LANCASHIRE COUNTY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Minutes of the Board Meeting
Monday 7th September 2026

Present: Mr D. Clarke in the Chair, & Messrs, G.A. Burns MBE, C.A. Baker, P. Deakin, C. Gaffey, A.N. Crabtree & M. Downs.

In Attendance: Messrs, D. Westhead, R Jones, S. Godfrey & B.H. Stott.

Apologies: Messrs, K. Bennetta & H. Hughes.

Regional Managers Report.

D Westhead reported:

Staffing Updates

The following appointments were confirmed:

1. Michael Gainsborough appointed as Growth Development Officer (North West).
2. Fiona Beckham appointed as Club & CB Support Manager (starting 28 September).
3. James Wright recently started as Club Developer.
4. Ben Gillard now in post as Safeguarding Development Officer.
5. John Heskett appointed as Fundraising Manager supporting the Regional Growth Partnership.
6. Existing roles remain in place across competitions, facilities, coaching and match officials.
7. D. Westhead to provide contact details, biographies, photos and organisational structure information for new regional staff, for publication on the Lancashire website.

Regional Growth Partnership

8. Board members met with the newly appointed North West Regional Growth Partnership Chair, **Taron Kapoor**. This was a chance to get to know Taron who has previously worked as a co-ordinating head of several schools in the Greater Manchester area.
   He is hoping to use his extensive network of contacts within education and beyond to cover his remit of recruitment to the game. He was particularly interested in the use of T1 rugby within the schools environment.
   His position is not full time and he will not be reporting directly to either Lancashire or Cheshire Boards.
9. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with members impressed by his leadership experience, extensive external contacts and growth-focused approach.
10. Recruitment is commencing for:
11. 2-3 Game Representatives
12. Several Independent Representatives
13. Applications are expected to be circulated during September, with a full board targeted by mid-November.

Strategic Priorities

The Regional Growth Partnership will initially focus on:

14. Growth in schools, colleges and universities.
15. Continued growth of the girls' game following strong post-World Cup participation increases.
16. Expansion of T1 Rugby into clubs and community settings.
17. Exploration of partnership-funded development officer opportunities.

Minutes of the last meeting.

The minutes of the Board meeting held on Monday 13th July 2026, (previously circulated) were accepted after a slight amendment from RJ and signed per procurationem as a correct record.

Matters arising.

There were no matters arising.

RFU.

PD Reported.

Governance Review.

1. The RFU Governance Review Working Group will hold its first meeting on 24 September.
2. Membership comprises approximately equal representation from Council members and RFU executives.

Meeting with Bill Sweeney and Steve Grainger.

Discussion focused on retaining players in Rugby Union, particularly in Rugby League heartlands.

Key points:

3. Lancashire and Yorkshire continue to push for publication of age-grade results and tables.
4. Positive support received from clubs and coaches in Rugby League regions.
5. Lancashire Mini & Junior representatives reported unanimous support during a recent coaches' meeting.
6. Any proposed pilot scheme would require Council approval and is likely to face resistance from Age Grade Governance groups.

Club & Community. (Appendix 1.)

CG Reported.

Although Chris experienced connection difficulties, updates included:

1. Completion of outstanding club community projects arising from 2025 club engagement work.
2. Continuing development of communication initiatives and community engagement.
3. Ongoing work around university engagement and club connections.

CG experienced connection difficulties and left the meeting.

Discipline.

BHS Reported.

1. No major disciplinary issues reported.
2. First sending-off of the season has already been received and is being processed.

Finance.

PD Reported:

Funding Allocation

1. Lancashire will receive approximately **£59,000** in RFU funding for 2026-27.
2. £21,000 allocated to administration and county rugby.
3. Remaining **£38,000** earmarked for retention-focused initiatives.

Priority areas:

4. Playing opportunities
5. Volunteer recruitment and retention
6. Direct club support
7. Other retention initiatives

Retention Focus

Discussion centred on the significant loss of players aged 15-18.

