Minutes of Volleyball England Board Meeting 7th February 2026 via Teams

Directors Present	Titles
RHa Hackwood [RHa]	Chair of the Board
AS Shipway [AS]	Vice Chair
AK Kornilov [AK]	Elected Director
Jake Sheaf [JS]	Elected Director
Jess Keen [JK]	Elected Director
Jess Plumridge [JP]	Elected Director
Jill Osleger [JO]	Independent Director
Richard Harrison [RH]	Elected Director
Tracy Newton [TN]	Elected Director
Staff Present	
CF Ford [CF]	Chief Executive Officer
Guin Batten [GB]	Deputy Chief Executive
Agata Sromecka [ASr]	Secretariate
In attendance	
Prof DV Vishnubala [DV]	Chief Medical Officer

EB/25-26/26 Apologies

- RHa welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was her first time chairing Volleyball England Board meeting following her appointment. RHa reinforced expectations around participation and the flow of the meeting. DV would be joining at midday.
- Apologies had been received from Andres Hernandez, Phil French and Brendan Fogarty.

26.1 Directors Conflict of Interest & Disclosures

JS declared an interest while discussing the UKBT agenda item.

26.2 Approval of agenda

- TN pointed out that sitting volleyball was meant to be a standing agenda item from February. CF clarified that this would be covered within and as part of the Exec report going forward.
- Agenda was approved by all.

26.3 Previous meetings

Minutes of 29 November 2025 Board meeting.

- Minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

26.4 Matters Arising/Actions List

- GB updated that DV was still to send the final wording for the Concussion policy discussed at the October Board meeting. The policy was still to be released. The policy would be shared with the Board for approval as previously agreed.

- GB asked for anyone who had not received the link to the safeguarding training to contact her and she would resend.
- GB thanked RHa and RH for their help with the policies update.

26.5 Board Member Check In
Board shared updates on their wellbeing.

EB/25-26/27 Exec Report
The report was taken as read. Selected items of the report were discussed as part of the agenda item.

27.1 NVL Rules & Regulations 2026/27 – Proposed Changes
GB reported that the paper outlined the proposed changes to NVL Rules and Regulations including adjustments to playing up rules, promotion and relegation arrangements, transfer clarity and live streaming expectations. The emphasis was placed on earlier circulation to allow clubs adequate preparation time.

Board discussed:

- AK asked re u18s and the transfer rule. A confirmation was given that under eighteen players were not intended to be restricted by these changes.
- Revised start time provisions were outlined as a response to club feedback and operational practicality. Additional match day requirements relating to video and live streaming were described as part of a broader ambition to improve league presentation and professionalism.
- AK raised technical concerns regarding live streaming requirements, particularly in school venues with restricted broadband or mobile signal. GB acknowledged these constraints and confirmed that quality thresholds aimed to ensure broadcasts remained meaningful and usable. GB would action this with the comms department.
- Clarification was provided on the role of team captains where a qualified coach was not present, with emphasis placed on limiting this role to substitutions timeouts and match administration rather than coaching activity.
- AK highlighted concerns regarding mid-season transfers, describing the competitive impact of losing key players late in the season.
- AK raised concerns about the introduction of fixed deadlines for playing up eligibility, noting that some teams may have played few matches before the proposed cutoff. AK suggested that the absence of a notice period could disadvantage teams attempting to remain competitive.
- AS questioned how the regulations would be enforced where clubs could not reasonably meet requirements. GB explained that the regulations already set out sanctions and compliance processes. CF added that VE would support clubs rather than adopting a sink or swim approach.
- AS stressed the importance of clear narrative and broad community endorsement when communicating regulatory changes.
- RHa reinforced that the intent was to raise professional standards while supporting clubs through the transition.
- RHa summarised the discussion and confirmed Board’s support for the NVL rule changes. RHa noted that approval was given subject to refinement of communications and follow up on technical and timing issues.

27.2 Evolution of Board meetings:
In terms of evolution of Board meetings, RHa and AS proposed the following:

- RHa invited AS to present a proposal on restructuring Board meetings to create space for deeper strategic discussion alongside governance and assurance responsibilities.

