

Meeting Minutes

Date: 20th November

Time: 18:30-20:00

Location: Principality Stadium

Attendees:

- Nigel Walker (WRU Interim Chief Executive Officer)
- Malcolm Wall (WRU INED)
- Simon Rimmer (WRU)
- Victoria Hughes (WRU)
- Barrie Jones (Crys 16)
- Gareth Storey (Crys 16)
- Cathy Green (Ospreys Supporters Club)
- Grant Berni (Ospreys Supporters Club)
- Lynn Glaister (CF10)
- Simon Harrington (Cardiff Blue & Blacks Supporters Club)
- Dan Hallett (Dragons Supporters Club)

Agenda:

1. Independent Review:

- Nigel Walker opened the meeting with a comprehensive overview of the independent review's findings, which included 36 recommendations.
- Highlighted the gravity of the situation and the commitment of the WRU to implement all recommendations.
- Provided an update on the progress of forming an oversight panel to monitor and report on the implementation of the recommendations, which will be in place until they are complete.
- Discussed the timeline for the announcement of the oversight panel and the forthcoming publication of the full list of recommendations.
- Noted that there would be an update on progress against all recommendations by January, but it may take a couple of years to implement all recommendations.
- Lynn Glaister noted her hope that changes would reach through the entire organisation of the WRU and not just at the top levels.
- Cathy Green expressed her concerns that the independent report may not have taken place if the BBC program had not been made & it would take some time for the WRU to be trusted as a whole.

2. Board Changes:

- Nigel Walker provided detailed information on recent changes in the board structure and the role of each INED appointed.

- Emphasised the significance of appointing an independent chair, the first female CEO, and reducing the number of elected members.
- Discussed the transformation in the board's composition over the past six to seven months and highlighted the commitment to cultural change and transparency.
- Responded to questions and concerns from attendees regarding the impact of these changes on the organisation.

3. Behavioural Changes:

- Discussed the need for behavioural changes within the organisation.
- Nigel Walker assured participants of an open-door policy for reporting misconduct and discussed the modifications made to disciplinary procedures.
- Provided details on the establishment of a whistleblowing hotline and changes in the organisation's approach to handling such matters.
- Encouraged trust-building and transparency as essential components of the cultural shift.

4. Professional Rugby and Funding:

- Malcolm Wall delved into the financial aspects of the Professional Game, addressing concerns about the £4.5m budgets for the professional clubs during the 24/25 season.
- Malcolm outlined that he is looking at where commercial gains can be made to increase £4.5m playing squad budgets and noted the urgency.
- Discussed efforts to collaborate closely with professional clubs and manage budgets effectively while retaining Players of National Interest.
- Shared the organisation's commitment to fiscal responsibility and financial transparency.
- Discussion comparing WRU finances with the SRU and JSG representatives queried why the SRU had a significantly lower turnover but were able to invest much greater amounts into the professional clubs. Malcolm noted that this may not be comparing apples with apples, but he was looking into it.
- Discussion on the CLBILS loan and its impact on clubs to repay given the reported 8.25% interest rate compared to the English clubs' settlement with DCMS at 2% which included a 2-year payment holiday.
- JSG representatives suggested that divesting assets and restructuring existing debts to take away the debt burden would be welcomed.
- Nigel noted that no stone would be unturned once new CEO (Abi Tierney) started and it would be a priority to create a new strategy.

5. Supporter Representation on Independent Panel

- Nigel Walker addressed inquiries regarding the potential inclusion of supporter representation in the oversight panel.
- Discussed considerations for appointing an independent panel and potential collaboration with Sport Wales for advice.
- Acknowledged the importance of involving supporters in decision-making processes and encouraged their active participation.

6. Financial Expenditures:

- Nigel Walker and Malcolm Wall provided detailed insights into settlements and their impact on regional budgets.
- Responded to concerns about expenditures, explaining the negotiation process, and highlighting the organisation's commitment to immediate changes.
- Discussed the need for financial prudence and responsibility.
- JSG representatives queried figures from the reported WRU accounts including £9m additional expenditure on the Dragons under WRU ownership, severance payments and £30m spend on marketing.
- It was noted that the other professional clubs had agreed to the Dragons sale, although they were not able to veto the deal.
- It was noted that there are clauses in the Dragons sale that may benefit other professional clubs in the future but there was no short-term fix to replace the additional expenditure.

7. Team Performance and Marketing:

- Discussed on-field performance and marketing strategies to enhance the organisation's image.
- Nigel Walker emphasised the WRU's commitment to being a role model and highlighted the recent launch of Dysgu WRU to support clubs.
- Addressed concerns about the narrative around Welsh rugby and outlined initiatives to attract new fans and increase positive stories about professional club rugby in the Welsh media.
- Responded to questions about the organisation's role in promoting positive narratives and the challenges faced in changing perceptions.

8. Judgement Day and Fixture Timetabling:

- Provided a detailed plan for Judgement Day, including changes to ticket sales approaches, including a telesales team employed to sell hospitality.
- Addressed concerns about fixture timetabling and committed to discussing and resolving these concerns for the 24/25 season and ensuring Judgement Day moves back to the Principality Stadium.
- Encouraged input from attendees regarding their expectations for Judgement Day and ways to enhance the event's success.

9. Commercial and Marketing Strategies:

- Malcolm Wall highlighted ongoing efforts to promote regional rugby through the WRU website and collaboration with regional clubs.
- Explored initiatives with travel partners to make regional matches more accessible for fans.
- Discussed the challenges and opportunities in commercial and marketing strategies and sought input from attendees on improving the overall approach.

10. Wrap-up and Future Commitments:

- The meeting concluded on a positive note, with Barrie Jones highlighting the WRU's commitment to maintaining four professional clubs.
- Malcolm Wall encouraged participants to share ideas for improving attendance and emphasised the importance of match attendance for both commercial success and team performance.
- Nigel Walker thanked participants for their engagement and contributions to the meeting.

Next Meeting:

- TBC (post meeting addendum – 20th February 2024)