



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 23 February 2016 Committee Room 15

Meeting commenced 1816

#### In Attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); David Mowat MP; Catherine West MP; Lord Hoyle; Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle MP; Lord Smith of Leigh;

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** Maurice Oldroyd;

**Organisational Associate Members:** Ralph Rimmer (RFL); Ikram Butt (BARA); Phil Browne, Alistair Davis (Try Tag Rugby); Dan Steel (London RL Foundation)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Ron Knox; Judi Knox; Gary Slater; Chris Byron; Martin Coyd OBE

**Other:** Phil Smith, Jo Drapier, Paul Kendall (Sport England)

**Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

#### Welcome

Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle MP took the Chair and welcomed all to the meeting.

#### Apologies

**Members:** Rachael Maskell MP; Jo Stevens MP; Ian Liddell-Grainger MP; Lisa Nandy MP; Lord Thomas of Gresford; Graham Brady MP; Yvonne Fovargue MP; Lord Prescott

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** David Hinchliffe; Sir Rodney Walker; Sir Ian McCartney; Mike Stephenson; Eddie Hemmings; Spen Allison

**Organisational Associate Members:** Roger Draper (Warrington Wolves); Mike Smith (Hull Kingston Rovers); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Hilary Clifford (Supporters Direct); Thomas Todd (Whitehaven RLFC)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Ian McIlwee; Steve Evans; Rick Jones; Gavin Willacy

#### Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Group's January meeting were agreed to be an accurate account.

#### Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised the following on-going activities not covered by the meeting's agenda:

- The Secretariat will pull together a history of the Group.
- The Chairman to meet with RFL and RFU CEOs regarding the sovereignty of the sport, both in the UK and abroad.
- The Secretariat is organising an event with rugby league journalists, to investigate media coverage in the sport.
- The Secretariat is liaising with the RFL regarding supporting the Group's involvement in a Parliamentary Sports Day.
- The Chairman and Karl Turner MP are due to present the trophies awarded to Jamie Peacock and Kevin Sinfield at Leeds Rhinos v Hull KR on 1 April.
- The Secretariat is investigating holding a Challenge Cup Draw in the Parliamentary estate.

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### 23 February 2016 Committee Room 15

## Correspondence

### Sent

- The Chairman wrote to BBC Trust Chairman Rona Fairhead, thanking her for addressing the Group at the last meeting, and detailing the Group's complaints with BBC coverage of rugby league.
- Related, the Chairman wrote to Head of BBC Sport Barbara Slater and BBC Sport Rugby League Director Alistair McIntyre, also thanking them for addressing the last Group meeting, and expressing the Group's support for BBC Sport coverage of rugby league.
- The Chairman wrote to Pakistan RL to clarify the Group's position on the split in the sport in Pakistan, and elsewhere.

### Received

- From Honorary Member, David Hinchliffe, regarding the omission of the World Club Challenge from news bulletins on the Today programme.

**Action: Secretariat had forwarded on the Sport Editor of the Today programme. Chairman to meet.**

- From an Associate Member, regarding coverage of rugby league on the BBC Sport website.
- An alternative format suggestion for the World Club Challenge. Secretariat passed to Super League General Manager.
- From BBC Sport Editor Alistair McIntyre, thanking the Group for the opportunity to speak, and providing an update on BBC Sport coverage. Also extending an invitation for Members to come to a match to see BBC coverage first hand.

### Pending

- A letter to Tower Hamlets Council supporting Associate Member Try Tag Rugby in their attempts to increase participation in a non-contact form of the game.
- A letter to new England coach, Wayne Bennett, wishing him well for his new role.
- Related, a letter to outgoing England coach, Steve McNamara, thanking him for his work, and wishing him well for the future.

Greg Mulholland MP took the Chair.

## Change to Constitution

A change to Article 35 of the Group's constitution was endorsed. It now reads: "Associate Membership will be granted to National Governing Bodies recognised by the RLIF or its component bodies on application. Where there is dispute as to the sovereignty of the sport's official body in a country, the Group will not grant Associate Membership."

The Chairman explained the reason behind a change. Specifically, to avoid the Group being drawn into disputes between bodies claiming to represent the sport in different countries. The Group will not accept Associate Membership from any competing organisations.

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary

The Secretariat provided references to rugby league in Parliament since the previous meeting.

In a Westminster Hall debate on the role of men in preventing violence against women, the Chairman mentioned the role of rugby league stars in showing that strong men are absolutely against violence against women in all forms.

### Public

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## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 23 February 2016 Committee Room 15

The Secretariat met with representatives of the charity Heartbeat of Sport, to discuss ways in which the Group might be able to offer support.

