



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

19th March 2013 Committee Room 17

Meeting Commenced 1845

[Secretariat's Note: The meeting took place after the presentation but is presented in the usual format].

In attendance

Members: Greg Mulholland (in the Chair) MP; Lord Smith of Leigh; Gerry Sutcliffe MP; Simon Reeve MP

Group Secretariat: Mark Ramsdale

Organisational Associate Members: Niel Wood (RFL); Spen Allison (BARLA)

Individual Associate Members (no affiliation): Mark Billyard; Dave Ramage;

Non-Members: Shane Birkett; Sean McGachie; Mark Broome; James Conisbee; David Ashby; Paul Stroud; Ann Godwin; Charles Thornton; Thomas McGachie; Tom Broome; Toby Conisbee; Jordan Bond; Joel Stroud; Harrison Godwin (All Howard of Effingham School).

Apologies

James Clappison MP; Lindsay Hoyle MP; Mark Pawsey MP; Karl McCartney MP; David Hinchliffe; Derek Twigg; Bob Walter MP; Nigel Wood; Gary Brook; Barrie Smith; Anton Muszanskyj; Andy Habbershaw; Bob Walter; Mike MacDonald; Alex Mitchell; Gavin Willacy; Colin Ward; Paul Cypher; Iain McIlwee; Hazel McCluskey; Eric Czerwionka; Maurice Oldroyd

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were considered an accurate record.

Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised the on-going activities:

- Visit to see England Wheelchair games
- Investigating various activities relating to wheelchair rugby league, including Members being made aware of local clubs, attending games and a Political Animals game.
- Compilation of the complete list of the Super League Player of the year.
- Consolidation of Group records.
- Preparation of the process for contacting local politicians regarding Associate Membership of the Group.
- Seeking of information on Sport England's Active People measure, including level of rugby league participation broken down by region.
- Investigation into inclusivity event
- Investigation into Women & Girls in Sport Parliamentary Group joint event;
- Contact with SARL regarding the South African Government position on rugby league; and
- A memorial at the National Arboretum honouring rugby league playing and supporting servicemen and servicewomen.
- Signed bottle of House of Commons Whisky for player Ryan Glynn. Simon Reeve provided and update.

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Correspondence

Sent

- Letter to Associate Members regarding Associate Membership and Group Constitution

Received

- A note from the family of Lord Lofthouse regarding a memorial service to be held on 8th June 2013 at St. Giles Church in Pontefract.
- A note from DCMS regarding Hugh Robertson's support of SARL's aims to recognise rugby league as an independent sport in South Africa.
- Communication with the Serbian and the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Parliamentary Groups regarding the first official game of rugby league having been played
- From Eric Czweronkia regarding Associate Membership and Group Constitution

Pending

- Letter to Sheffield Hallam Vice Chancellor research supplied to the BBC for a piece on finances of Super League clubs
- Communication with the Serbian and the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Parliamentary Groups regarding the first official game of rugby league having been played there

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary

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

Chairman's Visit to RLWC13 Event

The Chairman was invited to represent the Group at the Rugby League World Cup's 200-days-to-go event. Using twitter, he had ensured #RLWC2013 was trending in Leeds which helped deliver the positive messages around the tournament.

The Chairman sought to have a reception in Parliament before or shortly after the summer recess to support the tournament. As well as the Sports Minister, MPs from the Group and rugby league heartlands, as well as those outside would be invited. Celebrities and other well-known supporters could be invited.

England Manager Steve McNamara had been spending much time in London to promote the tournament and England's chances. It had been very well received by London-based media. The tournament team was working closely with the BBC now that the corporation had a stake in tournament.

It was noted that the French President was the only national political leader yet to have been visited by the World Cup.

Action: Secretariat to support visit of World Cup to the French President.

Honours Meeting with DCMS

The Chairman outlined a meeting that took place earlier the day with the Secretariat, Niel Wood of the RFL and officials from DCMS who had responsibility for Honours. He was pleased report the meeting was very useful, and

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opened a dialogue and provided a better focus. Niel Wood thanked the Group for arranging the meeting; reiterating how useful it has been, particularly as a means to understand the process from the DCMS perspective. It was felt that officials were very supportive and helpful.