Ideas discussed included:

8. University-to-club transition projects.
9. Under-20/Under-21 rugby opportunities.
10. Greater engagement with universities.
11. Evidence-based approaches rather than small-scale one-off initiatives.

Financial Management

12. A £600 reduction in accountancy fees had been negotiated.

Financial software is being migrated to Xero, reducing costs significantly.

Mens & Boys Rugby.

HH reported:

1. Cups actually went well, couple of minor issues.
2. 18s nominations stalled at 40, not sure if the belated start to the Colts and Schools season is the reason. 32 of the 40 are from last seasons 17s squad.
3. County Championship Management Group review meeting is also tonight, also not attending! I fear the news on County Championship may not be good as the planned setups require CBs to agree and a few them aren't on the same page.

Mini, Junior & Schools.

Mini, Junior. No Report

Schools

RJ reported:

Actions underway include:

1. Survey of schools to establish levels of rugby activity.
2. Mapping club-school relationships throughout Lancashire.
3. Identifying gaps in provision.
4. Supporting new local school competitions, particularly in Merseyside.

Arthur Crabtree offered previous survey data that may support the project.

Safeguarding.

CAB Reported:

Lancashire Safeguarding Conference

1. Conference held at Widnes RFC.
2. Attended by 18 newly appointed Club Safeguarding Officers.
3. Event considered highly successful.

Contributors included:

4. Heather Lewis, Ben Gillard, Luke Stafford (Proactive), Lisa Johnson.

Topics included:

5. Mental health, Neurodiversity awareness, Safeguarding best practice, Player welfare and concussion management.

Proactive Concussion and Welfare Platform

6. Lancashire subsidising club subscriptions by 50%.
7. Approximately six additional clubs have already signed up following the conference.
8. Proposal supported to extend pilot access to selected schools.

Regulation 9

ANC reminded clubs that:

9. Player Welfare Audits must be completed by the end of September.
10. Failure to comply may result in RFU sanctions and potential league point deductions after November.

Welfare Concerns

The board received an update on:

11. **Josh Jones**, who suffered a serious neck injury (C5-C6 disc prolapse) whilst playing.
12. He remains in hospital but has begun walking and is making progress.
13. Lancashire extends its best wishes for his recovery.

Volunteering.

GAB Reported:

RFU Volunteer of the Year Nomination

Lancashire's nomination for Outstanding Contribution Volunteer of the Year is:

Rowley Heptonstall

1. Recognised for exceptional long-term service to rugby in Lancashire.
2. Will attend the Red Roses v France fixture at Twickenham on 15 May as part of the award package.

Volunteer Recognition

Board members were encouraged to submit names of outstanding volunteers throughout the season to create a wider pool for recognition opportunities.

Womens and Girls.

KB reported:-

1. U16s trials held at Preston were a great success. Highest numbers yet with 120 coach nominated players.

Correspondence.

There was none appertaining to this meeting.

New Members.

There were no new members

50:50 Draw

Aug 2026		Value	Sept 2026		Value
	H Henderson	£39.00		P Hanson	£39.00
	M Brennand	£6.50		H Henderson	£6.50
	RTJ Briers	£6.50		TD Stirk	£6.50
	G Spenglar	£6.50		P Hanson	£6.50
	K & A Andrews	£6.50		P Hanson	£6.50

Date of next meeting.

Next Meeting: 6:30 pm on Monday 5th October 2026 by Teams.

Any other business.

CAB – Keen to sell County branded umberellas which have proved popular.

ANC – England Roses v Australia Ladies at Sale. Lancashire Girls will be flag bearers.

MD – will be feeding back to the County Championship review group prior to deadline.

MD – We need to source and engrave a new Lancashire Plate.

Meeting ended at 7:55pm

_____Chairman Date: 5th October 2026

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Appendix 1.

