



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 4 September 2018, Committee Room 9

Meeting commenced 1803

## In Attendance

**Members:** Judith Cummins MP (in the Chair); Yvonne Fovargue MP; Marie Rimmer MP; Lord Smith of Leigh; Tracy Brabin MP; Lord Caine

**Organisational Associate Members:** Sarah-Jane Gray, Dave Elliott (The RFL); Ash Lucas, Martyn Cheney (Bramley Buffaloes);

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Chris Ashton; Dominic Breslin; Hazel Asenci; Kevin Ward; Tracy Rodger; John Connell; James Chespy; Ron Knox; Judi Knox

**Other:** Jody Freeman

**Secretariat:** Jack Baker

## Welcome

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the meeting, in particular:

- New Member: Joanne Platt MP
- New Organisational Associate Member: Red Star Belgrade
- New Individual Associate Member: Andrew Hill

## Apologies

**Members:** Lisa Nandy MP; Debbie Abrahams MP; Bob Blackman MP; Sir Graham Brady MP; Ian Lucas MP; Catherine West MP; Alex Sobel MP; Mark Pawsey MP

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** David Hinchliffe; Ray French; Neil Turner; Andrew Cudbertson; Spen Allison; Neville Smith; Mike Denning; Martin Coyd OBE

**Organisational Associate Members:** Chris Noble MBE (Sheffield Eagles); Ian Wilson (Rugby Oldham); Siobhan Atkinson (The RFL); Andrew Jackson (London Skolars); John Holden, Shaun Currie, Geoff Parker, Tim Powell (RLGSOA)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Chris Byron; Graham Oliphant; Gavin Willacy; Iain McIlwee; Simon Moat; Pippa Deacon; Ian Ackley; Paul Secher; Mathew Lancaster; Kevin Rudd; David Ballheimer; Debbie Knight

## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Group's previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate account.

## Matters Arising

- The Secretariat noted that the Group was looking for a sponsor for its annual dinner.

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### Correspondence

- The Chair wrote to BBC Director of Sport, Barbara Slater, offering congratulations for the two rugby league documentaries aired on the BBC, 'the Rugby Codebreakers' and 'Rugby League's Legendary Watersplash Final', and also extending an invitation to meet with the Group to discuss coverage of the game, and particularly the RLWC2021. **The Secretariat was organising a date for that meeting, and would circulate in due course.**
- The Chair wrote to new RFL Chief Executive, Ralph Rimmer, congratulating him on his appointment. A response was received, thanking the Group for their congratulations and welcoming the opportunity to work closely with the Group in the future.
- A condolence letter was sent to the family of Max Blakeley, the Birkenshaw RLFC player who sadly passed away at a match in July.
- A condolence letter was sent to the family of friend of the Group Mike Greetham, who sadly passed away earlier in the summer. Mike was a constituent and good friend of Vice-Chair Paula Sherriff, and always enjoyed attending the Group's annual dinner and events in the Palace.
- An email was received from a fan regarding efforts to save Whitehaven RLFC from financial difficulties, and was passed to the local Member of Parliament, along with a note offering any support the Group could provide.
- Two invitations for Members to attend Rugby League World Cup 2021 'Inspired by 2021' legacy programme launches were received and circulated. **The Secretariat noted that if any Members wanted any further information on the legacy programme or any aspect of RLWC2021, he would be happy to provide.**
- A number of briefing notes were received from the RFL and circulated to Members: on the England Performance Unit; the RFL's move to Manchester; RFL campaign themes; and the 12-18 review.
- Vice-Chair Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP and the Chair both wrote to Network Rail expressing disappointment at the closure of London Euston station on the weekend of the Challenge Cup Final.
- The Group received a note from Sheffield Eagles regarding challenges around their facility. The Group is liaising with the club and Sheffield MPs to provide support.
- The Group passed on a note from the RFL to the APPG on Catalonia regarding Catalans success in reaching the Challenge Cup final.
- The President wrote to Warrington Wolves Physical Disability Rugby League team, wishing them well for the inaugural Physical Disability World Club Challenge against South Sydney Rabbitohs. The Wolves were victorious.
- A briefing note was received from the RFL on the England Women's team, which was circulated to Members.
- The Chair wrote an open letter to the Editor of The Times regarding the paper's decision to axe its longstanding rugby league correspondent, Chris Irvine. A number of messages of support for this stance were received from rugby league fans. **Action: Secretariat to draft a follow-up letter for the Chair.**

### Group Activity Report

#### Parliamentary

The Secretariat provided references to rugby league in Parliament since the last meeting.

