



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

24 May 2016 Committee Room 18

Meeting commenced 1803

In Attendance

Members: Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Lisa Cameron MP; Paula Sherriff MP; Marion Fellows MP; Gavin Newlands MP; Mark Pawsey MP; Stuart Donaldson MP; Hannah Bardell MP; Carol Monaghan MP; Deirdre Brock MP; Michelle Thomson MP

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

Organisational Associate Members: Sue Taylor (BARLA); Phillip Browne (Try Tag Rugby); Martyn Cheney, Ash Lucas (Bramley Buffaloes)

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Graham Oliphant; Nigel Kitchen; Anthony Dellar; Steve Evans; Gary Slater; Darren Williams; Ron Knox; Judi Knox; Carl Dalby; David Ballheimer; Dave Ramage

Other: Keith Hogg (Scotland RL); Rachel Fellows

Secretariat: Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed new Members Melanie Onn MP; Lisa Cameron MP and Gavin Newlands MP.

The Chairman welcomed new Individual Associate Member Charles Mather.

Apologies

Members: Rt Hon. David Mundell MP; Rt. Hon. David Evennett MP; Lord Smith of Leigh; Lisa Nandy MP; Ian Liddell-Grainger MP; Debbie Abrahams MP; Daniel Poulter MP; Jason McCartney MP; Catherine West MP;

Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation): Sir Rodney Walker; David Hinchliffe; Sir Ian McCartney; Sally Bolton OBE;

Organisational Associate Members: Dan Steel (London Rugby League Foundation); Ian Wilson (Rugby Oldham); Trevor Hunt, Peter Moran, Tony Johnson (National Conference League); Hilary Clifford, Jacqui Forster (Supporters Direct); Richard Thewlis (Huddersfield Giants);

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): James Chespy; Chris Byron; Iain McIlwee; Gavin Willacy; Martin Coyd OBE; David Johnson

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Group's April 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 work with the RFL to take a stand at the forthcoming Parliamentary Sports Fair on 27 June.
- The Secretariat will pull together a history of the Group.

Our Supporters





All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

24 May 2016 Committee Room 18

- The Chairman will meet with the CEOs of the RFL and RFU, regarding the sovereignty of the sport, both in the UK and abroad.
- The Secretariat is liaising with State of Mind to find a suitable date for them to update the Group.
- The Secretariat is investigating a Group scarf as an alternative to the Group tie.

Correspondence

Sent

- The Chairman wrote to Blake Solly, thanking him for his work as General Manager of Super League, and wishing him well for his new role as CEO of South Sydney Rabbitohs.
- In his role as Club Captain of the Political Animals RLFC, the Chairman wrote to London Skolars RLFC, thanking them for the invitation to be part of the Friday Night Lights event on the eve of the Challenge Cup.
- Letters were sent to: the Secretary of State and Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland; the Sports Minister; and Gavin Newlands MP, Chairman of the Scottish Sport APPG; inviting them to attend the meeting.
- An email invitation to the meeting was sent to all Scottish MPs.

Received

- From NRL CEO, Todd Greenberg, in response to a letter sent by the Chairman, thanking the Group for an invitation to speak and for its ongoing support and advocacy for the sport.
- A number of pieces of positive correspondence following the Challenge Cup Draw on BBC Radio 4's Today programme.
- A piece related to accusations that World Rugby had sought to block the Rugby League International Federation's entry to SportAccord, the umbrella organisation for all international sports federations. The RLIF have clarified that World Rugby had raised issues with SportAccord's process, rather than blocking a specific sport.
- A piece regarding South Africa Rugby League's difficulties in gaining recognition as a separate sport to rugby union.
- A piece from Burundi Rugby League, expressing their need for support in developing the game.
- A request for more information on the Group from Northern Rail, in response to the Treasurer's previous email regarding support for the Group.

Pending

- Letters to the leads of the New South Wales, Queensland and Australian Federal Parliament's Parliamentary Friends of Rugby League groups, inviting them to visit Westminster during the Four Nations tournament in the autumn.
- A letter to the Sports Minister explaining the work of the charity Heartbeat of Sport, who provide defibrillators and advice and training on cardiovascular health.

The Chairman reiterated the Group's thanks to Blake Solly for his work as Super League General Manager.

The Chairman also expressed thanks to Gavin Newlands in his role as Chairman of Scottish Sport APPG, for circulating information on the meeting to Members.