- AS explained that recent Board conversations highlighted the need for regular deep dive opportunities rather than relying on annual strategy days. AS described how this approach would allow the Board to explore complex topics such as beach pathways, risk appetite, and horizon scanning. AS emphasised that this shift depended on sub committees operating effectively as delivery engines providing assurance and escalation by exception. AS outlined a proposed structure where the first part of Board meetings focused on governance compliance and assurance while the second part focused on strategic deep dives. AS explained that deep dive outcomes could lead to task and finish groups further subgroup work or executive action rather than Board level delivery. AS clarified that the strategy would remain unchanged and embedded within the assurance cycle.
- RHa reinforced that the proposal aimed to make better use of Board expertise networks and lived experience within the sport. RHa stated that this approach would allow Board members to contribute more actively to shaping the future of the sport while maintaining oversight of current delivery.
- CF reminded the Board of the strategic progress barometer reviewed in November and suggested using it to inform future deep dive topics. CF highlighted indoor national teams and facilities development as areas currently tracking behind plan. CF noted the recruitment of a new indoor performance director as a timely opportunity to support a focused discussion.
- RHa invited Board members to indicate whether they supported the proposed direction and asked for ideas for future deep dive topics to be shared by email.
- RH questioned the intended outcomes of this approach and wondered whether there was a risk of duplicating the role and expertise of staff. RH challenged the Board to clarify whether long term ambitions focused on performance outcomes or participation and development. RH expressed concern that previous long-term targets had delivered limited progress.
- AS responded that the Board role was not operational delivery but long-term reflective thinking and challenge. AS suggested the Board could explore future ambition questions and then delegate expert development and implementation. RH reiterated that performance strategy required specialist leadership and warned against setting unrealistic long-term targets. RH argued that performance represented a more complex governance challenge than other organisational areas.
- CF proposed Beach Volleyball strategic planning as a potential deep dive topic for the April meeting. CF suggested facilities development as a further deep dive topic given recent momentum without a clear strategic anchor.
- AK suggested that beach performance and pathways warranted earlier strategic focus. AK acknowledged strong recent progress in junior beach programmes and communications.
- RHa summarised the discussion and confirmed broad Board support for evolving meeting structure. RHa emphasised the need to avoid operational overlap while making effective use of Board expertise. RHa asked CF and AS to draft a proposed forward work programme for upcoming meetings.

CF reported the following on AGM planning and governance decisions:

- CF proposed Saturday 20 June 2026 as the AGM date with SportPark as the venue.
- The Board approved the proposed AGM date and location.
- CF outlined the upcoming Board member review process and its link to nominations committee planning. CF explained that RH could not remain on the Nominations committee due to his forthcoming vacating the Board.
- CF recommended that AS formally join the Nominations committee alongside JO, AH and RHa. The Board approved AS's appointment to the Nominations committee.

EB/25-26/28 Subgroup Reports

The following was reports in terms of the work of the subgroup:

- CF presented a financial update confirming performance ahead of budget at Q3.

- CF confirmed a healthy cash position and confidence in yearend delivery.
- RH confirmed that talent activity would continue with refinement rather than fundamental change.
- TN highlighted strong safeguarding training uptake and challenged the group to define success metrics. GB acknowledged that uptake figures reflected Q3 and expected further improvement.
- JK highlighted the importance of Board visibility at major events. JK confirmed work underway on a Board attendance calendar to support engagement and representation.
- CF reported successful confirmation of a beach pro tour event in the UK.
- CF shared progress toward a three-year agreement for Queen and King of the Court London at the Copper Box.
- GB reported early delivery expectations for the new Loughborough venue. GB confirmed vacancies within the competitions working group following resignations.
- CF clarified that pressures related to complaint volume rather than compliance issues.

EB/25-26/29 UKBT – Review and Planning

- RHa formally introduced JS in his capacity as UK Beach Tour lead and clarified that he was attending as an invited guest rather than as a Board contributor. RHa confirmed that JS held a declaration of interest in relation to the paper and would not participate in any decision making. RHa invited JS to outline the background and intent of the proposed Ways of Working agreement.
- JS and CF explained that UK Beach Tour had historically operated under a licence arrangement with Volleyball England and the Home Nations. He then stated that the purpose of the proposal was to strengthen alignment and present a clearer narrative of joint working rather than operating as a loosely connected independent entity. JS highlighted specific areas of alignment within the paper, including officials' development and closer operational links through Rowan, General Manager of UK Beach Tour.

