**RFU COUNCIL MEETING**
25 September 2026
**Post-Meeting Council Briefing Note**

## 1. Presidential matters

1.1 Bill Beaumont (RFU President) welcomed Council Members to the September Council meeting.

## 2. CEO Update

2.1 Bill Sweeney (Chief Executive Officer) updated Council on current matters facing the Game and the Union, including:

a. Community game: The competitive season had been delayed supporting player welfare, competition integrity and club planning.
b. Regional Growth Partnership Boards: Chairs had been appointed and onboarding was underway; recruitment for further Board roles was due to begin.
c. Professional game: Project Forge and PWR expansion work had progressed, including PREM expansion planning and club-development activity.
d. England teams: Individual development planning and Rugby World Cup (RWC) preparations had continued; England A fixtures had been confirmed.
e. Nations Championship: Pool-fixture sales had remained strong.
f. Stadium Masterplan and litigation: Planning work had continued, while the head-injury litigation remained ongoing.

## 3. Chair Update

3.1 Sir James Wates (Chair of the RFU Board) updated on the priority matters of the Board and reflected on his first year as Chairman.

## 4. Finance Update

4.1 Francesca Pierce (Chief Financial Officer) set out the refreshed four-year cycle with the stated aim to invest sustainably in rugby throughout.

4.2 Francesca noted, as at it is only month 3 of the financial year with no key games yet played, that there was no meaningful YTD update to provide. However, she confirmed the current year financial plan and comparison to first 2 years in this financial cycle. Nations Championship Group stage games were performing strongly.

4.3 FY27 budgeted rugby investment of £97m across professional clubs, the community game and England teams represents another year of strong investment. Variations in revenue and spend across the years were discussed, especially in relation to the differing match profiles.

4.4 All key metrics were brought onto one page, showing a targeted cumulative underlying profit across the first 3 years of the cycle, supporting investment in strategic growth initiatives in all years and the upcoming significant loss expected in the final year, in line with historic trends due to the men's RWC.

## 5. Standing Reports

5.1 Council received reports from the following groups, and the papers were taken as read: Council Nominations Committee, Men's Professional Rugby Board, Champ Rugby Board, Head Impact and Prevention Management Steering Committee, and the Commercial Report.

5.2 David Roberts (Junior Vice President and Interim Chair of the Community Game Board) shed light on the Community Game Board (CGB) Report by setting out the improvements that had been made to the standing CGB agenda, and ways in which Council reporting of CGB matters

had been strengthened. David also noted that as part of their July meeting, CGB approved the 2026/27 Community game investment and operational plan - this was circulated to Council for further sharing to Members. David concluded by requesting that clubs fill in the Adult Male survey.

5.3 Paula Carter (Council Member for Surrey and Chair of Governance Committee) outlined the focuses of the recent Governance Standing Committee meeting which took place on Tuesday 22 September.

**6. Council Nominations Committee**

6.1 Matt Webb (Co-opted Council Member and Chair of Council Nominations Committee) set out the work the Committee had undertaken to improve processes of the Committee, including a role matrix and a refreshed Terms of Reference. Council approved the changes made to the Council Nominations Committee's Terms of Reference for the 2026/27 season.

6.2 Matt also updated on the process to recruit a co-opted Council Member to represent the Women and Girls' game, working closely with Lou Latter, the existing Women and Girls' Representative.

6.3 Following agreement by Council in June 2026 that the National Youth Council will have a voting Representative on Council, Council approved a standing co-option of the Chair of the National Youth Council for a period of three years from the 2026/27 season.

**7. County Championship Regulations for Season 2026/27**

7.1 Eddie Keal (Council Member for Middlesex) presented a draft of the County Championship Regulations for Season 2026/27. Changes to the regulations included:

a. The Bill Beaumont Division 1 being open to players playing in National League 2 and below (whereas previously it was possible to pick players from National League 1 and below);

b. Clarificatory change to RFU Regulation 15 that U18 Age Grade players are not able to participate in County Championship competitions (even if such players have turned 18 within their U18 age grade year).

7.2 It was also noted that following a review of the Gill Burns competition, several recommendations were made including promotion and relegation, and the creation of a clearer pathway to ensure that divisional placement is determined by performance. For the 2026/27 season, a managed transition will be required to move from the current opt-in system to one based on promotion and relegation. This will not result in regulation changes for 2026/27, but will start in the 2027/28 season.

7.3 Council approved the proposed County Championship Regulations for Season 2026/27 at Appendix 1 to this paper, with delegated authority to the Governance Committee to finalise any minor drafting amendments to the regulations as required, ahead of circulation.

**8. Governance Oversight Group Update**

8.1 Bill Beaumont provided an update following the first meeting of the Governance Oversight Group formed of members of Board, Council and the Executive. The group has set two areas to review and identify opportunities to improve - firstly, the role of the Board, Council and the Community Game Board and secondly, corporate governance and modernisation of the Union's Rules. These workstreams will be taken forward with the aim of ensuring the Union has clear, timely and transparent decision-making structures (in line with best practice) in which Member views continue to be represented, and decision-makers are accountable to Members.

## 9. Code of Conduct Review

9.1 Deborah Griffin (Immediate Past President) shared an update on the Code of Conduct Review group that had been established to consider whether the RFU's Code of Conduct remains fit for purpose, proportionate, transparent and aligned with modern governance expectations. It was expected that a final draft of the revised Code would be presented to the Governance Standing Committee for decision in November 2026 before returning to Council.

## 10. RFU Annual Report 2026 – President's Assurance Statement

10.1 Council received the President Assurance statement, questions and comments were welcomed.

## 11. Strategy Targets

11.1 Rory Price (Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation) presented the FY2025/2026 target outcomes, drawing out two targets that were not met. These misses were described as marginal, so no real concern was present. FY2026/27 targets were also highlighted.

11.2 Council Members requested further information on how the indicators drive the overarching targets.

## 12. Community Game Update

12.1 Steve Grainger (Executive Director of Rugby Development) shared a positive trend in registration and team league numbers.

12.2 John Lawn (Game Development Director), David Fraser (Training Workforce Manager) and Matt Watts (Area Training Manager) introduced England Rugby Learning, the mobile-first platform launched in July 2026, highlighting that the first eight weeks delivered 45,723 active users and 108,607 completions. Overall feedback on the platform had been strong, and the next steps include: campaigning phase two, Salesforce integration, and reporting language changes to remove minimum standards and distinguish free content from paid content.

12.3 David Roberts (Junior Vice President and Interim Chair of the Community Game Board) reflected on the decision to delay the start of the season in the community game and the communication of this decision. Council members provided feedback on the process.

12.4 Terry Burwell (Council Member for Hampshire) confirmed the Competition Landscape Steerco as a time-limited CGB group owning a 12-month roadmap for the Competition Landscape Plan, with recommendations to be evidence-led. Emerging recommendations from the Steerco included travel and league size, match completion at lower tiers, volunteer capacity and education/club clashes. Terry outlined that consultation should run through autumn, with recommendations and delivery plans due in the new year.

12.5 Finally, Steve Grainger reminded Council that although all Chairs had been recruited, recruitment of new members for the Regional Growth Partnership Boards remained ongoing. The purpose of the Boards is to grow incremental revenue of rugby in new places and strengthen regional partnerships.