



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013 Committee Room 13

Meeting Commenced at 1800.

## In attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Lord Hoyle; Lord Smith of Leigh

**Group Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale

**Organisational Associate Members:** Colin Ward (Pro-Build Assist Ltd); Eric Czerwionka (Pro-Build Assist Ltd); Andy Habbersh (ActionDry); Niel Wood (RFL); Spen Allison (BARLA); David Gent (RFL);

**Individual Associate Members (no affiliation):** Barrie Smith; Irene Sommeling; David Ramage; Jeff Charlton; Mark Billyard

**Non-Members:** Hazel McCluskey (Sport England); Kate Turner (Sport England)

## Apologies

Lord Prescott; Lord Grantchester; Lindsay Hoyle; Yvonne Fovargue MP; Dave Watts MP; Ed Balls MP; Mark Pawsey MP; Thomas Docherty MP; Simon Danczuk MP; Mary Creagh MP; Simon Reeve MP; David Hinchliffe; Anton Muszanskyj; Phil Hodgson; Stephen Johnson; Gary Brook; Daniel Bunney; Paul Cypher; Maurice Oldroyd; Ikram Butt.

## New Associate Members

The Chairman welcomed William Hill and ActionDry as new Organisational Associate Members. William Hill became an Associate Member in becoming a supporter of the Group. Action Dry provided a donation to the Group.

The Chairman welcomed new Associate Members Geoff Charlton, David Ramage, and Irene Sommeling, noting that Ms Sommeling became the Group's first overseas Associate Member.

## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were considered an accurate record, save for a missing apology.

*[Secretariat's note: The apology has been updated in the minutes]*

## Matters Arising

- The Secretariat informed the Group that it is believed that the Group's Super League Player of the year was instigated in 2008. The Secretariat will compile a list of those who had received the award.
- The Secretariat informed the Group that steps were being taken to consolidate Group records.
- England Wheelchair Rugby League will present to the Group in March.
- Howard of Effingham School will meet the Group in April.
- A copy of the bid by the RFL to Sport England has been received and is available to Members on request.
- A meeting is being sought between Cabinet Office officials, the Chairman and the RFL regarding honours.
- Meeting to be arranged with the Cabinet Office for the Chairman and the RFL.

## Ongoing

The Secretariat raised the on-going activities:

- Inclusivity event
- South Africa Rugby League and DCMS regarding the South African Government position on rugby league;



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- Women & Girls in Sport Parliamentary Group joint event; and
- The RFL regarding a memorial at the National Arboretum honouring rugby league playing and supporting servicemen and servicewomen.

## Correspondence

### Sent

- Letter to Geoff Lofthouse's daughter regarding the Annual Dinner
- Letter of condolence to the family of Mr Thomas Disken, BARLA Solicitor
- Letter of congratulations to new RFL Chairman Brian Barwick
- Letter to Maurice Oldroyd regarding a recent operation
- Notes of thanks were sent to the RFL, 1eague3 and Canada Rugby League on the Chairman's shortlisting for Sports Parliamentarian of the Year
- Correspondence between the Secretariat and Jason McCartney with Huddersfield Giants regarding overseas player visa issues
- Letter to Mark Harper seeking clarifying over government position on treatment of professional rugby league players when awarding visas in comparison to other sports
- Letter to Nigel Wood thanking the RFL for their continued support of the Annual Dinner, and specifically thanking Tracey Barr for her efforts

The Chairman noted his meeting with Brian Barwick at the World Club Challenge, and his agreement to meet the Group.

### Received

- Letter from Lord Lofthouse's daughter regarding the Group's Annual Dinner.
- Correspondence from Honourary Member David Hincliffe regarding the RBS Rugby Forces Programme.
- Letter of thanks from RFL Chairman Brian Barwick on his appointment and acceptance of offer to meet the Group.
- Correspondence through website from Mr Derek Halliwell regarding the player pathway programme.
- Correspondence through website and to the Chairman's office from Mr Derek Halliwell and Mr Thomas Todd regarding promotion and relegation.
- Correspondence from 1eagu3 regarding the meeting of the group's Chairman, Jon Wilkin, and the GMB Union to discuss how the two bodies might work together.
- Correspondence from the RFL regarding England Wheelchair Rugby League,
- Correspondence between the Secretariat and Jason McCartney with Huddersfield Giants regarding overseas player visa issues.
- Letters from William Hill introducing them, their work and extending an invitation to Members to visit William Hill outlets.

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary Activities

The Secretariat listed the number of references to rugby league in Parliament since the previous meeting.

The Chairman noted the high level of activity within the Group and by Members, believing it to be one of the most active in terms of frequency of meetings and on issues taken forward.

Noted previously, a visa issue had arisen since the last meeting for a professional player coming to play in the UK. In this instance the matter was dealt with but a Question was asked to the Home Secretary by Group Member Barry Shearman asking for steps to be taken to ensure that rugby league players were given fair consideration when applying for visas and work permits.



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The Chairman wrote to the Immigration Minister seeking clarification on the answer he provided to Mr Shearman's question as it appeared players from other sports found it easier to be awarded working visas. The Chairman reminded the Group that he, the Secretariat and the RFL met with the previous Immigration Minister, Home Office and UKBA Officials on the same matter.