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary

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

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All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

24 May 2016 Committee Room 18

In a Westminster Hall debate on the powers of local government to charge for organised sporting events, Jack Lopresti MP mentioned the use of a park in his constituency for tag rugby league.

The Chairman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer a number of written questions on the Government's pledged support for the UK's bid for the the 2021 Rugby League World Cup in the Budget 2016. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury reiterated the Government's support.

Related, the Chairman asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport about his plans to take a decision on the details of the Government's support for the UK's 2021 World Cup bid. The Sports Minister responded that officials have been working closely with the RFL and the government is aware of the deadline for submitting the bid to the RLIF.

Marie Rimmer MP tabled an Early Day Motion on St Helens RFC and St Helens Autism Support awareness campaign.

Public

The Chairman appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme following the Challenge Cup draw, to discuss the work of the Group.

Related to activity, the Group sent press releases on:

- Paula Sherriff's appointment as a Vice-Chair of the Group.
- The announcement that the Challenge Cup draw would be made live on BBC Radio 4's Today programme
- The Chairman's appearance on BBC Radio 4's Today programme following the Challenge Cup draw
- The Early Day Motion on St Helens RFC's autism awareness campaign

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,757 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).

During his appearance on the Today programme, the Chairman invited John Humphrys and Justin Webb to play for the Journalists team against the Political Animals.

The annual game against a London Select XIII will take place on the eve of the Challenge Cup Final, 26 August.

A Political Animals touch rugby league event will take place in London on 7 September. The Secretariat will circulate details in due course.

The Secretariat is looking to schedule a game against a Journalists XIII and will circulate details in due course.

AOB

The next Ordinary Meeting will be held on 5 July. The Group's Annual Dinner is on Monday 21 November.

Our Supporters





All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

24 May 2016 Committee Room 18

A meeting focusing on women's rugby league will be scheduled as soon as possible.

The Chairman stated his intention to stand again for the role at the forthcoming AGM.

Main business concluded at 1824

Presentation: Keith Hogg, Chairman, Scotland Rugby League

The Chairman welcomed Keith Hogg, Chairman of Scotland Rugby League.

Hogg discussed his background in rugby league, before going on to explain the work of Scotland Rugby League. The organisation is funded jointly by the RLIF, RFL and SportsScotland, and has a structured board comprised of eight volunteers.

Rugby league has existed in Scotland for over 20 years, but are now seeing the development of strong clubs, university rugby league, and wheelchair rugby league. The national under-19s side, historically expatriates, are now almost completely Scottish based, showing the improvement of the junior game.

Hogg explained that Scotland have qualified for the 2016 Four Nations, by winning the 2014 European Championships. Scotland's game against England will be the first time the two nations have ever met at the highest level, and will be televised live on the BBC. Hogg expects the squad to be competitive throughout the tournament, and to cause some upsets.

The Chairman thanked those Scottish MPs in attendance, and emphasised that the Group is keen to work with the Scottish Parliament. He also noted that the first man to lift a Rugby League World Cup, Dave Valentine, was Scottish.

Opening to questions, the current Scottish clubs are based in Easterhouse, Forfar, Edinburgh, and two in Aberdeen. There are also outbreaks in Falkirk and elsewhere. In terms of schools, the focus is on the Aberdeen region at the moment, with a view to then trying to develop the sport in Glasgow.

On the sugar tax, it is hoped that this might provide more funding to get rugby league into schools.

The connection between Huddersfield and Scotland, with Danny Brough and Dave Valentine playing for both, was raised.

It was noted that a Member of the Group, Lord Addington, had played rugby league for Scotland Students.

Hogg predicted that Scotland would finish third in the Four Nations, and noted that it was a great achievement for Scotland to beat teams like Wales and France in the European Championships.

On the prospects for a semi-professional club in Scotland, Hogg expects that this is at least 10 years away. This would likely be in the Borders.

It was noted that there are currently no Scottish based players in the Great Britain Masters squad. Hogg noted that in the past, Scotland Rugby League has tried to do too much, and now has very clearly defined priorities to build something properly.

The Chairman pointed to new possibilities for rugby league that are opened up by Masters, namely as a way of keeping people in the game.

Our Supporters





All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

24 May 2016 Committee Room 18

On the amount of media coverage that Scotland Rugby League receive, the greatest amount is during the Rugby League World Cup. The game against England in in the Four Nations will get some good coverage, as the game is live on the BBC.

The Chairman thanked Hogg for his presentation and thanked all for attending, noting that the meeting had seen one of the best ever turnouts from MPs.

Meeting closed at 1931

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