English National Anthem

Raising in a personal capacity, the Chairman outlined his position on English sporting teams singing God Save the Queen as their national anthem; noting that Wales and Scotland both use a distinct anthem to represent their countries, and God Save the Queen when a Great Britain side was taking part. He felt the Rugby League World Cup 2012 provided the opportunity to break with the tradition and generate support and coverage for the tournament – the debate itself generating publicity for the tournament. Further, he felt that if the RFL took the decision to use a distinct English national anthem, other sports governing bodies would follow suit.

Reiterating this was a personal position and not one of the Group, Mulholland would write to the CEO of the RFL outlining his case and begin a petition.

Associate Membership & Constitution

On behalf of the Group, the Secretariat raised letters that had been sent from the Chairman to all Associate Members, asking them to reflect on the Group's constitution, to which all had agreed to adhere.

The Chairman reiterated points made about the propriety of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, and that there was a review of Group's taking place. It was important for the Group to abide by Parliamentary Rules and the Rugby League Group's constitution which had been designed to ensure Members and Associate Members knew their rights, duties and privileges.

The Chairman made clear that the Group felt Associate Members were valued and an important part of the Rugby League Group, and that the Group wanted to expand Associate Membership.

AOB

BARLA Chairman

The Group recognised that Spen Allison would stand down as BARLA Chairman in June, a position held for many years. The Group thanked Allison for his work in the community game over many years of service and wished him many congratulations on his retirement.

In response, Allison thanked the Group for its work, noted how much he had enjoyed being part of the Group, and that he would continue to be involved both in BARLA, and in the Group, albeit in a different capacity.

Group Member and Leader of Wigan Council, Lord Smith, raised his meeting with RFL Chairman, Brian Barwick at the recent FA Cup Final. They discussed Barwick's attendance at a Group meeting. The Secretariat noted correspondence with Barwick's office and that it was hoped he would attend meeting soon.

[Secretariat's note: Brian Barwick will attend the July 2013 Group meeting]

The meeting concluded at 1919

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Presentation: Howard of Effingham School

Commenced at 1800

The Chairman welcomed players, staff, volunteers and parents from the Howard of Effingham School; rugby league's year seven National Schools champions. He congratulated them on their victory in the final which placed the school – as the first southern school to win the tournament – in the annals of rugby league history and was an outstanding game that enthralled the crowd as a curtain raiser to the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley.

P.E. Master, Shane Birkett, presented before players took questions.

The school has a tradition of playing rugby union at a good level and has links with local clubs. London Rugby League and London Broncos offered the opportunity to continue playing rugby year-round albeit in a different format. With that support, and by learning through playing, the team progressed and developed skills at each stage and in each game. Players absorbed the referee's comments during matches, and listened to opposition and how they played the game. Staff constantly researched the game and put things in place.

The school has been in rugby union and football finals and has the pedigree and precedent of playing at the highest school levels but faced a different sort of opposition in rugby league.

Taking the Group through some of the games, the team were almost knocked out during the Surrey final but rallied and found themselves part of the national competition facing sides from Wales and the north of England, providing tough games, mentally and physically. In the semi-final at Leeds, the school came back from 10-nil down to beat St Helens' St Cuthberts with 20 unanswered points.

The team faced Wakefield's Castleford High School at Wembley Stadium as a curtain raiser to the Challenge Cup Final. They started well, but Castleford came back to ensure the game was very close as it drew to a close. The team dug deep, remembered their training and through some spectacular efforts against an experienced side, secured a victory by two points – 24 to 22.

Since winning the tournament, the school received many plaudits, including winning local sports team of the year and Surrey sports team of the year. They had appeared on Sky and the BBC and received a training session from former Great Britain and England Captain Jamie Peacock OBE, who enjoyed himself so much, he wanted to stay.

When asked about playing at Wembley Stadium, players said it was something never to be forgotten; but that it took a long time to sink in that they were playing in front of friends and family in a national stadium. In winning, players felt they could do anything they worked hard at, particularly coming to a new game that seemed alien.

Players spoke of how they got started in the game, through links with London Broncos and London Rugby League, feeling both the timing and the way they were perfect. They particularly enjoyed the chance to cover more ground and gain territory in attack, as well as the need to have a lot of awareness off the ball.

They were going to continue in the game and Members hoped to see players playing in Super League and the England national side, particularly in future World Cups.

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman thanked those presenting for speaking to the Group and for their great presentation. It was hoped they would continue playing the game, and develop a lifelong passion and friendship with rugby league and the rugby league family.

Concluded at 1836.

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