#### **Annual Dinner**

The Chairman asked for feedback on the Annual Dinner. Members felt it was a success and thanked the Secretariat for his efforts. The Chairman noted the support of the RFL and that he had written to Nigel Wood thanking him and asking him to pass on his gratitude to Tracey Barr for her work.

The Chairman provided feedback that he had received that the event had focussed heavily on the past. He explained that the balance was correct as it was the Group's 25<sup>th</sup> year and there was a need to look at what he Group had achieved during its quarter century.

Lord Smith noted the Head Coach of Wales was seated at the Papua New Guinea Table.

#### **Associate Membership**

The Chairman put forward the suggestion that elected officials in the UK should be offered Associate Membership of the Group. This would enable the Group to reach a wider audience and ensure a greater number of players for the Political Animals. The means of disseminating the invitation were discussed.

**Action:** Secretariat to devise invitation process; Chairman to invite elected officials.

#### **Political Animals Report**

The Secretariat stated he was investigating a game in mid-April and an annual dinner and game in mid-May.

#### **Ties**

Members approved the Group tie with the addition of a reference to the Group's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

**Action:** Secretariat to take forward.

#### **AOB**

##### **RBS Rugby Force Programme**

The Secretariat summarised correspondence from Honourary Group Member David Hinchliffe regarding the RBS Rugby Force Programme which provides advice and financial support to "rugby (sic) clubs and their local communities".

It was felt that, given the RBS has with the rugby union Six Nations tournament, it was likely that the programme would apply only rugby union clubs, but as it was not clear, Members agreed the Group should write to the Chairman of RBS seeking clarification, particularly as the taxpayer had substantial involvement in the bank and rugby league served some of the UK's least advantaged communities.

**Action:** Chairman to write to Chairman of RBS.

##### **BARLA 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Spenn Allison raised the upcoming 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BARLA.



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The Chairman congratulated BARLA on its work in its 40 years and its longstanding support of the Parliamentary Group.

Meeting closed at 1837.

## **Presentation: Review of Four Seasons & Sport England Funding Award**

**David Gent, RFL Director of Participation and Strategic Partnerships**

The Chairman welcomed David Gent from the RFL to update the Group on the Four Seasons programme and the outcomes of the recent round of Sport England funding.

The growth in participation in rugby league in all its forms was presented; evidenced by record levels of registered players. This ran contrary to the decrease in participation based on Sport England's Active People measure which recorded frequency and sustained levels of participation rather than absolute figures of participation. The RFL have, along with other governing bodies of sport, been working to ensure the Active People measure is more pragmatic and it has altered the way players take part in the sport.

The RFL has implemented a number of changes over the previous 18 months to create a single integrated whole game solution. Most welcomed was the way different elements of the sport worked together to create an integrated calendar with a single set of rules. In creating this integrated structure, rugby league was ahead of other sports.

The Four Seasons programme allowed for a significant switch in terms of when players take to the field with the vast majority preferring to play during a summer-based season.

Additionally, there remains great potential for growth, specifically in the higher and further education sectors which would impact on participation numbers.

Gent explained Sport England's 2013-2017 funding award and how that money was to be spent. In terms of the top ten funded sports, rugby league was placed 8<sup>th</sup> with an award of £17.5m. He noted, however, that were the award made on the basis of active people alone, rugby league would be positioned 23<sup>rd</sup>. The result therefore can be considered positive.

This difference demonstrated the high cost per participant in the sport; something Sport England wants to be reduced by 2017. It was felt that rugby league would always be an expensive sport, but Sport England recognised the steps being taken to reduce the per-player cost, develop the game through central restructuring, creating a stronger volunteer community and working closely with the Super League club foundations.

When opened to questions, Gent explained the need for more children to play the game after the age of 14. In schools, the Champions Schools competition was a well-valued and viable product. The RFL was working with schools to engage with nearby clubs and was resurrecting local school leagues. There was a clear plan, but there was a need for the financial input if all activities were to be achieved and sponsors were being sought.

Examples were given of steps being taken to develop the game outside of traditional rugby league areas, specifically of the London-based Newham Dockers' partnership with the Hard Rock Café to focus on local connections.

**Action:** Secretariat to secure numbers of participants broken down by region.



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Discussion focussed on the definition of Active People. Hazel McCluskey and Kate Turner of Sport England provided discussed the scale and format of the survey and explained the difference between participation and registration. Gent explained where money from the Sport England funding award was channelled. The majority is focused on the majority of players and money is provided to all forms of the sport.

**Action:** Secretariat to liaise with Sport England and the RFL to seek information on Active People.

When questioned about sponsorship for Super League and the Challenge Cup, Gent explained that sponsors require a return on their investment and there is a very competitive national and international market. He felt there are challenges for all sports but rugby league and its competitions are sound; it would not take a lot to make a difference, and the RFL was right to focus on the future.

Gent gave the example of London Skolars, Hemel Stags, Oxford Rugby League and Gloucester All Golds who would were working together to take advantage of combined resourcing and potential group funding. Building on that, clubs in the south were working close with clubs in the north to share best practice and explore ideas.

**Action:** Secretariat to invite Clubs to speak at future meetings.

The Chairman thanked David Gent for his presentation and thanked Hazel McCluskey and Kate Turner for their attendance and input.

The presentation concluded at 1914