an overview of her role which looks after player welfare in relation to Regulation 9. Having given overview of role and noting that in line with Regulation 9, every team at a club has to have a qualified 1st aider, Cathryn went on to note that the RFU have recently pulled the 1st Aid course that was being delivered by Cathryn and other accredited RFU deliverers. Cathryn is now in the process of writing her own accredited 1st aid course which will

have the four core areas covered in any First Aid at Work course, but will then also have some rugby specific modules attached to it. This is an ongoing piece of work and will take some time to pull together however the Board are very keen to support this project with Cathryn and will look to write a project to fund places on her course, once live, to ensure that rugby continues to be played with all welfare provisions in place.

Action – Cathryn (continue liaison on project progress)

Post Meeting - A further update around the proposed new 1st Aid Accredited Course has been received from Cathryn and this has been shared with the Board. It is looking likely that this project will run in second half of the 25-26 season as there is considerable work to be done by Cathryn before the course can be accredited. Cathryn will keep in touch.

Penny Stewart introduced herself and explained her roles of RFU Council Rep and World Rugby Rep.

Alan Gardiner was then invited to discuss his role as Chair of Colts. He is looking to actively expand the role from previous remit and is already engaging with clubs around new ideas and initiatives to support colts club rugby in the County.

Any Other Business

North East Womens and Girls Team – documents seen in relation to this team seem to indicate CB support. It was placed on record that this team not been discussed at Board level and has not endorsed any part of the programme. A new Steering Group has been set up and Ruth Scott is now on that group. It is hoped that an understanding of what this team / group aims to achieve is received as currently very little is known about this team, who runs it, overall aims and how it is funded.

Value the Volunteer – Blackshaws Garage The current Honda backed RFU Volunteer initiative has now finished and the RFU are in discussions with other corporate contacts. The Director of Comms recently met with Will Blackshaw to discuss their volunteer initiative recently detailed on social media

Playing out of Age Grade and Club Cluster Forms - RFU Forms / CB Digital Forms – Graham Crozier introduced discussion around RFU Forms and CB Digital Forms. We have been in a unique position this last year where we have used two systems. Overwhelming feedback from clubs and in particular club CSOs, is that the CB designed Digital Form system is far better than the RFU system and meets the needs of the Clubs. We have been in touch with Mark Saltmarsh to pick up on discussions that were ongoing last November and if he is happy with the proposals that have been put him this past week, we are looking to reinstate the CB systems for all forms. It should be stressed that the CB will be Regulation compliant so this is not an issue. Given that the age grade season rolls over on the 1st August, this is an urgent piece of work so on the basis that Mark Saltmarsh reverted back to County and indicated his approval of the proposal, the Board were asked to endorse the proposed changes as the next Board meeting is not until mid September. Three people in the room who have actively used the forms in question all agreed

with what was noted as feedback issues, and agreed the CB Forms were far easier and better to use. Given this feedback and the information presented to those in the room, there was unanimous agreement to revert back to CB digital forms system for all playing out of age grade forms and club cluster forms.

Post Meeting Note – Mark Saltmarsh reverted back to Claire the following day after the Board Meeting and is happy with what was being proposed to him. Work is now underway to get the forms ready for the 1st August.

Revenue Generation Manager – RFU Pilot Project – the CB has been invited participate in this project and are on a call to discuss and get some more information later this week.

Post Meeting Note – Initial discussions went well. Pete, Keith and Graham are now having a face to face meeting with Martin Woodward in Newcastle on the 29th July.

Thanking Gosforth for hosting this meeting and thanking those present for some very constructive discussion on the subject of rugby, the Chair closed the meeting at 9.05pm.

Board Meeting Schedule (next meeting)

Date of Next Meeting: Monday 8th September at Gosforth RFC, 6.30pm.

Board Report Requests will be sent out by Claire on Friday 22nd August.

Board Reports to be sent to Board members and added to September folder (website) on Monday 1st September.

Appendix One

Data Officer Presentation (Tom More)

1. Introduction

Good evening , everyone. I'm Tom More, and I took on the role of Data Officer for Northumberland RFU in January 2025. This is the first time the role has existed within the organisation, and I'm excited to share what we've achieved so far and what's ahead.

2. Why This Role Matters

In today's digital landscape, data protection and cyber awareness are more important than ever. My role is to help the county grow its understanding and practices in these areas, ensuring we stay compliant and secure.

3. What We've Done

With the invaluable support of Claire Sharpe, we have successfully updated several key compliance documents, including the Northumberland RFU GDPR Policy Statement, Privacy Policy, and Cyber Policy & Guidance, ensuring they reflect current legislation and best practices. We have also introduced a new Acceptable Use Policy for all members who require access to Northumberland Rugby IT systems. These policies have been made clearer and more accessible for our members to help them understand the legislation. During this period, we reported two data breaches to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO); both cases were reviewed and subsequently closed with no further action required.

4. What's Next

We're now focused on finalising the rollout of the Acceptable Use Policy and working with the RFU to deliver GDPR, Subject Access Request (SAR), and Cyber Awareness training. Our goal is to embed a culture of continuous learning and improvement, and to support clubs with clearer data guidance and tools.

5. Final Thoughts

This is just the beginning. Data governance is a team effort, and I look forward to working with all of you to build a safer, smarter future for Northumberland Rugby.

Tom More, Data Officer