



Cheshire Rugby Football Union

(EST. 1875)

Cheshire RFU Statement: Conclusion of the Sirens Cluster and Transition to Sustainable Club-Based Girls' Rugby

Explaining the Decision

Cheshire RFU has decided to discontinue the Sirens girls' cluster. We recognise this news will be disappointing for many of the players, families, coaches and volunteers who have invested so much time, energy and passion into the programme over the past two seasons. We would like to begin by thanking everyone who has contributed to creating opportunities for girls to play and enjoy rugby through Sirens.

We know that this decision will not be welcomed by everyone. For that reason, we believe it is important to explain how the decision was reached, why it has been made, and how Cheshire RFU will continue to support girls' rugby across the county moving forward.

Some volunteers, parents and coaches wrote to Cheshire RFU to express their views, including asking us not to discontinue the cluster and proposing alternative ways forward. The Board carefully considered that feedback, along with discussions held with the RFU and the Board's responsibilities under RFU regulations and cluster guidance. After considering all available options, the Board concluded that the Sirens cluster should now come to an end and that girls' rugby activity should return to affiliated club structures.

Cheshire RFU remains of the view that the current model no longer aligns with the aims and principles set out in the RFU's Cluster Guidance, which describes clusters as temporary arrangements intended to support player development until sustainable club structures can be established.

It is important to emphasise what this decision is not:

- It is not a decision against girls' rugby.
- It is not a criticism of the Sirens players.
- It is not a criticism of the coaches, volunteers or parents who have supported the programme.
- It is not a reflection on the effort, commitment or achievements of everyone involved.

Our aim is for this decision to lead to stronger and more sustainable girls' rugby across the county, with both existing and new volunteers helping girls to thrive in the sport we all care deeply about.

Why Cheshire RFU Has Reached This Decision

Alignment with RFU Cluster Principles

RFU guidance describes clusters as temporary arrangements designed to help clubs work together where player numbers are low, with the long-term objective of creating sustainable club teams.



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The guidance states:

"The cluster should be viewed as a temporary arrangement with the long-term aim of creating sustainable standalone club teams."

Over time, Sirens has evolved from a temporary development model into an ongoing playing structure. Having reviewed the operation of the cluster over multiple seasons, the Board concluded that it no longer reflects the intended purpose of a cluster as described within RFU guidance.

Governance and Accountability

The Cheshire RFU Board also considered a number of governance and accountability issues arising from a model where registration and playing activity were operating separately.

The Board's concern was not with the commitment of those involved, but with ensuring that responsibilities for safeguarding, welfare oversight, discipline, insurance and operational accountability are clearly defined and managed through appropriate club structures.

Following its review, the Board concluded that these responsibilities are best delivered through affiliated clubs operating within clear, transparent and compliant governance arrangements.

The Board's Decision

Over a number of months, the Cheshire RFU Board considered potential ways forward for the Sirens cluster through a series of Board discussions and consultation with the RFU.

Following the decision, Cheshire RFU wrote to the Sirens volunteers and all players to inform them of the decision made at the Cheshire RFU Board Meeting on July 8th.

- The Sirens cluster will be discontinued.
- Rugby activity under the Sirens identity will come to an end.
- Players should transition into affiliated club structures for the 2026/27 season.

The Cheshire RFU Board carefully reviewed the feedback and alternative proposals put forward by volunteers, coaches and parents. These views formed part of the discussions leading up to the Board meeting on Wednesday 12 August, at which the Board confirmed its final decision.

While the Board recognised the commitment and passion behind the proposals received, it concluded that the Sirens cluster arrangement should be discontinued in line with its responsibilities under RFU guidance and its vision for the long-term development of girls' rugby across Cheshire.

The outcome was subsequently communicated to the four clubs involved in the Sirens cluster: Birkenhead Park RFC, Caldby RFC, Helsby RFC and Winnington Park RFC.



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Opportunities for Girls' Rugby Going Forward

Throughout discussions, Cheshire RFU considered a number of possible models for supporting girls' rugby across the county. The Board's priority throughout has been to ensure that every girl continues to have access to safe, enjoyable and sustainable rugby opportunities. For the 2026/27 season, players need only be registered with the single club they are representing.

1. Development Through Affiliated Clubs

The Board's preferred long-term approach is for girls to train, play and develop within affiliated clubs in their local communities.

Current player numbers indicated that clubs such as Birkenhead Park, Caldy and Winnington Park are sufficiently established to provide playing opportunities for girls across a range of age groups.

This approach helps strengthen:

- Local club identity
- Sustainable player pathways
- Volunteer recruitment and development
- Relationships between clubs and schools
- Long-term growth of the girls' game across Cheshire

2. Transitional Single-Club Model

The Board also considered whether a single affiliated club could temporarily host the programme if an immediate transition into standalone club environments proved difficult.

During those discussions, the Board formed the view that Winnington Park RFC would provide the strongest foundation for such an arrangement, reflecting its existing girls' and women's rugby pathway, established coaching structure and volunteer network. However, representatives of Sirens expressed a preference for Helsby RFC. While that preference was fully considered, the Board concluded that Winnington Park offered the strongest overall platform for a sustainable single-club model.

Regardless of these discussions, players remain entirely free to join the club that best suits their individual needs, and Cheshire RFU encourages all clubs to work positively and collaboratively to support every player's transition.



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Support for Players and Clubs

Cheshire RFU remains committed to helping every girl continue her rugby journey and to supporting clubs as they develop and grow their girls' sections.

Support will continue to be available through:

Cheshire RFU Women & Girls Lead

Providing support with:

- Player recruitment and retention
- Volunteer and coach development
- Operational planning
- Governance, safeguarding and compliance

Regional Women & Girls Leads

Providing local support tailored to individual club needs, including:

- School engagement and outreach
- Festival and fixture coordination
- Team development planning
- Ongoing support for player welfare and progression

RFU Support

Continuing guidance on:

- Regulations
- Governance requirements
- Best practice for developing sustainable girls' rugby programmes

The shared priority remains ensuring that every girl has access to safe, enjoyable and high-quality rugby opportunities.

Playing Opportunities

Girls across Cheshire will continue to have access to competitive and meaningful rugby through the Northern Girls Network. This structure enables clubs to work together to provide regular playing opportunities and helps ensure that girls can continue to enjoy rugby regardless of the size of their home club's player base.



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Our Commitment

Cheshire RFU remains fully committed to supporting the continued growth of girls' rugby across the county.

While we understand that not everyone will agree with this decision, it has been made with the long-term development, sustainability and welfare of the girls' game in mind. Our responsibility is to ensure that girls have clear pathways within well-supported club environments that can help them enjoy rugby and remain in the game for years to come.

We are grateful to every player, parent, volunteer and coach who has contributed to Sirens. The passion and commitment shown over the last two seasons has helped create opportunities for many young people and has demonstrated the enthusiasm that exists for girls' rugby in Cheshire.

We look forward to working with clubs, volunteers, schools and the RFU to build on that foundation and to support the next chapter of girls' rugby across the county.

Cheshire RFU
September 2026