



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 25 January 2016 Committee Room 12

Meeting commenced 1807

#### In Attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Mark Pawsey MP; Paula Sherriff MP; Lord Thomas of Gresford; Karl Turner MP; Jack Lopresti MP; Andrea Jenkyns MP

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** Spen Allison

**Organisational Associate Members:** Ikram Butt (BARA); Blake Solly (Super League); Nigel Wood (RFL); Anna Darcy (RFL); Martyn Cheney, Ash Lucas (Bramley Buffaloes); Alistair Davis, Phillip Browne (Try Tag Rugby); Hilary Clifford (Supporters Direct)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Gavin Willacy; David Ballheimer; Chris Byron; Ron Knox; Judi Knox; Darren Williams; Chris Ashton; Steve Evans; Stuart Morris

**Other:** Rona Fairhead, Barbara Slater, Alastair McIntyre, Emma Bishop, Alex Hamilton (BBC); Mathew Lancaster; James Cherpy

**Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

#### Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the following new Members: Chris Matheson MP; Jonathan Edwards MP; Bob Blackman MP; Rachael Maskell MP.

Lord Thomas of Gresford took the Chair.

#### Apologies

**Members:** Jason M<sup>c</sup>Cartney MP; Karl M<sup>c</sup>Cartney MP; Rt Hon. Lord Prescott; Marie Rimmer MP; Lisa Nandy MP; Lord Smith of Leigh; Catherine West MP; Lord Hoyle; Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle MP; Jamie Reed MP

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

**Organisational Associate Members:** Thomas Todd (Whitehaven RLFC); Dan Steel (London Rugby League Foundation); Roger Draper (Warrington Wolves); Nicola Hudson, Jacqui Forster (Supporters Direct); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Richard Thewlis (Huddersfield Giants);

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Stephen Johnson; Ian McIlwee; Gary Slater; David Johnson

#### Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Minutes of July's meeting were agreed via email with those who attended.

As the meeting was not quorate, it was agreed that minutes from the December meeting would be circulated to those who attended for agreement.

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 25 January 2016 Committee Room 12

## Matters Arising

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

- The Secretariat is in the process of writing a brief history of the Group.
- The Secretariat is in conversation with the Assistant Private Secretary to the Queen regarding Royal Patronage for the game. A review of Royal Patronages is currently underway, and set to be complete in the first half of 2016.
- The Chairman is to meet with the CEOs of the RFL and RFU, regarding the sovereignty of the sports, both in the UK and abroad.
- The Secretariat is looking into organising an event with rugby league journalists, to investigate media coverage in the sport.
- The Secretariat is to meet with representatives of the charity Heartbeat of Sport, to discuss a possible joint Group event regarding heart awareness in sport.
- The Secretariat is liaising with the RFL regarding supporting the Group's involvement in a Parliamentary Sports Day.

## Correspondence

### Sent

- To Honorary Member Spen Allison, congratulating him on his induction to the York Rugby League Hall of Fame.
- The Secretariat emailed all MPs with constituents selected in the England Youth and Academy squads.
- To an Associate Member regarding roles and duties relating to associate membership of the Group.

### Received

- A number of pieces related to coverage of rugby league by the BBC. Specifically regarding bias in coverage provided by the Today programme on Radio 4; lack of coverage across all BBC news programmes; and frequent reference to rugby union as "rugby".
- From bodies in Italy and Pakistan regarding rugby league in those countries and potentially joining the Group as associate members. The Secretariat is to liaise with the RLIF, RLEF and Asia Pacific Confederation.
- From Associate Member Try Tag Rugby, a request for support accessing pitches in Tower Hamlets. **Action: Secretariat to liaise with the Chairman as how best to support.**
- From Honorary Member Sir Ian McCartney, expressing disappointment at how poorly rugby league was treated in the New Year Honours list.

Greg Mulholland MP took the Chair.

## Change to Constitution

Following correspondence from a number of rugby league bodies outside the UK, the Group has clarified the constitution on international governing bodies. Article 35 now states:

*Associate Membership will be granted to National Governing Bodies recognised by the RLIF or its component bodies.*

The Secretariat has asked the RLIF, RLEF and Asia Pacific Confederation for a list of those bodies they recognize. Whenever the Groups receive correspondence, it will direct appropriately, for example by forwarding details to the RLIF for them to take forward.

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 25 January 2016 Committee Room 12

The Chairman stressed that the Group wants disputes to be resolved, but does not want to exacerbate these further. The Group is prepared to listen, and wants countries that play rugby league to be unified, and to work together to benefit the sport.

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary

The Secretariat provided references to rugby league in Parliament since the previous meeting, specifically Early Day Motions:

- 896 – KEVIN SINFIELD NOMINATION FOR SPORTS PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR AWARD (Greg Mulholland MP)
- 910 – 3000<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF LEAGUE EXPRESS (Greg Mulholland MP)

### Public

The Chairman met with Dr David Collier, CEO of the RLIF, and Danny Kazandjian, General Manager of the RLEF, for an update on the international game.

Related to Parliamentary activity, the Group put out a press release on the 3000<sup>th</sup> Edition of League Express.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,701 followers on Twitter. The Group's twitter name is @UKParliamentRL

Lord Thomas of Gresford took the Chair.

