



All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

Ordinary Meeting Minutes

27th January 2015 Committee Room 19

Meeting commenced 1806

In Attendance

Members: Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Karl Turner MP; Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP; Lord Thomas of Gresford; Rt Hon Lord Prescott; Lord Smith of Leigh

Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation): Maurice Oldroyd; Spen Allison;

Organisational Associate Members: Mike Smith (Hull KR); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Alex Mitchell (Chicago Stockyarders);

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Gary Slater; Ron Knox; Judi Knox; Stephen Johnson; Richard Jones

Other: Helen Slater; Ashley Brown

Secretariat: Mark Ramsdale

Welcome

Lindsay Hoyle took the Chair and welcomed new club, organisation and individual Associate Members:

- Leeds Rhinos
- Mark Wynn
- Hull KR
- Bramley Buffaloes
- Rugby Oldham (the first supporters trust to join)
- Warrington Wolves
- Huddersfield Giants
- Chicago Stockyarders (the first international club to join)
- Gary Slater
- Steve Evans (former GB and England international)
- Judi Knox
- Ron Knox

Apologies

Members: James Clappison MP; Lisa Nandy MP; Gerry Sutcliffe MP; Karl McCartney MP; Simon Reeve MP; Hazel Blears MP; Derek Twigg MP

Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation): Neil Turner; David Hinchliffe; Sally Bolton OBE

Organisational Associate Members: Nigel Wood, Ralph Rimmer, David Gent (RFL); Tony Colquhoun, Callum Irving, Ade Smith (Oxford RL); Steven Broomhead (Warrington Wolves); Mike Featherstone (Chicago Stockyarders);

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Iain McIlwee; Ken Edwards; Martin Coyd OBE; David Ballheimer

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous Group meeting were considered an accurate account.

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Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised the following on-going activities not covered by the meeting's agenda:

- The Secretariat has spoken with Professor Tony Collins. He has the Group's archive up to 2006, donated by David Hinchliffe. The Secretariat will meet Professor Collins to discuss activities around the 120th Anniversary of rugby league.
- After speaking with Bill Arthur regarding Prostate Cancer UK, the Secretariat has Pin badges from the charity which are available to Members. Additional options for PC UK and the Group are in discussion.
- The Secretariat has taken forward the recommendation of the Group that Sam Burgess receives an honour for services to rugby league.
- An update on rugby league statue at Wembley was circulated to officers and made available to Members.
- An informal request has been sent to the LGA for contact details of councillors regarding Associate Membership and playing for the Political Animals. A formal request will follow.
- Secretariat investigating measurement metrics for media coverage investigation.

The Chairman took the Chair.

Correspondence

- A letter was sent to The Private Secretary of Her Majesty The Queen regarding patronage of the game from the Royal Family.
- A formal invitation was made to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to speak to the Group to speak to the Group.
- Following a letter regarding disciplinary proceedings, an offer has been made for the RFL's Head of Legal, Karen Moorehouse to speak to the Group.

Action: The Group accepted the offer as a private meeting. Secretariat to arrange.

- Letters were sent to the Chairman of the RFL and Great Britain Armed Forces Rugby League commending the wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph on the eve of the Challenge Cup Final, and supporting similar future activities.
- Letter to the CEO of the RFL regarding a memorial at the National Arboretum.
It was felt momentum had been lost in taking a memorial forward and other sports – specifically rugby union - were ahead of rugby league in gaining a memorial. The Group was reminded of the statue at Wembley stadium and the role the Group took in ensuring that took place in timely fashion, and of the amount of financial support the RFL requested for the Rugby League World Cup 2013 in comparison to that requested by the RFU for the Rugby Union World Cup 2015.
Action: Secretariat to request update from RFL regarding the memorial

- Letters were sent to Super League clubs encouraging them to join the Group, resulting in four joining and requests for information from others.
- Additional requests for information were received from clubs and governing bodies. All have received a response and will be discussed with officers.
- Letters and emails were sent to lapsed Associate Members asking them to re-join the Group. Three have re-joined. [Secretariat's note: those who have not renewed have been removed as Associate Members]
- After the Secretariat introduced himself to those involved in the Rugby League International Federation. Emails have been received from: Russia, Phuket, Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Pakistan as well as NSW Disability

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Rugby League. All received a response. Hong Kong Rugby League speaking to the Group at its February meeting, and the Secretariat introduced NSW Disability Rugby League to the RFL.