Club & Community Rugby Committee
September 2026 Report

Our Purpose: To bring people together to enjoy Rugby and grow/sustain a passionate, flourishing community club game in Lancashire.

1. Club Community Projects Update

Objective: Improving Rugby engagement during the summer months with the aim of improving (adult male) player retention & recruitment.

- **Lancashire East**
- Rochdale RUFC delivered a Lancashire East 'Summer Social 7s' event on Saturday 29 August. An open tournament and an over 35 vets tournament , 130 players participated from the club community East Manchester, Oldham, Littleborough and Rochdale, a strong crowd of spectators and society referees ensured this inaugural pre-season event was a great success. Rochdale are keen to host again next year.

- **Lancashire West**
- St Edwards Old Boys stepped forward, at the 11th hour, to deliver a community Sevens event in August. Uptake and club interest for an earlier initial event in July was affected by the England vs Fiji fixture at the Hill Dickinson Stadium, and the exceptionally hot weather. Undeterred they hosted another event which experienced better support and promotion.

- **Lancashire South**
- Friday Night Vets & Colts event at Didsbury Toc H, planned for the beginning of September as pre-season engagement, was delayed once again due to the RFU decision and weather and pitch conditions. The intention is to host it next April when it is hoped that commitment from all clubs will be better.

Bringing clubs together to find solutions to shared problems remains our policy. However, across the county, getting community projects and events off the ground has proven to be very difficult with club volunteers attending the club meetings reluctant to take on the additional but necessary leadership, responsibility and commitment to build momentum and drive delivery. Clubs responded positively to the concept of a collaborative community project but few are willing to actually collaborate to make things happen. Progress was slow in 5 of the 6 regions. Shifting club culture, from independent mistrust to commonwealth co-operation, is going to take time.

As such, although I intend to use feedback from the 2026 club survey to once again to inform the direction of our club & community rugby support, I will be taking a different approach this season to the distribution of funding and hope to recruit the help of our new RFU Club Developer.

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2. Lancashire Club Community Survey August 2026

- Invitation to 69 clubs to participate in the survey went out in the first week of July.
- After 8 weeks of persistent encouragement, involving the help of numerous volunteers to prompt non-responding club officers, the final submission was received on 2nd September.
- 59 clubs participated. This is 4 more clubs than responded to the survey last August and represents all active Lancashire RFU member clubs. The 10 clubs who did not respond can be described as dormant/demised.
- The purpose of the survey is to assess the health of community rugby in Lancashire ahead of the 2025/26 season; to assess progress or changing circumstances from last season; and to help plan for future development by identifying the most common goals, challenges and issues that clubs face.

- Analysis of the club feedback and a detailed summary report will be produced this month, with a clear focus on retention of players and volunteers. I aim to publish the report online before the League fixtures begin on 26th September.
- The intention is this report will lead to a series of regional club community meetings, which will take place during the autumn, where collaborative solutions can be discussed and funded. Venues and dates TBC.
- In preparation for this I have organised clubs into seven geographic regions, with at least one if not two community representatives for each region on the C&CR committee.
- I intend to undertake a survey and a meeting for our University Community of 10 clubs later in September one students are back and re-engaged in rugby. Integrating the university clubs into wider club community remains a priority but to make progress this group needs an enthusiastic student to champion and drive it.

- This seasbn, Beyond improving the community connectivity between clubs and achieving a meaningful, measurable improvement in player and club volunteer retention across the county, I'd like to improve the absence of a connection between Lancashire representative teams and the community clubs who play outside the National Leagues, who do not have their players selected and thereby do not identify with the county teams 'representing them'. These clubs offer potential for growing home crowd support and ultimately a stronger Lancashire rugby community.

3. Communications

There are still website pages requiring completion and awaiting attention

I’d like all board members to adopt a uniform consistent Lancashire RFU email signature and use the Lancashirerfu.com email addresses.

CG.

7 September 2026