RFU COUNCIL MEETING
24 November 2025
Post-Meeting Council Briefing Note

1. Presidential matters

1.1 Deborah Griffin (RFU President) welcomed Council members to the November Council meeting of the season. The President congratulated the Men's Team on their 100% win rate in the Autumn Internationals.

2. CEO Update

2.1 Bill Sweeney (Chief Executive Officer) updated Council on the current matters facing the game and the Union, including:

a. Progress on Member Pledges: Significant progress had made on pledges to members. The RFU has also focused on reducing administrative burdens and modernising competitions.
b. Game Insights: The Rugby World Cup fan engagement campaign led to a significant number of lapsed players re-registering and strong growth in girls' registrations following the Red Roses' win.
c. Performance against RFU Targets: The RFU is hitting or exceeding its targets under the perform and follow pillars. The organisation is also on track to meet its targets for Red Roses ticket sales and new direct relationships.
d. Delivery of RFU Strategic Projects: The strategic projects are on track, with the Stadium Masterplan being the most challenging.
e. Nations Championship Update: The commercial and governance agreements for the tournament are progressing well, with a ticketing strategy agreed for the Finals weekend.

3. Chair Update

3.1 Sir James Wates (Chair of the RFU Board) updated on the priority matters of the Board for the RFU and the game.

3.2 He highlighted the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts, the appointment of a new INED to the Board, and the Board Effectiveness Review which is now underway.

4. Finance Update

4.1 Francesca Pierce (Chief Financial Officer) provided an overview of the content of the Annual Report and Accounts. The report highlighted strong financial performance and significant growth compared to the previous year, which was impacted by fewer home matches due to the men's World Cup.

4.2 Revenue reached £228m (the highest ever figure aside from 2015/16 which featured the home men's RWC15), with a profit before rugby of £99m and an underlying profit of £8m. The RFU maintained sustained investment in rugby, allocating £94m overall, including £31m into the community game.

4.3 The organisation reports a clean external audit, positive cash flow, no bank debt, and healthy reserves, positioning it well for upcoming stadium redevelopment and future challenges.

5. Standing Reports

5.1 Council received reports from the following groups: Governance Standing Committee, Community Game Board, Council Nomination's Committee, Men's Professional Rugby Board, Champ Rugby Board, HIPM Subcommittee, and the Commercial Report.

5.2 Conor O'Shea (Executive Director of Performance Rugby) verbally updated that the Champ Rugby Board is considering issuing an Expression of Interest for potential league spaces that may become available from the 2026/27 season. The timeline for greater clarity is expected by February/March.

6. Board Nominations Committee Report

6.1 Council ratified the appointment of Ben Kay (former England international and British and Irish Lion) as an Independent Non-executive Director for a three-year term ending 31 July 2028. He will take office pending ratification by the members at the 2026 AGM.

7. John Mitchell: Red Roses Head Coach

7.1 John Mitchell (Red Roses Head Coach) presented an interactive Q&A session for Council following the Rugby World Cup win for the Red Roses. This covered topics including learnings from the tournament, managing performance over a sustained period of time, and plans for the coming years.

8. Spirit of Rugby Review Update

8.1 Terry Burwell (Council Member for Hampshire) updated that the Spirit of Rugby Review Task Group recommends maintaining the Core Values framework (Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline, Sportsmanship) as the foundation of rugby's values but needed to energise its context to align with the modern day. Endorsement from Council was sought on this approach.

9. Professional League Structures Update

9.1 Rory Price (Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation) and Simon-Massie Taylor (Council Member for PRL and PREM Rugby Chief Executive Officer) presented the Men's Professional Rugby Board's aim to accelerate growth and value in English rugby by improving elite systems, engaging fans, and supporting both the national team and community game. The MPRB developed strategies led by both the league and clubs, focusing on growth, expansion into new geographies, and setting minimum standards, promoting famous players through content-driven approaches and enhancing the product by improving broadcast, sponsorship, and fan experiences. Governance and oversight were strengthened through coordinated workstreams and stakeholder collaboration.

10. Academy System

10.1 David Roberts (Community Game Board Chair), Matt Williams (Academies Programme Lead), and Neil McCarthy (Head of Player Development at PREM Rugby) presented that the England rugby team had benefited significantly from the Academy System, and that the Academy had become more inclusive, with a notable increase in players from state schools and colleges.

10.2 The system had been regularly reviewed, with audits and stakeholder feedback driving improvements in player development and satisfaction. Strategic planning had been evident, with workstreams and performance plans implemented to ensure ongoing progress and alignment with the stated vision and mission.

10.3 Communication channels had expanded to include a wider range of stakeholders, strengthening the connection between the academy and the broader rugby community.

11. Plan 2030

11.1 The new strategy (Plan 2030), presented by Rory Price, set out a vision for a successful, united, and thriving rugby game across England. New funding opportunities and improved governance were identified, and feedback from council, clubs, and staff helped refine the strategy.

11.2 Rory divulged the strategy's intended message, which emphasises emotional connection, clear ambitions, and simple communication of values, and explained that the release of said strategy was initially due to go to the game via an engaging video format, voiced over by a key rugby figure.

12. 2026/27 Ticket Pricing

12.1 Ansell Henry (Venue Sales and Member Services Director) presented the pricing strategy and structure for men's home matches for season 2026/27.

13. Inclusive Delivery Group Update

13.1 Matthew Webb (Inclusive Delivery Group Chair and Co-Opted Council Member) updated the Council on recent inclusion efforts, outlining that discrimination cases increased compared to

last year, with most incidents involving disability and sexism. About half of the cases came from youth rugby, so a new educational resource for 16–18-year-olds was piloted to address this gap. The RFU partnered with Women in Sport to research sexism in rugby volunteering, gathering over 380 responses. The Inclusive Leadership Delivery promoted leadership opportunities for underrepresented communities and expanded their Inclusion & Diversity network, holding their first conference. Matt also shared examples of volunteer recruitment and outlined a two-year plan to develop and implement an inclusion framework. Key actions included updating role descriptions, supporting leadership projects, and strengthening the I&D network.

14. Governance and Representation Review

14.1 James Cook (Council Member for the Army, and Chair of the GRR Group) noted that the review focuses on an evolution approach rather than revolution, with reform across each of the Board, Council and key committees such as the Community Game Board. He focused on the need to align decision-making with the legal responsibilities for those decisions, emphasising that the right people need to be making the right decisions at the right time. The project remains on track to put proposals to the members in the first half of 2026.

15. Competitions Deep-Dive

15.1 The Council discussed the following points in small groups, led by Council facilitators:

a. Seamless Game / Minimum Participation criteria
b. Structured Season, Cup Competitions, Lower XV leagues.
c. Supporting the future growth of the Women's game through appropriate and effective competitions.
d. Developing U18 competitions that support transition and balance quality and quantity of playing opportunity.
e. Where the RFU should retain control and where local bodies might play more of a role.

16. Mandatory Training

16.1 The Council received Sexual Harassment training from an external law firm.