

All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 12th June 2012

Room W1, Westminster Hall



Present

Greg Mulholland MP (Chairman), Lord Hoyle (Vice-Chairman), Jason McCartney MP, Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, Mark Pawsey MP

In Attendance

Mark Ramsdale (Secretariat); Sarah Williams (RFL), Maurice Oldroyd (no affiliation).

Private Session

The Secretariat briefed Members on the application of South Africa Rugby League to become a nationally-recognised sport in the country. SARL had been instructed to apply to become a part of South Africa Rugby Union. The Chairman had previously written a letter of support to the President of SARL. Members expressed bemusement as to why this should be the case and sought to raise the issue more widely.

Actions: Letter to be sent to politicians world-wide explaining situation and asking for additional support; Secretariat to report back at the next meeting.

[Secretariat Note: Letter dispatched to Chairman of the Parliamentary South Africa Group; Group Member Sir Tony Cunningham wrote to the President of SARL as Chairman of the Parliamentary Rugby Union Group].

Public Session

The Chairman welcomed Rugby MP Mark Pawsey to his first meeting, saying how important it was that the MP representing the constituency that lends its name to the sport was now a Member of the Group.

Pawsey thanked the Chairman for his welcome at the meeting in and in a letter and highlighting the work the two codes do together.

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

James Clappison MP
Yvonne Fovargue MP
Lindsay Hoyle MP
Simon Reeve MP
Shaun Woodward MP

David Hinchliffe (Hon Life Member)
David Gent (RFL)
Dan Steel (RFL)
Anton Muszanskyj (no affiliation)
Ikram Butt (no affiliation)

Minutes of the previous meeting

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

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

Correspondence

The Chairman received a letter of thanks from former RFL Chairman Richard Lewis. The Chairman had written to thank Lewis for his work in the sport and wish him continued success in his new role as Chief Executive of the All-England Club.

Group Activity Report

The Secretariat provided a verbal report on support received from the RFL and outlined the visit of Officers to the BBC's Media City to tour the facilities and discuss with executives the BBC's proposals for local radio service provision.

All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 12th June 2012

Room W1, Westminster Hall



Actions: Secretariat to provide update to the Group at the next meeting after consulting RFL; Political Animals to challenge the BBC to a game – Nicky Campbell to be invited to play.

The Secretariat reported the success of the Rugby League World Cup Reception held on the Terrace on May 2nd. The Chairman highlighted that the timing of the event –immediately before local elections – had been raised during the planning stages, but due to limited availability of the international delegation, he agreed to sponsor but would be absent. This had caused some confusion with Members, but had been fed back and dealt with the request to consider future events much further in advance,

The Secretariat had corresponded with Bradford Bulls, offering support from the Group. The Chairman wrote to the Chairman of RBS asking if the bank could extend the Bulls' overdraft facility period. A letter received made clear that RBS would be happy to consider the extension, and with the express permission of the Bulls, it would take joint meetings. The Secretariat passed to the Bulls' CEO.

Actions: Group to write letters of support to Bradford Bulls, the RFL and Bradford City Council; Secretariat to keep in close contact with Bulls' MP Gerry Sutcliffe and the RFL.

The Secretariat summarised all mentions of rugby league within Parliament since the last meeting.

Jason McCartney spoke of the work of Underbank Rangers, recognition of which came in the form of a Big Lottery Fund cheque of £45,000 which would go to the club to create facilities for female and disabled players. This was welcomed by the Group, and congratulated McCartney on his work to promote the sport and the club.

The Secretariat listed the players shortlisted to be the subject for the statue at Wembley Stadium, causing further debate.

[Secretariat's note: the Group had provided a shortlist to the RFL as one of the selection panels].

Future Activities

The Secretariat presented suggestions for future events.

The Secretariat informed the Group of the new rugby league page and increased coverage in the Evening Standard, which was warmly received.

Action: A letter to be sent to the Evening Standard Sport Editors welcoming the action taken and inviting them to attend a meeting of Sport Editors to discuss who they view the sport.

Political Animals Report

The Secretariat provided an update on the Political Animals RLFC. The Group noted that it was looking forward to the debut of Andy Burnham.

Action: Letter to Evening Standard to include challenge of a game.

Super League licensing/promotion and relegation

The Chairman welcomed Andy Burnham, who wanted to raise the issue of Super League licensing, and promotion and relegation within rugby league.

Burnham thanked the Chairman and apologised to the Group for what his "freelancing work" on this issue. He outlined the opportunity he saw arising from Richard Lewis' departure to consider the structure of the

All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 12th June 2012

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game. Through his website, Burnham had presented an open letter to be sent to the incoming RFL Chairman when appointed. The letter was collecting signatures, which stood at around 800 that evening.

Burnham advocated the return to a system of promotion and relegation, citing Leigh RLFC in his constituency has SL standard ground. He noted that every sport has a level based on the structure below, which provides financial incentive for people to get involved in the sport.

Burnham praised the RFL for embracing the debate; he had appeared with Nathan Clarke on a number of radio programmes to discuss.

Members discussed alternatives, and it was decided that whilst it was not for the Group to advocate a particular model, the Group could facilitate a public debate on the issue.

Actions: Secretariat to prepare a debate after summer recess; Secretariat to request from the RFL the process for selecting the new RFL Chairman.

AOB

None provided.

Main Presentation

The Chairman welcomed Sarah Williams from the RFL, to present the work of the sport's governing in challenging racism and promoting inclusivity.

Williams showed the RFL's TackleIT! video and delivered a presentation on the RFL's work.

[Secretariat's note: both are available at www.apprlg.org.uk/apprlg/Meetings/Inclusivity/Racism].

Williams made clear that the RFL's position on all forms of discrimination is part of its core values, and that the work the sport does in challenging discrimination and welcoming people is not new, particularly regarding in race and on BME inclusion. She noted that this is not just a moral argument, as it also makes business sense to be inclusive.

Reflecting all society, there had been occasional issues. These were taken very seriously by the RFL with clubs banned from leagues or fined for failure to respond appropriately. Noting innovations like a mobile phone number for people to report issues, Williams noted that inactivity was not an option. The RFL adopted the approach of delivering sanctions for unacceptable behaviour, as well as providing education.

A free national resource for schools was being prepared as a way of reaching curriculum requirements for citizenship and online surveys and courses were available.

Opening discussion, the Chairman thanked Williams and paid tribute to her and the RFL's work. He noted the Group supports the same aims. It was recognised that rugby league is outstanding at self-policing. There was a big and noticeable difference in cultures between football and rugby league. The Respect programme had played a massive part and all should be congratulated in rugby league.

Andy Burnham echoed the Chairman's comments and raised the Tongan Rugby League World Cup team who were to use Leigh as a base. He asked if activities like the Tongan players going to local schools to teach the Haka had been considered. Williams had been part of the team involved in selection host cities and that as part of their selection; they had to demonstrate their commitment to a range of issues.

Concluding, the Chairman raised issues that had appeared in amateur rugby league in white, working class areas and asked what had been done to break down barriers surrounding faith. Williams said the RFL do not

All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting 12th June 2012

Room W1, Westminster Hall



pretended issues don't remain and that one issue to overcome around faith was to ensure that different faiths saw their local rugby league was open to all , was their own club as much as anyone else and the sport was not just for young white males.

The Chairman thanked Williams for her time, enthusiasm and achievements and asked her to continue to keep the Group informed.

Meeting concluded at 1930.