

# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012

Committee Room 13



## Present

Lord Holye (in the Chair); Lord Smith of Leigh; Jason McCartney MP; Derek Twigg MP

## In Attendance

Mark Ramsdale (Secretariat); Spen Allison (BARLA); Maurice Oldroyd (no affiliation); Anton Muszanskyj (no affiliation)

## Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Greg Mulholland MP  
James Clappison MP  
Yvonne Fovargue MP  
Lindsay Hoyle MP  
Karl McCartney MP  
Barry Sheerman MP  
Simon Reevell MP  
Dave Watts MP  
David Amess MP

David Hinchliffe (Hon Life Member)  
Niel Wood (RFL)  
David Gent (RFL)  
Dan Steel (RFL)  
Ikram Butt (no affiliation)

## Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

## Matters Arising

The Annual Dinner was considered to be a resounding success with many Members attending. As numbers attending resulted in the dinner being overcrowded, it was agreed that Members should attend based on their attendance at meetings and engagement with the Group throughout the preceding year.

## Group Activity Report

### Membership

The Secretariat raised on-going activities to raise membership numbers, such as the RFL writing to Members of Parliament with constituents selected for England squads, and letters to clubs that had achieved the RFL's Clubmark awards. Meeting dates were sent well in advance and were no longer fixed to the final Tuesday of the month to enable more members to attend.

The Chairman sought ideas for the Group to both grow Parliamentary membership and increase attendance at meetings. Further, it was noted that the 2013 World Cup and the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Group provided opportunity to grow Membership.

**Action: Secretariat to circulate full Membership list**

**Action: Members to raise Membership with Parliamentary colleagues**

### RLIF Board Visit

The Board of the RLIF visited Parliament on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011; the Chairman hosted the delegation and asked a Question to the Sports Minister who were present in Strangers' Gallery.

[Secretariat's Note:

Greg Mulholland's Question can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/apprlg-FourNationsRLIFPO> ;

The press release and pictures of the visit can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/apprlg-RLIFvisit>]

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## Rugby League International Player of the Year Awards

The Chairman and Secretariat attended the Rugby League International Player of the Year Awards on 3<sup>rd</sup> November at the Tower of London. On behalf of the Chairman, the Secretariat thanked the RLIF and RFL for the invitation to the event, which was a tremendous success.

## BBC Local Radio

BBC Trust Chairman Lord Patten announced that he had instructed the BBC to review its proposals for BBC Local Radio. In his announcement, he cited the response of the rugby league community as being integral to his decision.

The Secretariat explained that with the RFL and Group had written to Lord Patten to ask how best to follow up to provide a pragmatic solution. A meeting with senior BBC executives had been organised for the Group in March, alongside a visit to Media City and the Rugby League World Cup offices in Salford.

**Action: Secretariat to provide details to Group Members and invite.**

## **Political Animals Report**

The Secretariat explained that the Political Animals backer had pulled out of its agreement to sponsor the club, leaving the club with significant debt. Alternate sources of sponsorship were being sought.

## **Guest Speaker: Neville Smith, Sky Sports' Rugby League Executive Director**

Lord Hoyle spoke of the Group's appreciation of Sky Sports' work in rugby league and invited Neville Smith to speak.

Smith congratulated the Group on its work with the BBC and Local Radio services before extending an open invitation to Members of the Group to visit one of the Sky Sports' rugby league outside broadcasts.

**Action: Secretariat to liaise and take forward with Members.**

Smith provided a personal history in the game, including that he was a referee by the age of twelve. He worked as a cameraman for ten years in Australia before travelling and arriving in Britain 25 years ago and was asked to produce a documentary on Australian players in the UK.

With the timing right, Smith took his opportunity, becoming assistant producer with BSkyB before being made Executive Producer in 1990.

Derek Twigg congratulated Sky Sport's coverage of sport in general, calling it fantastic, and asked how this was reflected in viewing figures.

Providing data, Smith felt that the reason for rugby league's high relative viewing figures was due to the innovative approach and commitment to delivering an outstanding package. He discussed *Super League Full Time* which has become one of the world's top-ten sportscasts and after two years on the internet alone, was now broadcast on the network proper and had similarly taken off with fans. In addition, the new show *Super League Supermen* had been well received and generated high numbers of viewers.

Smith was asked about the arrangement with Super League, which is to cover two per weekend, one of which will likely be on a Friday. Games may take place within a certain window of time. The rights fee goes to the Super League, which decides how this should be distributed.

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When asked about promotion and relegation to and from Super League, Smith said he was a fan of the licencing system and whilst not criticising, he never understood the culture that celebrates coming third last.

When asked about the Margin Meter, Smith explained that pundit Phil Clarke was both a student of statistics and of the game. Alongside Professor Bill Gerard of Huddersfield University, Clarke worked with the RFL to create the meter to measure the momentum of the match. Whilst there had been some criticism after its first outing, its continued development showed the commitment of the rugby league team at Sky Sports to innovation. The system initially suffered from intermittent technical issues but was now working. Smith felt it better to deal with criticism and persist until it worked or until it might fail before admitting defeat.

Lord Hoyle closed the meeting, thanking Smith for attending and reiterating how much the Group appreciated Sky Sports' coverage.

Closed 1902.

DRAFT