

Buckinghamshire Council Representative Report

Buckinghamshire RFU AGM July 25

Since the 2024 Buckinghamshire RFU AGM, I have attended all Council meetings both formal and informal, all Community Game Board (CGB) meetings both formal and informal and chaired the Rugby Growth Sub Committee meetings with additional sub-group meetings. The Council Oversight Group for Adult Player Registration was stood down and its responsibilities transferred to the CGB.

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 and have informed them of my desire to Chair the CGB next year.

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 or as this year assist with problems that I can short-cut with Twickenham.

The following issues are worthy of note in my report:

Leadership Challenges at the RFU

This has been a particularly difficult time for the leadership of the RFU, with pressure brought to bear on the Chair who resigned and the CEO who fought off an SGM motion of no confidence. Issues however remain, particularly with regard to the handling of the Governance & Representation Review which saw the recent game-wide consultation sent to over 240,000 people on GMS attracting only 1,100 returns. The options within the consultation – both of which were to remove Council – have been derided by CBs and clubs as a removal of their right to elect local representatives of the game to both lobby on their behalf and to run the game in partnership with the executive. The alternative is unelected volunteers selected to undertake the work of the current Council, but with no mandate from the game to do so. The RFU AGM will vote on 11 resolutions put forward by Chichester RFC and Nottingham RFC which if passed will transform the governance of the game by enhancing the power of Council and the membership. At the time of writing, the Interim Chair of the RFU has written to all members to reject these resolutions. I remain in support of the move to retain a ‘reformed’ Council / elected body and will be presenting that case to Council on the 27th and 28th June at a meeting prior to the RFU AGM.

Community Game Board (CGB) / Rugby Growth Sub-Committee (RGSC)

The CGB is likely to be strengthened as part of the GRR to become a more autonomous board. I welcome this potential move to create a more effective board accountable to the community game, and responsible for its own decisions. Meetings this year have focused on Adult Player Registration; women & girls and WRWC 2025; safeguarding and pitch side care; competitions management and travel funding; agreeing the measurements of the Community Game Future strategy. The workflow of the CGB doesn’t vary a great deal which points to ensuring that the board maintains its focus on the critical parts of the community game. A significant amount of time has been spent on business planning to ensure that we have a more effective 3-year view of programmes and budgets.

The Rugby Growth Sub-Committee work programme has developed this year to include responsibility for youth engagement as well as ensuring the actions from the women and girls review are implemented and overseeing the club facing element of the T1 non-contact rugby.

Community Game Future Strategy 2025

The strategy was implemented this year with a number of key strands as reported before. 45 Rugby Schools Managers are now in post working with school trusts to re-introduce and strengthen rugby in the state sector. The emphasis has been on working with trusts who have offered partner funding in year 1 and ensuring that clubs who traditionally may have partnered with these schools are aware of the potential influx of players who have been introduced to rugby via T1 Rugby. I continue to press this issue to ensure we don't lose opportunities to accept these new players into our clubs. The women and girls' investment has ramped up as the WRWC 2025 approaches, but the target of 100,000 female players by the end of season 26/27 is unlikely to be met.

Adult Player Registration

The first season of adult player registration was a relative success with more players registering than expected, particularly in lower teams and merit tables. Significant time and effort has been made available to ensure that season two is easier for those players who registered last year and help those clubs who did the registrations for their players to allow them (the players) to do so for season 2025/26.

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

As you are aware I chaired a semi-independent review into refereeing and match officials for the CGB. The review produced 30 recommendations that were ratified at the CGB meeting in October and a subsequent action plan was written for the game. I have just finished 6 roadshows for referee societies to provide feedback before the action plan is fully implemented in season 2025/26. Further work with CBs will be undertaken to press home the need for refereeing issues to have a game wide response.

Buckinghamshire Club 1st XVs will play their rugby in the following leagues in 2025/26:

Regional 1 South East: Amersham & Chiltern

Regional 2 Thames: Aylesbury, Beaconsfield, Marlow

Regional 2 Mid East: Olney

Counties 1 Southern North: Bletchley, Buckingham, High Wycombe

Counties 2 – North: Chesham, Milton Keynes, Risborough (P), Slough

Counties 3 South: Farnham Royal, Phoenix

At the time of writing, the RFU website wasn't displaying 2025/26 fixtures for our women's teams.

Simon Winman

Bucks RFU Council Representative