- CF provided additional context, explaining that Volleyball England had historically taken a light-touch approach to UK Beach Tour delivery. CF acknowledged that while indoor and sitting volleyball structures had developed in alignment, beach volleyball had progressed along a separate trajectory. CF stated that this divergence had begun to create confusion among members and that recalibration was required. CF confirmed that Rowan would attend Volleyball England monthly meetings, including four in-person meetings per year, to embed closer organisational integration.
- CF identified officiating pathways as a key catalyst for the proposed changes, following previous concerns raised by AH. CF described the document as a Ways of Working agreement rather than a contractual change and invited Board challenge and insight before approval.
- RHa reminded the Board that the recommendation sought endorsement of the Ways of Working agreement and support for continued joint implementation.
- AK stated that he was unfamiliar with the original decision to outsource domestic beach competition delivery to UK Beach Tour and requested background. CF explained that the arrangement predated his tenure and arose during a period of organisational and financial constraint. CF described how Volleyball England previously operated the Volleyball England Beach Tour before transferring delivery under a licence model. CF stated that UK Beach Tour assumed financial risk and delivery responsibility in return for operating the domestic competition structure. CF confirmed that the licence had been periodically reviewed and extended, most recently eighteen months earlier. JS expanded on the historical context, noting that domestic beach competition had grown from a small number of large events to almost 400 events annually. JS stated that participation had increased significantly, while performance outcomes had not yet matched that growth. JS highlighted the transformation in access to beach volleyball compared with ten years earlier. RHa queried whether the licence

operated in perpetuity. CF confirmed that the licence was time-bound and currently due for review in 2027. AS emphasised that the Ways of Working agreement should be viewed alongside a wider strategic conversation about beach volleyball. AS questioned whether Volleyball England should reflect on the broader delivery model for beach as part of future planning. AS noted, that the upcoming licence review presented an opportunity to consider long-term intent, outcomes, and delivery approach

- RHa reflected on whether outsourcing represented an appropriate and proven model within sport governance. RHa invited comparative insight from other sports.
- JO shared experience from tennis, explaining that outsourcing delivery could be effective where resource constraints existed, provided outcomes and accountability were clearly defined. JO highlighted the importance of clarity around responsibility, escalation, and standards where third-party delivery models were used.
- CF stated that the Ways of Working agreement intentionally repositioned Volleyball England and UK Beach Tour toward a balanced partnership model. CF raised the question of whether format-specific strategic narratives were required for indoor, beach, and sitting volleyball. CF observed that while multiple beach initiatives were progressing, a clear and accessible overarching narrative was missing.
- JS supported the need for a clearer strategic picture for beach volleyball and highlighted opportunities to align domestic and international events. JS referenced infrastructure at Weymouth and Bournemouth as capable of supporting higher-level international competition.
- RHa drew attention to questions raised in the chat regarding benchmarking, safeguarding, and policy alignment. CF confirmed that safeguarding and disciplinary alignment between Volleyball England and UK Beach Tour had been prioritised. CF acknowledged ongoing work to manage complex safeguarding cases within the beach community. RHa stressed the importance of clear escalation, appeal, and liability pathways for participants and families regardless of delivery model. CF confirmed that further alignment work would be undertaken as part of implementation.
- RHa asked the Board to confirm whether it supported the proposed Ways of Working agreement. The Board confirmed approval and endorsement of the agreement.
- RHa noted that beach volleyball would be considered as a potential deep dive topic for a future Board meeting.
- CF confirmed that Rowan's upcoming time in the office would provide an opportunity to progress outstanding alignment actions.

JS left the meeting.