**Action: Secretariat to liaise with the Chairman.**

The Secretariat met with a representative from ITV Sport. An invitation has been made to to address the Group.

The Group put out a press release on the meeting with BBC Trust Chairman Rona Fairhead, Head of BBC Sport Barbara Slater, and BBC Sport Editor Alistair McIntyre.

Lord Smith of Leigh hosted representatives from the clubs taking part in the World Club Series for a dinner in the House of Lords.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,756 followers on Twitter. The Group's twitter name is @UKParliamentRL.

### Political Animals Report

The Secretariat reminded Members that they are always eligible to play for the Political Animals (Associate Members are also) and reiterated the eligibility criteria that are contained on the Animals' website and requested that all Associate Members who may know someone who could be eligible to review and introduce to the Club Captain (Group Chairman) or General Manager (Group Secretariat).

Details of future fixtures will be circulated once they are confirmed. These will include annual game against a team of Journalists, and against a London Select XIII.

### AOB

Paula Sherriff MP noted that the Group should do anything it can to encourage female participation in the game. The Chairman agreed a women's rugby league meeting should be in the Group Programme.

**Action: Secretariat to arrange.**

Lord Smith of Leigh questioned what can be done to narrow the gap between rugby league in the UK and Australia, and suggested there ought to be a no-blame review. The Chairman suggested the need to understand gulf in status and quality, and levels of resources. The President suggested inviting Wayne Bennett to address the Group, before the 4 Nations, if possible.

**Action: Secretariat to investigate.**

Declaring an interest, the Secretariat noted that tickets are still available for the Rugby League Varsity Match on Friday 4 March at the HAC. See Mark Ramsdale or Jack Baker for more information.

Main business concluded at 1834

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## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 23 February 2016 Committee Room 15

#### **Presentation: Phil Smith, Director of Sport, Sport England**

The Chairman welcomed Phil Smith, Director of Sport at Sport England.

Smith outlined Sport England's role as the non-departmental government organisation responsible for grassroots sport, with the express aim of involving more people in sport on a regular basis and develop players to be stars of the future. Sport England was currently writing a new plan based on the Government's sport strategy, to become operational in 2017.

The lines between sport and physical activity have largely been removed. Sport England is now agnostic about the form of activity participants choose. Smith explained Sport England's remit has dropped from age 14 to 5, and it must now review resources to look after 6 million more people. It also now has an organisation-neutral strategy, having previously been NGB-centric. This is a challenge for the RFL, but not for the sport of rugby league.

Smith noted rugby league's clear geographic strength, relevant due to the government's strategy has a location-based perspective, looking at whether investment in an area can change the behaviour of the population there. Rugby league tends to be strong with underrepresented groups, especially so in economically deprived areas, and there are opportunities for collaboration with charity groups and other projects. Smith noted that as rugby league is seen traditionally as a sport for young boys, the extension of Sport England's remit is perhaps a blessing.

A successful 2021 Rugby League World Cup bid would provide a great opportunity to attract new audiences.

Opening to questions, on the support that Sport England provides rugby league in the south of England, Smith emphasised their remit covers the entire country. Sport England can invest in rugby league through the national governing body, the RFL, and as a national lottery distributor to anyone who applies for funding.

On how sport can be the key for health, Smith gave assurances this is now being counted in communities, and that there is a focus on physical activity rather than sport.

Alternative forms of traditional team sport are a growing field, and Smith acknowledged the importance of these versions, such as masters rugby league, in providing opportunities for physical activity for everyone. The challenge for rugby league, according to Smith, is to appeal to different playing audiences, as the game tends to lose people over the age of 30.

Explaining the difference between UK Sport and Sport England, Smith noted that UK Sport only funds Olympic sport, whilst Sport England has funded, to a significant degree in recent years, the rugby league talent programme.

When asked whether organisations increasing participation in rugby league would get more funding, Smith highlighted the importance of where new participants have come from. In the eyes of Sport England, if they have just come from another physical activity, then there is no net gain. The Chairman questioned the logic behind this, commenting that a sport should get more funding if it draws-in participants, regardless of their source.

Smith noted many clubs and organisations, including many rugby league clubs, qualify for Sport England grants.

Discussing the future of the Active People survey, Smith explained it has a year left to run and will be replaced with the Active Lives survey, which will follow behaviour of individuals rather than provide a snapshot of participation on a given day.

The Chairman thanked Smith, and noted that the Group are keen to work positively with Sport England, to see people more active, and promote mental, physical and social wellbeing.

**Meeting closed at 1945**

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