Board Meeting – Monday 1st December at Gosforth RFC

Present: Pete O'Brien (Chair), Keith Atkinson (Director), Ruth Scott (Director), Dean Gray (Director), Tony Lenderyou (Director), John Austin (Independent Director), Brian Russell (Director), Rob Gibson (Director), Penny Stewart (RFU Council Rep), Jim Pollock (Presidential Team), Paul Tanney (Presidential Team), Howard Ingram (Presidential Team)

Apologies: Graham Crozier (Hon Secretary) and Craig Wrightson (President)

Budgets and Meeting with the Trust

The Chair opened the meeting updating the Board/Presidential Team on the recent meetings held with the Trust where the budget was discussed. At the meeting, £165k funding was agreed from the main Trust. A bid for a further £11k was to be submitted to the Youth Trust. Chair was delighted to announce that notification that the additional bid had been approved had been received today.

The Board and CB are indebted to the Trust for their continued support and cooperation in driving Rugby forward in Northumberland.

Development Plan

In support of this years budget the Chair reiterated the necessity to have a short, mid and long term development plan in place to enable the Board and the clubs to agree a strategy to continue the development and growth of the game in the CB so that expected costs and initiatives can be included into budget figures and bids, thus assisting the Trust so they have an expectation of what funding the CB may bid for in the coming seasons. Aim - to have budget discussions with the Trust in the summer months before the season starts.

The Chair invited the Presidential Team to take the lead on outlining the Development Plan, strategy and vision, liaising with both Directors and budget holders to agree the framework required. Those present from the Presidential Team agreed to speak to those on the team not present (ie Craig and Graham) and feedback on thoughts.

The Plan will cover off: Scope, Vision, Strategic Objectives and requires club involvement and feedback. Aim – for a document to be written by end of this current season.

Board Reports

October Folder:

https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-october-2025/

December Folder:

(additional reports to those posted in October)

https://northumberlandrugbyunion.com/board-minutes-reports-december-2025/

Matters arising from Board Reports

John Austin raised the matter of **Playing Up/Down forms for Schools and Colleges** and in particular adults playing down to age grade rugby as there have been instances in the last few weeks where a college has tried to get authorisation for players to play down when they are already playing adult rugby at club level. There has also been a parent in touch regarding her son (playing adult rugby) playing down at schools level. Both matters have now been resolved – the schools matter handled correctly by the school with the parent being told that playing down was not an option, the player at college deciding not to play down despite pressure from the college to do so. Had applications been submitted and approved, interpretation of regulation 15 indicates both players would not be able to continue at club level to play adult club rugby.

This led to further discussion around process – as this is schools/college rugby (ERFSU) different forms to the forms used by the CB are submitted. The CB has no idea if any forms are submitted or approved. Questions were also asked around who approves the forms (is it someone local or are they approved centrally by someone at the RFU) as no one seems to know and as this can have an impact at local club level, comms need to be addressed so that clubs and the CB are appraised of any submissions.

Ruth Scott raised matter of the **NE15 Select who have asked for non voting membership of the CB**. They are already members of Durham and are also approaching Yorkshire. A number of questions were raised around this and as Cesca Harding (Durham and leading on this) has offered to meet with CB personnel, the Chair asked Ruth to set up a meeting.

Tony Lenderyou asked the Director of Sponsorship, Marketing and Comms about progress on **potential sponsors** – "irons in fire". There was also a question around **social media** (access and platforms used). Keith Atkinson agreed to approach a colleague at Newcastle Red Bull to ask for some assistance with video clips.

RFU Council Rep Report

Penny noted that she had contacted Directors reference meeting with Katie Storie. Chair offered am on the 15th December to meet with Katie.

Stakeholder Comms Meetings with CBs – are these taking place (Academy players being released back to clubs – there should be quarterly meetings between Academy and CB)? Tony confirmed no meetings had taken place.

AOB

Keith Atkinson had attended a **Steering Group Meeting** with Newcastle Red Bulls and reported that growth was 2.8%, with 2,500 children having received rugby delivery. Transition rate to

clubs still needs work at 1.8% however Morpeth have gained over 25 players through the CB/Red Bull project.

Howard Ingram noted that a **new national framework was being developed around D&I.**

The Chair reported upon a matter that had arisen regarding **club referees** who are not members of the Referees Society and who do not have a Coaching qualification above equivalent of L1. There is a question around liability on insurance for those who may officiate on a weekend (or at training) who are not Society members and who are not Level 1 or above coaches. The Chair is following this matter up with the support of NRURS (Dave Pearson and James Richie) and with Michael Patz at the RFU as urgent clarification is required.

The Chair reported upon issues being faced by **D&N3 clubs** as the league has all but disintegrated. Having started out with 8 teams, Seghill, Winlaton and now South Shields appear to have withdrawn leaving only 5 teams and very little opportunity now for meaningful games this season. Wallsend's first home game of the season was the 8th November – not sustainable for the club. Some discussion around the issues. Chair will continue with dialogue with affected Northumberland clubs.

Meeting closed at 8pm.

Date of next meeting: Monday 23rd February