## Political Animals Report

The Secretariat reminded Members that they are always eligible to play for the Political Animals (Associate Members are also) and reiterated the eligibility criteria that are contained on the Animals' website and requested that all Associate Members who may know someone who could be eligible to review and introduce to the Club Captain (Group Chairman) or General Manager (Group Secretariat). Unfortunately, the Political Animals are currently men-only.

Details of future fixtures will be circulated once confirmed. These will include annual game against a team of Journalists.

## AOB

The Secretariat noted a London Rugby League Foundation Event on Thursday 4 February with Adrian Morley, from 7pm at Riley's Sports Bar.

Declaring an interest, the Secretariat noted that tickets are still available for the Rugby League Varsity Match on Friday 4 March at the HAC. See Mark Ramsdale or Jack Baker for more information.

Paula Sherriff MP outlined her interest in rugby league, and expressed delight to be a Member of the Group

Main business concluded at 1847

Greg Mulholland took the Chair.

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 25 January 2016 Committee Room 12

#### **Presentation: Rona Fairhead CBE, BBC Trust Chairman; Barbara Slater OBE; BBC Head of Sport, Alistair McIntyre**

The Chairman welcomed Rona Fairhead, Barbara Slater and Alistair McIntyre.

Fairhead thanked the Group for its invitation, and outlined her background as Chairman of the BBC Trust. She noted the Trust has heard the Group, and tried to make sure the BBC takes note.

Summarising the work the BBC has done in rugby league, Fairhead announced a dedicated correspondent for rugby league from 2017. She hoped fans recognised the BBC was hearing their concerns, and realised the current environment is difficult, as the BBC has to make big cuts from its annual budget, and the cost of sporting rights has increased.

Fairhead praised the work Barbara Slater and her BBC Sport team has done to make sure that as much sport as possible is shown on the BBC, including rugby league.

Slater noted that rugby league is a significant sport to the BBC, which has a huge responsibility to spread the sport to as wide an audience as possible. She commended the sport for its decision to split right between pay-to-view, and free-to-air, in order to generate revenue and to reach the largest possible audience. The BBC accounts for 3% of UK sport coverage, yet holds 42% of viewership, illustrating what the BBC can bring in terms of showcasing sport to the largest possible audience.

BBC coverage is not just on TV and radio, but also via its website, and it has increased its use of social media to keep in touch with younger audiences.

Slater noted the BBC provides 52 hours of network coverage of rugby league per annum. Production has progressed over the last few years, with innovations such as the player mic bringing coverage to life. The team is passionate about broadcasts, and feedback for rugby league coverage is amongst the best in sport.

Slater introduced a short film detailing the BBC's rugby league coverage.

McIntyre outlined his role as a sports editor at the BBC responsible for rugby league coverage, and his passion for the sport as a lifelong fan. Adding to Slater's comments, he noted the BBC has not been afraid to take risks to get rugby league talked about outside the rugby league community, and get to the greatest possible audience. There are champions at the BBC for rugby league, who want to get the sport in as prime a position as possible.

Describing the breadth of the BBC's coverage, McIntyre hoped that a dedicated rugby league correspondent would be the focal point for everyone, with his or her target to go out and spread rugby league as far as possible.

Opening to questions, on plans to use archive footage, this had been used to an extent already, though there is only so many times this can be shown on television.

There was some surprise that there had not previously been a dedicated rugby league correspondent, but it was explained that at present the team sometimes work on rugby league, and sometimes on other sports.

McIntyre emphasised there are exciting opportunities to get the sport more into the mainstream, through use of innovations such as player mic, to turn big moments into bigger moments. Slater noted the popularity of red button content in rugby league.

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 25 January 2016 Committee Room 12

Frustrations regarding lack of coverage of rugby league on the national news were noted, particularly when there are big or national events. The Chairman emphasised the scant coverage on the England v New Zealand international series, and also raised the attitude of certain presenters across the BBC, and especially on the Radio 4 Today programme, to rugby league.

The Chairman noted an institutional blind eye to rugby league at the BBC, despite excellent BBC sport coverage. Responding, Slater hoped the dedicated rugby league correspondent would make sure the sport's voice was heard and stories were put forward. Fairhead emphasised that there is a clear process to make complaints to the BBC, and that these are heard and acted upon.

Responding to questions over the use of "rugby", and a "BBC Rugby" twitter account, Slater noted that the change to "BBC Rugby Union" had been made as a direct result of the Group's work. McIntyre noted that rugby league content is shared far more widely on the BBC Sport twitter account than if it the sport had its own dedicated account.

On coverage of the sport in the south, McIntyre explained that the reason for the Super League Show being shown first in the north is the unique way in which the programme is funded by the regions.

On the impact of Kevin Sinfield's SPOTY second place, McIntyre noted a great moment for rugby league, and one of the best adverts that the sport could have had. The Chairman noted the Group's thanks for all those in the sport involved with getting votes for Kevin.

On behalf of Associate Member and Group supporter, Honorary Member RFL CEO Nigel Wood noted his recognition for passionate champions for rugby league within the BBC at all levels, and looked forward to a day when these were not needed, as the sport would be integrated more into the BBC.

Super League Managing Director Blake Solly emphasised that McIntyre is very modest about his role and does a great job for the sport. He felt there are opportunities for the sport with BBC social media, which he hoped it could grasp this year.

The Chairman thanked all speakers for their time, and hoped that the Group could work closely with them all in the future, to the benefit of rugby league.

**Meeting closed at 1943**

Our Supporters

