



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 25 October 2011

Committee Room Thirteen

Present

Greg Mulholland (in the Chair); Lord Hoyle; James Clappison MP; David Mowat MP; Jason McCartney MP; Derek Twigg MP; Paul Burstow MP

In Attendance

Mark Ramsdale (Secretariat); Spen Allyson (BARLA); Stuart Prior (BARLA); Ernie Benbow (State of Mind); Sue Henry (NHS NW/State of Mind); Philip Cooper (State of Mind); Terry O'Connor (State of Mind); Brian Carney (State of Mind); Malcolm Rae (State of Mind); David Gent (RFL); Maurice Oldroyd (no affiliation); Robert Daniel (Jason McCartney's office)

Apologies

Anne McGuire MP; Dave Watts MP; Julie Hilling MP; Therese Coffey MP; Ian Lucas MP; Simon Reevel MP; Lindsay Hoyle MP; Yvonne Fovargue MP; Ikram Butt (Leeds Rugby Foundation); Ken Edwards (no affiliation); Dan Steel (RFL)

Introduction

Chairing the meeting, Greg Mulholland explained the meeting would effectively be in two parts. Firstly, an ordinary meeting of the Rugby League Group, followed by a joint meeting of the Rugby League Group with the Mental Health Group during the presentation section of the meeting.

With such an important topic being presented – the State of Mind programme – there had been discussion that the format of the meeting could have been altered but with a Minister attending, the decision was taken to continue as planned. A further event/meeting would therefore be investigated.

Action: Secretariat & Chairman to discuss future event or meeting on State of Mind.

Minutes

The minutes of the previous ordinary meeting were accepted as a true and accurate recorded.

Matters Arising

Following the Group's campaign to see a statue erected at Wembley Stadium, the Group facilitated a meeting over the summer between Wembley and the RFL at which it was agreed that such a statue could be installed.

Discussions had taken place between the secretariat of the Group and the RFU (secretariat to the Rugby Union Group) regarding a joint meeting as suggested at the previous meeting. The Group agreed that there would need to be clear what such a meeting would achieve and should not be used to facilitate a meeting of the two governing bodies.

Action: Secretariat & Chairman to discuss with counterparts in the Rugby Union Group.

The Chairman asked if the RFL might add coverage of the Group's activities to their cuttings service provision.

Action: Secretariat to place formal request with RFL.

Correspondence

Ray French MBE wrote to the Group stressing the urgent nature of the BBC consultation on local radio. This was taken during the next item.



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Main Discussion: BBC Local Radio

The BBC launched its consultation on local radio (<http://consultations.external.bbc.co.uk/bbc/localradio>), closing 21st December 2011.

The Group felt that cuts to local radio would have significant impact on rugby league and this was a hugely important issue.

It was agreed that the Group would respond to the consultation and that the November meeting would be used to inform the Group's response. Richard Lewis was due to attend the November meeting; the Group agreed that as the issue was both timely and important, that it should be the meeting's focus. Lewis' input would be most welcomed should he remain available to attend.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with Richard Lewis to either re-arrange attendance for a future Group meeting or ask if he would be willing to take part in the discussions.

There was concern that rugby league was disproportionality effected. As part of the Group's response, a detailed analysis of consultation was required.

Action: Secretariat to place formal request with RFL to provide impact analysis.

Any Other Business

Over the summer, the Chairman met with Richard Lewis and Nigel Wood from the RFL. A paper, had been prepared based on those discussions and other activities that have taken place over the summer months.

Action: Secretariat to circulate paper for discussion.

Trophies & Recognition of winners

It was felt that there could be more suitable reward and recognition for players that win competitions, particularly when comparing the spectacle of the grand final to England's world cup performance in rugby union.

Action: Chairman to write to the RFL seeking more appropriate reward and recognition for players

Broken Time play

A programme from the play Broken Time, covering the birth of rugby league was presented.

Action: Secretariat to make available to Members.

York Community Pride Award

BARLA Chairman Spen Allison was awarded the York Community Pride Person of the Year Award. The award, sponsored by Benenden Health was recognised Allison's work in rugby league. The Group congratulated Allison and felt it was suitable recognition of his long-standing service to the sport.

Action: Secretariat to write to be Benenden Health, applauding the choice of Spen Allison and ask if they may wish to be involved with the Group.

State of Mind Presentation

On behalf of the Rugby League Group and the Mental Health Group, Rugby League Group Chair Greg Mulholland welcomed the State of Mind programme to Parliament and invited them to present to the Groups.



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The State of Mind team presented the programme's history, scope and remit before discussing the work undertaken and achievements made to date. The scale and difficulty in raising and challenging the perception of mental health issues was made clear: one in four people suffer with mental health problems at some point in their lives with men three times more likely to commit suicide than women. Men are less likely to access available health services to help or treat any mental health problems.

The Super League had supported the plan to have a second designated round in the season dedicated to State of Mind and was working to secure additional funding to promote the campaign.

The programme immediately became a respected brand and had the potential to expand, increase income and promotion of issues. However, it was felt that the programme was at a tipping point between growth and expansion versus the level of resourcing. There was no established source of income for the programme and there was recognition that the rugby league message might be diluted if shared with other sports in order to generate income.

Former international players Brian Carney and Terry O'Connor provided their own experiences as professional athletes, personally and from others involved in the sport. Both spoke about colleague and friend Terry Newton and his untimely passing and their involvement in State of Mind.

Carney felt it was important to have representation in Westminster, saying words of encouragement from Parliament lifts players. He spoke about the level of mental health issues. He felt the best way to challenge peoples' perception was to remove any stigma attached to mental health problems. Through State of Mind and Super League round 27, the perception of mental health problems was challenged for two consecutive days on television, with players, coaches and others involved in rugby league talking about their experiences and offering their support to the wider rugby league community.

O'Connor spoke about the need for rugby league players to not show any outward signs of injury or distress, including mentally or emotionally. He continued, saying players were role models for children in particular and that, with rugby league teaching values to children and adult supporters, it has a role to play in demonstrating to individuals and communities that mental health issues affect even the most hardened players and that people should not be concerned to confront mental health issues.

Former Defence Minister Derek Twigg raised the work of the Defence Medical Services and suggested there could be a useful collaboration with State of Mind should they want to take forward.

Health Minister Paul Burstow thanked the Group for his invitation to the meeting and the opportunity to say a few words. He spoke of the need to change the change the perception of mental health issues and develop better programmes to support people and communities, especially young people and those from BME groups.

He discussed the announcement made earlier on the day of £32m to extend services and therapies for young people. He was delighted that this had received a wide range of support.

He felt the State of Mind programme in rugby league was an example to all other sports.

The Chairman thanked State of Mind for attending. He outlined how touched the rugby league community and the Group were in the work they do and asked the programme to remain in contact with the Group so it could support.