



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 12 April 2016 Committee Room 21

Meeting commenced 1804

#### In Attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Lord Smith of Leigh; Lord Hoyle, Catherine West MP; Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle MP; Jason McCartney MP; Paula Sherriff MP; Lord Thomas of Gresford

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

**Organisational Associate Members:** Emma Rosewarne (RFL); Ikram Butt, A Ghaffar (BARA); Phil Browne (Try Tag Rugby); Ashlyn Lucas, Martyn Cheney, Jeff Lucas (Bramley Buffaloes)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Martin Coyd OBE; James Chespy; Joel Holmes; Chris Ashton; Gary Slater; Ron Knox; Judi Knox; David Ballheimer

**Other:** Matt Cook; Mike Farrar; Karl Fitzpatrick; Tim Holmes

**Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

#### Welcome

The Chairman welcomed new Associate Members National Conference League and James Chespy.

#### Apologies

**Members:** Yvonne Fovargue MP; Lisa Nandy MP; Debbie Abrahams MP; Mark Pawsey MP

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

**Organisational Associate Members:** Dan Steel (London Rugby League Foundation); Richard Thewlis (Huddersfield Giants); Ian Wilson (Rugby Oldham); Nicola Hudson (Supporters Direct); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Trevor Hunt, Peter Moran, Tony Johnson (National Conference League); Mike Smith (Hull KR); Ralph Rimmer (RFL)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Steve Evans; Rick Jones; Gavin Willacy; David Johnson; Carl Dalby; David Ramage

#### Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Group's February 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 write a history of the Group.
- The Chairman will meet with the CEOs of the RFL and RFU, regarding the sovereignty of the sport, both in the UK and abroad.

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## Correspondence

### Sent

- The Treasurer wrote to the CEO of Sky, asking if they would consider supporting the Group as they have others.
- Related, the Treasurer wrote to the CEOs of train companies based in the north of England, asking if they would support the Group. The Treasurer had previously written but not received a response.
- The Secretariat notified MPs with constituents selected for the England Youth rugby league tour of France.

### Received

- From Honorary Member, David Hinchliffe, regarding rugby league coverage on news bulletins on the Today programme. **Action: Secretariat forwarded to Sport Editor of Today.**
- A piece regarding specific items on the rugby league section of the BBC Sport website. **Action: Secretariat flagged with BBC Sport Editor, and changes were made.**
- Regarding plans for a national rugby league museum. Secretariat circulated to Members.
- From the Sports Minister, in response to a letter sent by the Chairman in support of Try Tag Rugby.
- From State of Mind, a request to address the Group. **Action: Secretariat investigating opportunities.**

### Pending

- A letter to the new NRL CEO, Todd Greenberg, congratulating him on his appointment. [Secretariat's Note: Sent]

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary

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

In the second reading of the Football Governance (Supporters' Participation) Bill, Conor McGinn MP made reference to the very reasonable cost of a ticket at St Helens RLFC.

In an Adjournment debate on the Welsh bid for the 2026 Commonwealth Games, Craig Williams MP made reference to the 2013 Rugby League World Cup games hosted in Cardiff.

Lord Smith of Leigh asked a written question about support for the establishment of a National Museum of rugby league in the Northern Powerhouse. Responding, Baroness Neville-Rolfe stated that there were currently no plans to fund a National Museum of rugby league in the Northern Powerhouse, but that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport is investing in the game, through the £17.5million that rugby league will receive from Sport England between 2013 and 2017, and the £100k support for the 2021 Rugby League World Cup bid announced in the Budget.

The Chairman tabled an Early Day Motion on the renaming of the Rugby League World Cup as "The Paul Barriere Trophy."

### Public

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman presented the Geoff Lofthouse Award to Jamie Peacock MBE at the recent Leeds Rhinos v Hull KR game.

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Related to activity, the Group sent press releases on:

- The Government support for the 2021 Rugby League World Cup Bid reaffirmed in the Budget.
- The renaming of the Rugby League World Cup as “The Paul Barriere Trophy”
- The presentation of the Geoff Lofthouse Award to Jamie Peacock.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,747 followers on Twitter. The Group’s twitter name is @UKParliamentRL

### Political Animals Report

The Secretariat reminded Members that they are 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).