At DCMS questions and in a Westminster Hall debate on safe standing at football matches, Liz McInnes MP raised the dual use of Spotland stadium by Rochdale Hornets RLFC and Rochdale AFC, and compared the differing attitudes to safe standing depending on the sport played.

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In a debate on youth services, Baroness Newlove noted the opportunity she had to shadow the work of the Warrington Wolves Foundation with young people.

In response to a written question from Dan Jarvis MP on DCMS support for women's rugby, the Sport Minister made reference to funding provided to the RFL to build capacity and encourage participation, and also the government's support for the Rugby League World Cup 2021.

Marie Rimmer MP tabled an early day motion recognising the State of Mind Super League round, and the work that State of Mind does to improve the mental health and wellbeing of rugby league players and communities by challenging traditional stereotypes and encouraging young men in particular to open up about their mental health.

#### Public

The Group hosted a round-table session with the RFL to explore opportunities around the Women's Super League.

Group Secretary, Marie Rimmer MP, represented the Group at the annual ceremony at the Cenotaph on the evening before the Challenge Cup Final, to pay tribute to all those involved with the sport who had given their lives for their country.

The Group sent press releases on:

- The last Group meeting with the Rugby League Players' Association;
- Calling on fans to support Warrington Wolves Physical Disability Rugby League World Club Challenge tour;
- Welcoming the launch of the Rugby League World Cup 2021 legacy programme;
- The Chair's letter to The Times regarding their rugby league coverage;
- Wishing teams well for the Women's Challenge Cup Finals.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 2,254 followers on Twitter. The Group's twitter name: @UKParliamentRL

## Political Animals Report

The Secretariat noted that the Political Animals had a new sponsor, Cheney Payroll Services, for which the club was very thankful.

The Animals played their annual game against a London Select XIII on the evening before the Challenge Cup Final as part of London Skolars' Friday Night Lights event in Catherine West MP's Hornsey and Wood Green constituency. Thanks to Catherine for her support were noted.

A further game was being organised for the autumn, and details would be circulated to any Members wishing to take part. The Secretariat noted that the Animals played a modified version of rugby league that allowed those of any age, gender or ability to take part and enjoy their on-field experience.

Tracey Brabin MP suggested that the Animals play a game in her constituency of Batley and Spenningsdale.

## AOB

There being no other business, the Chair brought the main business of the meeting to a close.

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#### **Presentation: England Performance Unit**

The Chair welcomed Dave Elliott, England National Performance Programme Manager.

Elliott outlined the concept of the England Performance Unit (EPU), and the aim to deliver three Rugby League World Cup victories in 2021 for the men's, women's and wheelchair teams.

The desire to create more opportunities for players to represent England was discussed, as was the drive towards a better culture and environment. Elliott noted that members of staff worked across the various different teams within the EPU, which helped to ensure that the England men's captain received the same messages as for the under-16s, and provided the basis for a smooth transition between age groups.

Increased clarity and transparency with clubs was raised, as was the need to devise a structure to help elite players, with a clear strategy of how England teams would play, and how coaching would be delivered.

Sports science and medicine was also highlighted as an area in which the EPU was spreading good practice across all England teams.

Opening to questions, there was a discussion of the pathway for players in the London region. Elliott noted that he constantly talked to all professional clubs, and that if players were good enough, they would be invited into the national programme.

Wheelchair rugby league was raised, and Elliott noted that efforts were being made to support this format of the game in areas such as nutrition, and also potentially with a Knights programme, as a stepping stone from club rugby.

England Knights were discussed, as were opportunities for emerging nations to play against the team. It was noted that the Knights programme would still run alongside the Great Britain tour in 2019.

On consistency of coaching standards with changes to head coach, Elliott noted that whilst head coaches might change, sports science, coach education, medical support etc would all be constant, and the philosophies of any new coach would have to fit in to the EPU. It was also noted that young coaches were being encouraged into the EPU programme.

The England women's team was discussed, and Elliott highlighted the origin game as a fantastic development. Talent transfer was discussed, both at EPU and club level. Regional hubs were also discussed as a key element of the talent pathway.

There was also discussion around the women's Super League.

Physical Disability Rugby League was raised, and Elliott highlighted that there was a need to get more clubs playing the game before this was included in the EPU.

Masters rugby league was raised as a huge growth area for the sport, and conversations around the festival of World Cups were discussed.

**Meeting closed at 1858**

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