



# DEVON RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

## East/Mid Devon Club Voice Notes

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2026

Venue: Exeter Saracens

Present: Seb Stewart (Topsham), Rick Libby (Withycombe), Ant Cole, Abby Watkins, Holly Feller (Topsham), Graham Howells (Withycombe), Pat Mortimore (Exeter Saracens), Shaun Killian (Exeter Saracens), Simon Fuller, Simon Farmer, Rob Masters, Graeme Gillard, Keisha-Ann Down, Glenn Channing, John Drew, Tim Warren.

Apologies: Chris Foster, Nicola Vaughan, Paddy Dummett (Tiverton)

### ***Declaration of Interests***

None

### ***Meeting Notes***

#### **1. RFU Partnership Agreement Update**

The meeting received an update on the introduction of a new four-year Partnership Agreement between the RFU and Constituent Bodies, launching this summer.

Devon RFU will play a key role in supporting the community game through three core areas:

- **Run** – Operational delivery across the county game
- **Retain** – Development of an annual player retention plan
- **Regulation** – Oversight of areas including finance, safeguarding, discipline, and age-grade rugby

Funding will be aligned to club engagement and participation, reflecting both the number of voting clubs and registered players. This represents a positive step towards strengthening the long-term sustainability of rugby across Devon.

#### **2. Player Retention & Competition Integrity**

Clubs shared feedback on player retention challenges, particularly around the movement of players between teams within clubs. The meeting acknowledged concerns and welcomed ongoing work by the South West Regional Organising Committee (SW ROC) to explore solutions, including:

- Potential limits on the number of first team players eligible to play in lower teams
- Learning from approaches already trialled in neighbouring counties

In the short term, there is an opportunity to ensure consistent application of existing regulations, including appropriate use of sanctions where required.

**Actions Agreed:**

- Competitions Team to develop a clear and robust process to protect competition integrity
- Competitions Team to ensure consistent enforcement of existing rules
- Continued collaboration with SW ROC to align fixtures and regulations

**3. Competition & Playing Developments**

- Friday night fixtures under floodlights continue to grow in popularity, offering flexibility for players and supporters
- A new Front Row replacement infographic has been released, with clubs and referees encouraged to ensure full understanding and compliance

**4. Age-Grade Rugby Update**

The meeting discussed several important developments within the age-grade game:

- Variations in squad sizes across clubs were noted, with opportunities to encourage greater balance and participation
- An all-clubs meeting will take place on 31st May at Exeter Athletic to discuss competition structures for the upcoming season
- The RFU is reviewing the structure of age-grade competitions, with consideration being given to a post-Christmas competition window to better align school and club rugby

Clubs were reminded of key guidance:

- Festival formats must remain inclusive, with no streaming of players by ability
- The next Age-Grade Forum will take place on 15th June at Sandy Park

**5. Girls' Rugby Development**

Positive progress continues in growing the girls' game across Devon:

- Flexibility remains for Under 11 girls to play either mixed rugby or within under 12s girls' teams
- Clubs are encouraged to develop their girls' offer, supported by:
  - The Director of Age-Grade Rugby

- The Director of the Female Game
- Newly appointed Girls Lead, Tracey Driver

Additional opportunities include engaging university students studying sport-related courses to support coaching and delivery.

The meeting also discussed the potential for further investment in school rugby, including the possibility of jointly funding a Schools Rugby Manager (SRM) in partnership with the RFU.

## **6. Female Game Update**

- The Devon Women's Cup and Shield will launch for the 2026/27 season, with a dedicated working group to plan delivery
- This allows time to build strong foundations and maximise participation across the women's game

## **7. Player Development Pathway (PDG)**

- The boys' PDG programme continues to be delivered in partnership with Exeter Chiefs, including festival-based observation opportunities
- It was noted that additional opportunities will be provided throughout the season
- Encouragingly, local initiatives such as a self-funded shadow PDG in North Devon are supporting player development and retention

## **8. Key Updates & Notices for Clubs**

Clubs were asked to note the following updates:

- Launch of the RFU National Diversity Programme, with Devon RFU Diversity Lead, Ant Cole, engaging with clubs
- Opportunity to engage with the Stiga offer via the RFU team
- Completion of Facilities Needs Questionnaires to support future investment
- Availability of summer activity guidance
- Upcoming fixture: Red Roses vs Canada at Sandy Park (19th September)
- Opportunity to partner with Guide Leaders for T1 upskilling initiatives

### **Congratulations were extended to:**

- Dolphins – National Inclusive Rugby Champions
- Westcountry Wasps – Plate Final winners
- Paignton, South Molton, and Salcombe – reaching Communities Championship quarter-finals

- Topsham and Tiverton – progressing to the latter stages of national league play-offs

Thank you to Exeter Saracens for hosting this Club Voice meeting.