



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 7 July 2015 Committee Room 13

Meeting commenced 1804

### In Attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Marie Rimmer MP (Secretary); Lord Smith of Leigh (Treasurer); Catherine West MP; Jo Cox MP; Karl McCartney MP

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

**Organisational Associate Members:** Ralph Rimmer (RFL); Jacqui Forster, Nicola Hudson (Supporter's Direct); Martyn Cheney (Bramley Buffaloes)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Gary Slater; Chris Byron; David Ballheimer; Chris Ashton; Graham Oliphant; Ron Knox; Judi Knox; Chris Ashton

**Other:** Dr David Collier OBE (RLIF); George Scott

**Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

### Minute Silence

A minute's silence was held for Danny Jones, Keighley Cougars and Wales International, and James Ackerman, Sunshine Coast Falcons.

### Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the following new Members: Marie Rimmer MP; Conor McGinn MP Ben Howlett MP; Catherine West MP; Clive Betts MP; Graham Brady MP; Jo Stevens MP; Oliver Colville MP; Philip Davies MP; and Jo Cox MP. He noted the success of this recent recruitment, following a letter sent out to all MPs with rugby league clubs in their constituencies.

The Chairman welcomed new Associate Members Graham Oliphant and Chris Ashton; and returning Associate Members Supporters Direct.

The Chairman noted that Simon Kirby and Therese Coffey had resigned from the Group. Kirby is now a Government Minister and Dr Coffey is Deputy Leader of the House of Commons.

### Apologies

**Members:** Lord Hoyle; Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP; Jason McCartney MP; Lisa Nandy MP; Heather Wheeler MP; Lord Monks; Yvonne Fovargue MP; Derek Twigg MP; Clive Betts MP; Graham Brady MP; Oliver Colville MP; Philip Davies MP; Lord Thomas of Gresford; Daniel Poulter MP; Ben Howlett MP; Jo Stevens MP

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** David Hinchcliffe; Sir Ian McCartney; Ray French MBE; Sally Bolton OBE; Mike Stephenson

**Organisational Associate Members:** Jason Talbot (GBAFRL); Ernie Benbow (League 13); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Mike (Chicago Stockyarders); Ikram Butt (BARA); Dan Steel (London Rugby League Foundation); Richard Thewlis (Huddersfield Giants)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** John Piercy; Steve Evans; Stephen Johnson; Stuart Morris; Martin Coyd OBE

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## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous Group meeting were considered an accurate account.

## Matters Arising

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

- Meetings with Members will be scheduled for:
  - Karen Moorehouse & RFL COO Ralph Rimmer on player disciplinary procedures
  - Danny Kazandjian, RLEF General Manager, on rugby league in Italy.

## Correspondence

### Sent

- Letters of condolence to the family of Danny Jones and James Ackerman from the Chairman, on behalf of the Group.
- A letter to the RFU related to the facilities situation raised by the RFL. Receipt acknowledged and confirmed written response will be sent shortly. Awaiting response; MR in contact with RFU Head of Public Affairs.
- A letter to Honorary Life Member Spen Allison from the Chairman, on behalf of the Group, wishing him a swift recovery from illness.
- A letter from the Treasurer to the RFL, to confirm their continued support for the Group. The RFL was agreeable and responded as such in writing. Declared.
- An email from the Secretariat to MPs with constituents selected for the England Youth squad. A similar email will be sent once the Welsh squad is announced.
- An email to all MPs with clubs in their constituency from the Chairman, inviting them to join the Group. Secretariat noted 228 constituencies with rugby league clubs.

### Received

- From Brentwood RLFC, thanking the Group for publicising their interest in arranging a fixture in the North West.
- An update from South London Storm RLFC, who have now merged with Croydon Hurricanes, and are using their facilities.
- An invitation to officers and representative MPs to attend a BBC Rugby League reception at the Challenge Cup match between Leeds and Huddersfield in May. Vice-Chairman Jason McCartney attended.
- An offer from the RFL Facilities Trust to address the Group, and an update on their work. **Action: Secretariat to arrange.**
- A positive response from Rugby Oldham to an invitation to address the Group. **Action: Secretariat to arrange**

### International

- Further correspondence from overseas governing bodies regarding greater involvement with the Group. Governing bodies may join the Group as Associate Members; has been fed back.
- A request of support from the Hungarian Rugby League Federation. **Action: A letter to the British Ambassador in Hungary, requesting assistance for the Hungarian Rugby League Federation**
- Further information concerning a split in Italian rugby league, from the RLEF. **Action: Chairman agreed to take meeting with both sides to facilitate action on coming together. Secretariat to arrange.**

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- From the Army Rugby League with regard to rugby league in Kenya. Are unaware of any individuals with rugby league experience stationed in Kenya, but investigating. **Action: Letter to Kenya APPG with regards rugby league in Kenya**
- A number of pieces concerning the arrest and internment of Sol Mokdad in the United Arab Emirates, requesting the Group's support. The Chairman has been in communication with the RLIF and RLEF in a personal capacity.