- The Chairman received a tweet from Crigg All Blacks asking if there is any funding for coaching courses. The Chairman contacted their local MP; the Secretariat has passed on request to the RFL.
[Secretariat's note: The RFL has been in touch with the local MP to assist]
- Letter to the Guardian regarding the removal of rugby league on one of their online platforms.
- Dave Watts MP has made available to Members Peter Harvey's autobiography entitled "Redhead with Fire in His Boots"
- Request for historic Group information and a letter of support regarding an Honour. The Secretariat has provided the information and will draft a letter of support.

Action: Secretariat to draft a letter and circulate to officers for signature

- Email from Chairman of Brentwood Rugby League regarding a touring side visiting the north of England.
Action: Secretariat to circulate request to all Members.
- Emails were received regarding York City Council's change of mind to develop a new stadium, leaving York City Knights without a home.
Action: Secretariat to liaise with local MP and draft letter to those involved asking for ways in which the Group can help.
- Via Associate Member BARLA, Whinmoor Warriors have made the Group aware of a consultation by Leeds City Council reviewing community sports grounds, including their own.
- **Action: Letter of support to be sent.**

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary

The Chairman tabled a motion regarding the exclusion of Sam Burgess from the BBC Sports Personality of the Year shortlist.

During a motion in the House of Lords on taking note of the governance of sport, Lord Faulkner of Worcester raised the RFL's contact with Level Playing Field to conduct an audit of disabled access at professional grounds.

In the same debate, Lord Thomas of Gresford highlighted the need to address "a much more supportive approach with volunteers in running sports bodies and giving encouragement to them." He cited North Wales Crusaders, provides players to schools to encourage pupils to participate and encourage them to participate in sport.

Public

- Rugby league magazine 40-Twenty provided a feature on the Chairman and Secretariat.
- The Secretariat attended the Army Sports Awards on behalf of the Group.
- Press releases were sent out on:
 - The Group's support for the Boycott of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year

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- A release covering a brief summary of the Group in the current Parliament and the remaining meetings before the General Election.
- Five releases on new Associate Members: Bramley Buffaloes, Hull KR, Warrington Wolves, Huddersfield Giants, Rugby Oldham having joined the Group.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,346 followers on Twitter.

[Secretariat's note: the Group's twitter name is @UKParliamentRL]

Action: Letter to all MPs in which Associate Members reside.

Political Animals Report

The Political Animals are playing a Journalists team on Sunday 22 February, the afternoon of the World Club Challenge, at Wigan Warriors' training stadium.

Action: Secretariat to invite Members and Associate Members.

Action: Members to invite Councillors and Members of both Houses of Parliament.

Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner has been scheduled for 16 November 2015 in the Cholmondely Room and Lords Terrace. Secretariat is investigating costs and sourcing supporters.

AOB

Through the Secretariat, Yvonne Fovargue MP registered concern at Warrington Wolves' acceptance of sponsorship from an e-cigarette company and allowing e-cigarettes to be used in the ground. Whilst they are an unlicensed product, she considered acceptance of such sponsorship to be irresponsible and sending the wrong message to their supporters- particularly from a club that shares its ground with Health promotion initiatives. She hoped other clubs would take note of the backlash from fans and not consider such an agreement.

Lord Hoyle, Life President of Warrington Wolves, recognised this was a sore point and that it sends the wrong message. He noted other clubs had similar agreements in place.

The Secretariat would circulate information on a fundraising dinner for a statue of Billy Boston.