EB/25-26/30 Clinical Governance Plan 2026/27

- RHa opened the session and invited introductions, noting that the deep dive would focus on sport and exercise medicine and athlete welfare. Board members and attendees introduced themselves. RHa invited DV and CF to lead the session.
- DV introduced his background as a Sport and Exercise Medicine consultant and Professor, outlining his clinical, academic, governance, and advisory roles across multiple sports.
- DV explained that his work with Volleyball England focused on governance, risk management, infrastructure, and athlete welfare across both community and performance pathways.
- DV highlighted his ongoing clinical practice and direct experience treating volleyball athletes, noting the value this brought to system improvement.
- DV outlined why sport and exercise medicine constituted a Board-level responsibility, citing duty of care, safeguarding, reputational risk, and potential litigation.

- DV emphasised the importance of understanding injury trends, risk patterns, and mitigation strategies rather than responding reactively.

- DV highlighted the need to consider both junior and adult athletes, including pressure to play while injured and risks linked to selection and retention.
- DV presented findings from retrospective UK injury data covering 209 athletes, noting the absence of UK-specific data prior to this work.
- DV explained that the highest proportion of injuries were non-contact or insidious in nature, particularly affecting knees, ankles, and backs. DV highlighted that these injury types were preventable through improved strength and conditioning and movement quality. DV explained that overuse injuries often arose from inconsistent training loads, particularly when athletes moved between club environments and national camps.
- DV emphasised the need for ongoing monitoring to identify emerging risks and inform targeted intervention. DV described the position two years earlier, noting inconsistent healthcare cover, lapsed first aid training, lack of medical records, and reliance on borrowed emergency equipment.
- CF and GB were acknowledged for leading improvements, including mandatory first aid training for staff, qualification, and insurance checks, and strengthened HR processes.
- DV confirmed that standard operating procedures had been developed and aligned with Care Quality Commission standards.
- DV explained that encrypted clinical record systems were now in place to manage medical notes, allergies, and assessments. CF confirmed investment in emergency equipment, supported by sponsorship arrangements, and ongoing audit of readiness. DV identified strength and conditioning as the primary strategic priority to reduce injury risk.
- DV explained that the proposed framework extended beyond gym-based training to include fundamental movement skills, warm-ups, landing mechanics, and workload progression.
- DV emphasised that education needed to reach athletes directly as well as coaches to reduce reliance on informal or inappropriate sources.
- DV agreed and noted that transition points represented significant load-change risk.CF confirmed that transition points would be considered within future planning.
- DV emphasised the importance of long-term athlete health and sustaining participation across the life course. DV outlined female athlete health as a national priority, referencing collaboration with the FA, RFU, and ECB. DV explained that Volleyball England's approach would focus on education and signposting rather than intensive resourcing. Areas highlighted included menstrual health, pregnancy and postnatal participation, breast health, and long-term engagement. CF noted opportunities for partnership and sponsorship within the female athlete space. DV outlined plans for e-learning modules covering mental health awareness, concussion, nutrition, and injury prevention.
- DV described plans to build a national network of trusted clinicians and rehabilitation providers offering accessible support to athletes.
- DV explained that the research programme would continue annually to track trends and inform Board decision making.
- CF thanked DV for his work in these areas and highlighted the importance of integrating this work into regular Board reporting rather than annual updates.

Board discussed:

- RH highlighted the importance of supporting athletes transitioning out of performance pathways or participating at regional level to prevent long-term injury.
- TN strongly endorsed the work, linking it to culture, wellbeing, and safeguarding.
- AK questioned how responsibility could be shared where coaches lacked strength and conditioning expertise and facilities were limited. CF responded that the framework aimed to be scalable and embedded within coach education rather than reliant on specialist delivery alone.
- RH stressed the challenge in education of coaches to persuade them to follow the

recommended path rather than taking shortcuts.

- RHa noted that this session exemplified the type of strategic deep dive the Board wished to embed going forward.

Peter Wardale Memorial Award Nominations

- CF introduced nominations received via the Heritage Group.
- RH spoke in support of Roy Pankhurst, highlighting his foundational contribution to volleyball and lack of formal recognition.
- The Board agreed by acclamation to support Roy Pankhurst as the nominee.

TN left at 1pm.

EB/25-26/31 Meeting Finalisation
31.1 Review of Actions
Actions were noted.