#### BBC & Press

- From the BBC Trust Chairman, Rona Fairhead CBE, in response to a letter from the Group regarding coverage of rugby league on the BBC, and creation of @BBCrugby twitter account that only covers rugby union.
- Related, a letter from Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC, containing notes from BBC Sport and BBC Wales. **Action: A letter to the BBC Head of Sport, concerning coverage of rugby league, and an invite to attend a Group media event.**
- Related, a piece forwarded to the Group, sent by the BBC in response to a complaint regarding the @BBCrugby twitter account.
- A piece related to poor coverage of rugby league in the national press, requesting any help that the Group can give to improve this coverage. **Action: Secretariat to schedule event with media to investigate.**

#### Access

- A piece concerning declining opportunities for juniors to play rugby league. **Action: letter to be sent to RFL.**
- Via Yvonne Fovargue MP, from Army Rugby League asking for assistance with a sports outreach programme centred on fixtures at Salford's stadium in September. **Action: Secretariat to forward to Salford MP Barbara Keeley; will tweet support and offer quote for future press release.**
- A piece concerning a lack of engagement with BME communities by the RFL. **Action: letters to be dispatched to RFL and Leeds Rhinos (Leeds resident).**

#### Dual Registration

- Ongoing correspondence with regard to the dual registration issue. Standard response returned to all such enquiries.
- Continued correspondence relating to Keighley Cougars and the dual registration scheme, including from local MP Kris Hopkins. Standard response returned to all such enquiries. **Action: update to be provided to Kris Hopkins' office.**

#### Honours

- From a founding member of the Group and Honorary Member Sir Ian McCartney, concerning the lack of rugby league representation in the most recent honours list.

The Secretariat noted that rugby union had received four awards; cricket had received five; and tennis had received two. Most were for voluntary work at the grassroots level. It was noted that the RFU has been offering clubs support in nominating volunteers. **Action: Secretariat to work with the RFL to put similar support in place.**

#### Other

- From League 13, providing the Group with an update on their work. Available to members.
- An update from Rugby League Cares, the Group's charity partner, including the National Arboretum memorial.
- From the leader of the charity Heartbeat of Sport, concerning heart failure in rugby league. **Action: Secretariat to look into organising an event in Parliament.**
- Request of support for a commercial tag rugby league venture. **Action: Letter of support to be sent.**

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#### Pending

- Letter to the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, encouraging local councillors to join the Group as Associate Members.

Catherine West MP offered her help in encouraging local councillors to join the Group. The Chairman noted that councillors are eligible for a specific level of Associate Membership, and also qualify to play for the Political Animals.

The Chairman noted that the amount of correspondence received by the Group is a clear illustration of a need for a Secretariat, and thanked the Secretariat for their ongoing hard work.

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary

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

At Business questions Vice-Chair David Mowat MP asked the Leader of the House of Commons for a debate on the contribution of rugby league, in light of its 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and referenced the 120-mile founders walk taking place this summer. The Leader of the House replied:

*“My hon. Friend represents the great northern town of Warrington. I once stood there as a candidate, and I visited the local rugby league team to watch it play. I want to take this opportunity to wish the English rugby league team the very best when it takes part in this autumn’s world cup. I also wish all those involved in promoting the anniversary - including those going on the walk in a few weeks’ time - the very best in celebrating a sport that has been and continues to be a really important part of our northern communities.”*

The Secretariat noted that emails had been sent to all MPs in whose constituency the walk starts or ends. The Secretariat noted that emails had been sent to all MPs in whose constituency the walk starts or ends.

In a debate on sport and the 2012 Olympics legacy, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, John Whittingdale MP, referenced the games-make style volunteers at the 2013 rugby league world cup. In the same debate John Mann MP referenced pop-up rugby league sessions delivered as part of UK Sport’s gold event series.