Declaring an interest, the Secretariat raised the Rugby League Varsity Match, taking place on Friday 6 March at the Honourable Artillery Company, including pre-match lunch with Shaun Edwards.

Hon Life Member Maurice Oldroyd presented various press clippings to the Group.

The Chairman reiterated the welcome to all Associate Members.

Action: Secretariat to invite Rugby Oldham to speak.

Main business concluded at 1832

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Presentation: Mike Smith, CEO of Hull KR

The Chairman welcomed Mike Smith from Hull KR.

Smith thanked the Chairman and the Group, saying how important it was to have such a group to raise the profile of, and support the game. He would take back to Super League as a body and see how best to engage with the Group.

Speaking to a presentation, Smith provided a personal history and his involvement in the club. He presented details about the number of clubs that had folded and decreasing participation in the area since he was a child. He felt the RFL should provide more money for community level rugby league; something he believed had been recognised and made possible through the security of Sky Sports' seven year agreement with the sport and the soon-to-be-announced Sky Try Programme.

[Secretariat's note: details were circulated to Members prior to and post-meeting and a meeting has been arranged with the programme's lead].

Opening questions, the Chairman recognised the decline in players in the Hull area, particularly as a stronghold of the game. He noted the ongoing political issue of children being less active and asked if there was a challenge from other sports, and what Smith thought could be done. Smith raised the relationship between schools and clubs, and the lack of teaching and funding at school level. Rugby league is not a sport that is taught or played at many schools.

Responding to a question on level of volunteers, Smith believed there is a need to create a safe atmosphere, and one where people get something back from their involvement. Hull KR received a positive response to the partnership liaison group created to engage with the likes of community coaches, or physiotherapists and others in the kind of areas in which the club works. People enjoyed the opportunity to mix with top players, coaches and staff and learn something from them. Safeguarding had been a problem. If a person was not prepared to do the checks, they had to be let go.

Lord Prescott discussed his first going to Hull in 1960s, when his experience had been in association football and boxing. He agreed that it is schools teaching that was important and he wondered what the experience was like of other local authorities.

Lord Smith of Leigh felt there were a lot of young people playing, citing Warrington Wolves and Wigan Warriors as the best clubs in his opinion. He felt there needed to be much more integration in the game and gave the example of the NRL's approach which appears to consider the game in a much broader way. He felt that all the objectives that local authorities want to achieve can be delivered through sport but the approach was too short term.

In discussion, it was felt the number playgrounds had declined and local authority facilities were too often closed or closed early.

The need for greater compensation to community clubs from the professional game was raised. Community-focussed funding for Super League clubs enters into foundations. In the case of Hull KR, it provides additional support where possible. Most community clubs are well run, failing due to lack of players. Smith explained the challenges with Sport England funding, which is based on participation. Specifically that players could get injured in a contact sport like rugby league would not count toward participation figures, reducing the money Sport England provided.

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On collaboration between Hull KR and Hull FC, Smith acknowledged they cross each other's patch but explained how they are trying to cut through any issues and work together to deliver rugby league. The club has partnerships with Newcastle Falcons and Halifax. Smith felt support should be filtered down from senior clubs. He was not a supporter of expansion of Super League in France, preferring of focus on the likes of clubs such as Halifax and Swinton.

Chairman of BARLA, Sue Taylor, explained the lack of progression of children on short courses at schools to local community clubs with support from professional players. With Hull KR and Hull FC, BARLA's Hull District used incentives to reward those involved during their engagement programmes. She noted the initial payment to a community club for a player turning professional is £100; a lot less than their value.

In closing Smith felt disappointed with some of the Super League clubs and would discuss engagement with Super League Managing Director and ask Super League Clubs to invite the Group to a meeting.

The Chairman explained that the Group had received a good level of engagement from Super League, with the Managing Director being particularly helpful. He felt that the necessary connections were not being made and that opportunities were not being utilised as there are certain things that only the Group could do including holding events in Parliament for clubs.

The Chairman thanked Smith for his time in presenting his views.

Meeting closed at 1913

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