

## **Buckinghamshire Council Representative Report**

### **Buckinghamshire RFU AGM July 24**

Since the last Bucks AGM in 2023, I have attended 6 Council meetings, 13 'informal' Council meetings (held virtually), 8 Community Game Board (CGB) meetings, 4 informal CGB meetings and chaired 5 Rugby Growth Sub Committee meetings with additional sub group meetings. I attended 9 meetings as a member of the Adult Player Registration Working Group and 6 other Council related meetings including the Nominations Committee. In addition, I attended 8 Non-Contact Working Group meetings. These included interviews I conducted with the RFU President, Chair, CEO, Legal Director, Rugby Development Director, and Chairs of Governance, CGB and Laws Committee. I also met with the Chair, CEO and Rugby Development Director informally to discuss community rugby matters.

I have met with the Council Nominations Committee on 2 occasions and continue to work on their behalf on a leadership training and development programme for Council Members.

I have reported to member clubs on my voting record and provided a brief commentary as to why I voted as I did. I remain available to all clubs to further discuss any of these issues and will in particular organise a meeting to examine the new Community Game Future strategy in the new season.

The following issues are worthy of note in my report:

#### Community Game Future Strategy 2025

The strategy began in September 2022 and has now identified the 5 priority areas for investment. I led the non-contact game planning which will feature the new T1 Rugby format as the key intervention in schools. A new delivery system which introduces a regional structure is being developed for season 2025/26 which will provide new opportunities for school / club work as highlighted by Bucks clubs at their Club Conference.

#### Lowering the Tackle Height – outcomes

I am gratified that the Domestic Law Variation (DLV) has not impacted in anything other than a positive way. Many of the concerns expressed prior to the 2023/24 season have not been seen; the initial CGB report highlights:

- Analysis of over 8,000 tackles (4,000 from season 2023-2024 v 4,000 from season 2022-2023) shows a decrease in the number of tackles made above the base of the sternum. Prior to lowering of tackle height 49% of tackles made in National League Rugby were made above the base of the sternum. This season that figure is 31%. Further detailed analysis will be required to determine how many of these tackles were made legally in 'pick & go' scenarios.
- Indications are that there is some inconsistency in application and adherence by coaches, players and referees.
- Injury surveillance data that will inform a clear position on a reduction in concussion will be available at the conclusion of the season.
- The community game is much more positive about the RFU and participating in rugby – recovering to levels close to those before the announcement of the lower tackle height.
- Players have felt safer playing rugby this season than in the previous two seasons.

### Adult Player Registration

My work on the APR Council Oversight Group has continued this year towards an implementation next season 2024 following a delay due to too many game-related issues being implemented at the beginning of last season. The plan was for APR to open from 1<sup>st</sup> July; however, I advised club Chairs that this has been delayed by two weeks to ensure the appropriate bulk testing on GMS can be completed with a week's grace to deal with any issues that arise.

### Semi-Independent Review into Refereeing and Match Officials in the Community Game

I am currently chairing a semi-independent review into refereeing and match officials for the CGB. This piece of work will set the direction of travel for how we recruit, retain, develop and appoint referees for the next 5 years as part of the Community Game Future strategy. Critical to success will be the recognition that recruitment and retention of referees is a responsibility for all within the game, and the recognition by referees that they need to get closer to the game. This will report to CGB in September.

### The Professional Game Partnership Agreement

This agreement will start this coming season. A new 8 year funding package has been agreed, along with improved England player access and welfare planning with clubs, a new governance structure, agreement to promotion and relegation, and commercial and fan activation dealt with collaboratively between the RFU and PRL.

At the Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> June, Council ratified my position as Chair the Rugby Growth Sub Committee and my continuing on the Community Game Board. I am delighted to remain at the heart of the decision-making process for the community game and to be able to exert influence for the clubs in Buckinghamshire.

The main on-going issues for the 2024-25 season are:

This will be a transition year for the leading to the start of CGF delivery from July 2025 whereby key workstreams will be teed up for next year and other work reduced. Two funding streams are available to clubs via the CB to retain adult players and for CBs and referee societies to increase the recruitment of referees.

The health of the male XVs game: matches completed in RFU leagues increased again last season to 92% and Merit Table match completions increased to 72%. This remains a priority within the Rugby Development Business Plan for 24-25 with further action to target the movement of young players into the adult game as above.

Buckinghamshire Clubs will play their rugby in the following leagues in 2024/25:

Buckinghamshire men's clubs are distributed in leagues as below for 2024/25:

Regional 1 South East: Amersham & Chiltern (P)

Regional 2 Thames: Aylesbury, Beaconsfield (P), Marlow

Regional 2 Mid East: Olney

Counties 1 Southern North: Bletchley, Buckingham, High Wycombe (P)

Counties 2 – North: Chesham, Milton Keynes

Counties 2 South: Slough

Counties 3 North: Risborough

Counties 3 South: Farnham Royal, Phoenix

Buckinghamshire women's clubs are distributed in leagues as below for 2024/25:

W Championship N 1: Buckingham

W NC 1 East: Bletchley

W NC 1 SE North: Chesham

W NC 2 SE North West: High Wycombe, Marlow

W NC 2 SE North: Risborough

W NC 2 Mid South: Milton Keynes, Olney

W NC 3 SE North: Aylesbury

It is sad to see that Drifters is not competing in the league this year, but plans are in hand to ensure their players have opportunities to play this season.

**Simon Winman**

**Bucks RFU Council Representative**