In a debate on transport connectivity and infrastructure in the north of England, Lord Smith of Leigh referenced the rugby league connection across the M62 corridor up to Cumbria, which, after the Magic Weekend, includes Newcastle too. Acknowledged Northern Rail’s sponsorship of a rugby league cup, which Leigh Centurions hold as the last winners

In a written question the Chairman asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what grants and loans his Department has made available to support the development of grassroots rugby league in the last five years, and what steps his Department is taking to support the development of grassroots rugby league across the UK. The Sports Minister, Tracey Crouch MP responded:

*“Since 2010 Sport England has invested £32.8 million of National Lottery and Grant-in-Aid funding in the Rugby Football League, local rugby league clubs and community projects to support the development of grassroots rugby league. Rugby League’s Whole Sport Plan funding is now a mix of investment in the RFL and in club foundation community projects.”*

In her maiden speech, Sue Hayman, MP for Workington, mentioned rugby league heritage in her constituency.

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In a written question, Conor McGinn MP asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans his Department has for the promotion and development of rugby league. The Sports Minister, Tracey Crouch MP responded:

*“The Government, through Sport England, is investing £17.5m between 2013 and 2017 to get more people playing rugby league and to support talented individuals within the sport. I am keen to meet the Rugby Football League soon to discuss expanding the game across the country.”*

The Secretariat noted that they have been liaising with the RFL to ensure that this meeting is scheduled as soon as possible. The Sports Minister has also been invited to speak to the Group.

In a debate on the social and economic value of sports volunteering in the UK, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth referenced the work of volunteers at the Rugby League World Cup 2013.

The following Early Day Motions were tabled:

227 - INTERNATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE MATCH BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE (Greg Mulholland MP)

184 - RETIREMENT OF PAUL WELLENS (Marie Rimmer MP)

135 - RUGBY LEAGUE PARTICIPATION (Greg Mulholland MP)

#### **Public**

Greg Mulholland attended the memorial service for Wales' and Keighley Cougars' Danny Jones who passed shortly after the start of a game against London Skolars.

Related to Parliamentary activity, the Group put out press releases on:

- The Group's inaugural meeting.
- Growth in regular participation in rugby league, as announced by Sport England.
- Group support for the upcoming fixture between Ukraine and Russia, to be played in Serbia.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,461 followers on Twitter. The Group's twitter name is @UKParliamentRL

The Chairman noted that the number of mentions that rugby league has already received in both houses, and the amount of activity since the Group's reconstitution, shows the importance of the Group for the sport.

#### **Action: Secretariat to pull together a history of the Group.**

Catherine West MP asked if there were any ways in which the Group could help in inner city areas.

Richard Jones, representing the London RL Foundation, and Ralph Rimmer, RFL Chief Operations Officer, outlined the work that has been done in inner city communities. Rimmer emphasised that rugby league tends to work in a demographic that is relatively difficult to access, meaning a reasonably high cost per participant as a result. Any support the Group can lend to help secure funding from Sport England would be much appreciated.

#### **Action: Secretariat to organise a meeting focusing on rugby league in London, the ways in which the Group can help, and backing the Rugby Football League for funding for the coming years. This can be taken forward with a letter prior to the meeting.**

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#### Political Animals Report

The Chairman outlined a brief history of the Political Animals. The Animals is a team comprised of elected representatives, former representatives, and candidates at any level of government. The Chairman noted that it would be great to have more players for games.

The Secretariat provided details of upcoming Political Animals fixtures. Three fixtures are planned for the remainder of this year

- The traditional 'Friday Night Lights' fixture against a London Select XIII will be played on the evening prior to the Challenge Cup Final, 28 August.
- A fixture against a France Politicians XIII is planned prior to the test match between England and France at the Leigh Sports Village on 24 October
- A fixture against a New Zealand High Commission XIII is planned prior to the second test match between England and New Zealand at the Olympic Stadium on 7 November

Further details will be circulated once they are confirmed

In his capacity as Club Captain, the Chairman has written to certain MPs, inviting them to play for the Animals.

The Secretariat noted that parliamentary staff are also eligible to play for the Animals. Associate Members of this Group can also play.

#### Group Logo

Secretariat outlined the new rules regarding APPGs, especially those concerning the use of the Group's logo.

**Action: Secretariat to look into rules, and circulate information to Officers.**

#### Annual Dinner

The Secretariat announced that Oak Underwriting are supporting the annual dinner along with the RFL, and thanked both for their support. **Further details will be circulated to all in due course.**

The date of the annual dinner is 16<sup>th</sup> November.