31.2 AOB
There was no AOB.

31.3 Meeting Close
Meeting closed at 1.07pm.

Actions

EB/25-26/17	• Wording in the concussion policy still outstanding and would be shared as soon as ready.	Action GB
26.4	• GB to resend the link to safeguarding training to those that notify her.	Action GB
27.1	• GB would speak to the comms team re streaming junior games.	Action GB
27.2	• RHa asked CF and AS to draft a proposed forward work programme for upcoming meetings.	CF and AS

Board Meeting – Report Summary

The following paper provides summary information from the 25th October 2025 board pack which should be read in conjunction with the above-board meeting minutes:

EB/25-26/27 – Executive Report

1. Sitting Volleyball Progress

Significant progress has been made across BUCS integration, HEVO engagement, competitions, and development initiatives. Key achievements include increased university participation at all levels, successful sitting Grand Prix events, and enhanced communications outreach with our disability History Month campaign. Our strategic priorities for the next quarter focus on expanding club offerings, strengthening partnerships, and defining a longer term vision for the sport.

BUCS Integration

- Proof-of-concept paper in development.
- Proposed new tournament format with timed games for university play.
- Follow-up meeting scheduled for February.
- UEL tournament confirmed for 18 March (capacity: 5 teams; interest from 3 including Loughborough).
- Engagement with Loughborough, Nottingham, and Staffordshire universities to expand participation.

HEVO Engagement

- Sitting Volleyball featured in Term 1 HEVO reports (Sheffield and Bath confirmed; more pending).
- Increased interest following HEVO conference; multiple requests for information.
- Pilot taster sessions planned at University of Leeds and UWE, supported by local coaches.

Competitions

- Sitting Grand Prix successfully established at the new home in Loughborough; 4 events held with 8 teams each.
- Sitting Cup scheduled for 12 April; entry details circulated to UK clubs, universities and European contacts to get as many teams entering as possible
- Registered players for Sitting GP increased to 87 from 78 last year.
- Initial meeting with Invictus Games organisers (Birmingham 2027) to explore collaboration.

Development

- Continued outreach to clubs expressing interest in sitting volleyball in last season's club survey.
- New initiatives include:
  - Folkestone sessions launched by Claire Harvey with Foundation support.
  - East London Lynx seeking coach; liaising with LVA and newsletter promotion.
  - Nuneaton Volleyball Club acquired equipment to start sessions.
  - Interest from a member of Lincoln Imps to try and start a Grimsby-based club.
- Mapping project underway to identify clubs, coaches, and universities for targeted development.

Communications

- Successful Disability History Month campaign featuring athlete stories, podcasts and video content (Nov 2025).
- Sitting Volleyball newsletter launched (Nov 2025); strong uptake with nearly 200 subscribers, including international stakeholders from Italy and holland.
- Newsletter naming poll is underway; "Sit & Spike" currently leading.

SVJWG & Mapping

- Next meeting scheduled for 22 January; focus on club offering and coach support for new clubs.

In summary, the past months have seen strong progress in participation, competition, and outreach. Looking ahead, we aim to define a longer term vision for sitting volleyball, including growth targets, development pathways, and strategic partnerships.

2. Supporting Women's Health in Volleyball

We are in the process of formalising a proactive approach to supporting women's health across the sport, recognising that factors such as menstrual health, menopause, pregnancy, postnatal return, and breast support can impact participation, wellbeing, and retention if not appropriately addressed.

The approach focuses on normalising conversation, reducing stigma, and implementing practical, scalable solutions that enable women and girls to participate confidently at all stages of life. Key elements include education and awareness for clubs and coaches, improved venue-based menstrual support, guidance for pre- and post-natal participation, and menopause-sensitive practices.

Strategic partnerships with organisations such as MAAREE and FabLittleBag provide credible, low-cost mechanisms to improve comfort, dignity, and performance while reinforcing Volleyball England's leadership in inclusion and welfare.

This work supports Volleyball England's wider commitments to inclusion, participant wellbeing, retention, and good governance. It embeds women's health considerations into policy, practice, and culture, ensuring that health-related issues are not barriers to participation and that the sport remains accessible, supportive, and sustainable for women and girls.