### AOB

Future meetings will be held on 24 May and 21 June. The Group’s Annual Dinner is on Monday 21 November.

Main business concluded at 1812

### Presentation: Player Welfare Representatives

The Chairman welcomed: Emma Rosewarne, RFL Welfare Director; Mike Farrar, Chairman of the Player Welfare and Education Forum; Karl Fitzpatrick, Head of Rugby Operations at Warrington Wolves; Tim Holmes, Player Welfare Manager at Widnes Vikings; and Matt Cook, Castleford Tigers Player.

Rosewarne thanked the Group for it’s invitation, and outlined the RFL’s player welfare programme. Rugby league came to player welfare quite late compared to a lot of sports, which allowed the opportunity to look at what other sports were doing. The RFL takes the lead role on player welfare, which includes careers advice, education, mental health, financial planning, and transition to life after rugby league. The focus so far is on the sixteen full time clubs.

Farrar explained his role as independent Chairman of the Player Welfare and Education Forum, which provides a means to share best practice, and stressed the rigour and process with which the sport is taking care with player welfare and education.

Holmes discussed his role as a Player Welfare Manager, which includes involvement within the squad every day, as players tend not to respond well to a formal environment. He explained that a lot of work is done with outside agencies, from those offering financial advice, to careers advisory services, to those such as Sporting Chance. Player welfare is increasingly gaining importance in the changing room, with many players now taking the baton themselves to take responsibility for their futures. Holmes noted that at his club, Widnes Vikings, players were enrolled on part-time degrees, hairdressing training and accountancy courses, to name a few.

Fitzpatrick described the holistic approach to player welfare taken by his club, Warrington Wolves. Mental health issues in sport were discussed, as were gambling issues. Fitzpatrick also provided further detail on the work that Sporting Chance do, in particular breaking down the stigma that players shouldn’t talk about their problems. At Warrington the club run an open door policy, and recognise that the by-product of helping people off the pitch is that performance on the pitch improves.

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Opening to questions, issues around alcohol and recreational drugs are less prevalent than they used to be, though prescription drugs are a problem. There is a temptation for players to get involved in gambling, but educational workshops on betting integrity are now being run.

On preparing young players psychologically for the scrutiny they might receive playing at elite level, players are encouraged to work with in the community, to keep themselves engaged. There is also a movement within the clubs to educate spectators about what it means to be a spectator.

There is a focus on full-time clubs, but Sporting Chance is funded centrally by the RFL, and there is no judgement on who is worthy of their support. There have also been specific instances of support, such as to Keighley players following the tragic death of Danny Jones last year.

On mental health, workshops are provided to all players, and all Player Welfare Managers are mental health trained. The stigma on mental health issues is often on people coming forward in first instance. The most influential welfare manager at any club is the head coach, as they can create culture where people happy to step forward. Players are now starting to get to grips with player welfare managers, and bonds are getting closer.

On planning by players for life after rugby, the RFL employs a transition mentor who is a retired player, and meets up with retired players to offer support. At club level, support is offered to players with exit strategies, to help them deal with exiting the sport.

Clubs have foundations which do work in the community to emphasise opportunities for people, including important messages about ending violence against women and girls.

Cook spoke about the support offered to him by Rugby League Cares, who provided a grant so that he could complete a personal training diploma. So far Rugby League Cares has disbursed £120,000 of grants to players for education and training courses, but there is still not enough to support all players.

Links with State of Mind were explained, and their impact on players and generating profile for mental health issues was discussed.

On the number of cases referred to Sporting Chance, this was not an indicator that things are getting worse, but that players are becoming more open.

Welfare provision for match officials is part of a wider re-organisation within the RFL, but is an issue that is being dealt with.

Training for Player Welfare Managers is provided, and being a former player certainly helps. There are regular meetings between managers from all clubs to help share good practice, and links with outside agencies are vital.

The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking the player welfare representatives for their presentation.

**Meeting closed at 1931**

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