#### AOB

Lord Hoyle suggested that League Express might be a periodical that both houses take, in the libraries. **Action: Members to suggest to the Commons and Lords libraries.**

Lord Hoyle, along with the two Warrington MPs, will present Joel Monaghan with the Group's 2014 player of the year award at an upcoming game.

The Secretariat raised Martin Offiah Gala Dinner to be held on Thursday 27 August 2015.

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Richard Jones, on behalf of the London Rugby League Foundation, flagged the work of the Foundation on the ground, including with RL Cares, the Group's charity partner. For those interested, the Foundation has been hosting games at Riley's Haymarket and has begun planning a charity bike ride from London to Old Trafford for the Super League Grand Final.

Maurice Oldroyd noted the moving funeral of Danny Jones, at which the Chairman had represented the Group.

Main business concluded at 1847

### **Presentation: Dr David Collier OBE, CEO of the Rugby League International Federation**

The Chairman welcomed Dr David Collier OBE, CEO of the RLIF.

Collier opened by thanking the Group for its invaluable support of the game.

Having previously worked in hockey and cricket, Collier has been in his post for three months. The RLIF recently moved back to London from Sydney.

Since arriving, Collier has listened to clubs, federations, and supporters. Two key questions to answer: what assets does the game have at the international level; and where does the game want to be in 10 years. Good work done by RFL and NRL, but now in a new era.

From listening to and learning from federations, has realised that the RLIF has a leadership role, but also a role in financial support, since outside of England and Australia, are no big leagues to bring in money. Collier has also listened to supporters, who want consistency of events; Lions tours; and qualifiers for other countries.

Meeting in Hong Kong will discuss a proposed eight-year calendar, projected out from 2017, with the intention of operating more top class events, with consistency. Collier noted a number of challenges in the international game. There have been a number of cases of misunderstanding with rugby union, though World Rugby have been exceptionally supportive. Finding a consistent programme of matches and consistency of rules and regulations remain challenges, as does expanding the pool of neutral match officials. There are also challenges in funding, as the NRL and RFL cannot be expected to fund all nations, and so the international games income stream needs to be broadened. There remain problems around eligibility, and Collier noted the importance of seeing depth in the game, not just national teams of expatriates.

Collier noted that one of the most effective ways to expand income would be to secure overseas television rights, and expand into other markets. This is particularly relevant for supporting emerging nations, which have no income from domestic leagues. The RLIF can be a source of advice and expertise to these nations, as well as a source of material to develop the game.

Discussing the upcoming meeting, Collier outlined the proposal for big events and improved governance of the international game to drive revenues, which would in turn help to provide development support. Funding models would be related to performance, rewarding those countries with good governance. 2019 and 2023 would see new events, perhaps in the format of inter-continental cups, but importantly competitions with context, to give value to the games and engage television audiences. Collier highlighted that income ultimately dictates the extent to which the RLIF can expand.

Work remains to be done with other sporting federations, the Collier was pleased to report that direct involvement in the situation in the United Arab Emirates had meant that the situation was moving forward much more positively than it first seemed.

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Closing, Collier remarked that if the building blocks can be put in place, the future would be positive for international rugby league.

Responding to questions, Collier noted the importance of Lions tours, and pointed to the importance of an eight-year calendar, to give players a period of rest, and avoid the cancellation of tours in the future. The plan is to reintroduce Lions tours, as part of a more active calendar, as they are games with context, which supporters can buy into, and are easier to promote.

Asked about the issue of eligibility, Collier commented that this was an area misunderstood by many. There are different rules for different competition, which can be different to internationals. Acknowledging that this is an issue, Collier pointed out that there are more critical issues to be addressed first.

On the potential for televised Super League to be made available to RLEF development areas outside of current broadcast areas, Collier said he fully backed expansion, and hoped that the international game would also receive broader television coverage.

On the expansion of the RLIF, Collier pointed to support from others, such as the RFL, NRL and RLEF, but acknowledged that a plan has to be in place before “in house” expansion. The RLEF is independent but funded by the RLIF and RFL, whilst the development manager in Asia-Pacific is likewise funded by the RLIF and NRL. Collier commented that the Americas need structure, as they are an area of substantial growth at present.

Ralph Rimmer, on behalf of the RFL, emphasised how exciting Collier’s appointment had been. He hoped that the building blocks for a strong international game can be put into place.

The Chairman thanked Collier, before closing the meeting.

**Meeting closed at 1926**

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