

Cross-Party Group on Sport

12th June 2023, 5.30pm-7pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Jeremy Balfour MSP

Carol Mochan MSP

Brian Whittle MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association

Kirsty Cumming, Community Leisure UK

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, sportscotland

Anthony Drew, horsescotland

Edna Ewan, Scottish Sub Aqua Club.

Stew Fowlie, Scottish Student Sport

Alistair Gordon

Gary Grieve, Scottish ClubSport

Gina Hamilton, Oriam

Jane Harvey, Scottish Council of Taekwondo

Cllr Andrew Hassan

Emma Kane-McGuigan, Special Olympics GB

Rick Kenney, Scottish ClubSport

Graham Law, Scottish Rugby

Kevin Lee, Scottish FA

Hilary Lumsden, East Fife Sports Council

Gavin Macleod, Scottish Disability Sport

Alastair McCulloch, Scottish Sub-Aqua Club

Kirsty McNab, Scottish Sports Futures

Susan Melville, Leisure and Culture Dundee

Gregor Muir, Scottish Sports Association

Isabelle Michelson, LTA

Gavin Newlands MP

Joan O'Sullivan, Swimtime UKLtd. & Skilltime Training Academy

Fiona Reid, Bayfirth Research and OSS

Nick Rennie, Scottish Cycling

Jackie Smith, Scottish Clubsport

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating

Steve Walsh, High Life Highland

Mark Woods, Sported

Apologies

Susie Benson, CIMSPA
Stuart Brown, CHSS
Dr Adi Fawcett, Special Olympics GB
Marc Hope, Scottish Squash
David Laing, Borders Disability Sport
Liza Linton, RYA Scotland
Duncan Sinclair, Aberdeen Sports Village
Sue Webber MSP
Tess White MSP

Agenda item 1

Approval of minutes

Approval of minutes of 24th November 2022 meeting
Proposer, Rick Kenney, Scottish ClubSport
Seconder, Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, sportscotland
Minutes approved

Agenda item 2

Matters arising

In recognition of Volunteers' Week, on behalf of the Cross Party Group on Sport, the opportunity was taken to recognise the fantastic efforts of volunteers across Scottish sport for the contribution they make to clubs and communities and to thank the organisations, governing bodies, clubs and partners across the sector for taking the opportunity to share volunteers' stories and inspire more people to get involved.

Noted next round of UK Honours were to be announced shortly, attendees were reminded to consider people who could be nominated from across Scottish sport for future rounds.

Agenda item 3

Local Authority and Leisure Trust facilities - pricing, challenges and opportunities

JB opened the discussion by recognising the extent of sporting activity across Scotland which takes place in Local Authority and Leisure Trust operated facilities, and the consequent importance that such facilities are accessible, affordable and of a high standard.

The discussion aims to help share understanding of the current landscape around these facilities and the operators, the pressures that they are under and the potential

consequences of such pressures, and to raise awareness of the impacts that financial challenges are causing.

Community Leisure UK Chief Executive Officer Kirsty Cumming provided an introduction to Community Leisure UK, its work and its membership. Recent price rises have been an issue for clubs and individuals users accessing facilities, and KC explained the context behind these - rising operating costs, with energy and utility prices presenting significant challenges (especially given energy intensive facilities) with over double pre-Covid rates for most members, along with inflation and supply chain increases (e.g. swimming pool chemicals seeing an approximate 40% price increase, and rising property repair and maintenance costs). The largest pressure is coming from pay awards (notably the increase of 9.7% in the National Living Wage having a significant impact on payroll given the proportion of staff in the sector on low wages), coupled with pressure to match pay awards in other sectors to retain staff and maintain differential pay structures with significant challenges inherent for pay progression and career development. The sector wants to pay good wages, but they do present issues of affordability.

There is decreasing investment from Local Authorities in services, with significant cuts in management fees along with rising inflation meaning significant real terms cuts. With pressure on LA finances it is not a surprise to see cuts to 'non-statutory' services, but also seeing a worrying path to zero management fees for some Trusts (moving towards zero investment from LAs and fully self sustaining within 5-10 years) - this reduction in investment may lead to the requirement for more commercialised services. This reduction is happening at a time where we see an ageing infrastructure with a significant refurbishment or replacement required, with an additional concern over investment needed to meet Net Zero targets.

Additional issues raised were the impact of Barclay review recommendations, whereby changes to rates relief and ceiling on rates for ALEOs mean facilities are being hit with rates for the increase on rateable value in the case of refurbishment or replacement, impeding and disincentivising this investment in infrastructure.

Impact of these factors is being seen by clubs, community groups and individuals across the country, and the impacts will continue. Efficiencies that can be made have been made already, such as reducing opening hours - now in a position of cuts rather than efficiencies. In effort to balance financial sustainability with affordability and accessibility, there have been price increases (around 10% on average, but activity dependant), but trying to limit increases as best as possible. The ambition is to protect and preserve facilities in communities and Trusts want to continue to work collaboratively with partners to meet the shared ambitions of affordable access to community sport.

High Life Highland Chief Executive Steve Walsh provided additional operational context of the cross-subsidy model operating in the Highlands, with a wide range of services, facilities and geographies to cover.

SW highlighted that pay pressure has been significant, along with inflation and consideration is required in terms of delivery against councils' service delivery contracts - for some Trusts this means serious impacts such as looking at closures. HLH has had to close outdoor activity service this year as well as reducing opening

hours at other facilities which leads to tension with clubs, as well as raise prices by 9%, but have tried to limit rises as best as possible and often been in a position without a choice.

HLH has maintained its budget membership scheme to protect access and inclusion for individuals receiving Universal Credit and will protect access for vulnerable groups at all costs, as there is recognition of the disproportionate impact there.

SW highlighted the importance of collaboration and shouting about the contribution made against wider Scottish Government departments and ambitions, in terms of education, health, transport and more, where sport makes a big difference but is not seen as a priority. It has felt that LAs and Trusts have been left to deal with an increasingly difficult situation and the outcome is going to come down to really hard local choices.

JB thanked speakers for providing an overview and sobering reflection of current issues.

The meeting then opened to questions and discussion from attendees.

Gary Grieve, Scottish ClubSport

Highlighted that local clubs are having to find new sources of income to meet rising costs of facilities, transport, equipment and doing their best not to pass on costs to members, which puts additional stress on club volunteers. GG asked about support for clubs and how facility operators are working together with clubs during this challenging time.

Dr Fiona Reid, Bayfirth Research/Observatory for Sport in Scotland

Noted the perfect storm potentially happening with the cited issues around LA facilities coupled with evidence of the number of young people volunteering in sport having decreased 10% since pre-Covid and wider research showing most community sports clubs expressing fearing for the future. FR would be interested in working with others to gather evidence of impacts of these collective factors that are impacting on clubs to pull evidence together to get more people in Parliament and Government to pay attention.

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating

Raised particular concerns about access for people with additional needs and access of volunteers to support people. Has been working on a 'sport equality access card' which would entitle someone with additional needs to bring in a volunteer to support them in their activity as there remains a gap in providing support through volunteers to people with additional needs and there is a need for a coordinated system across Scotland.

JB noted that it was a year on from the Festival of Politics session in Parliament about access to community facilities, asking SW if he was more optimistic or less optimistic than during those discussions.

SW agreed that a lot had happened since then - even though a fairly bleak picture was presented a year ago, the situation has deteriorated since then, especially with regard

to inflation. Many Trusts are now at a crisis point, evidenced by the facility closures seen across Scotland, and it looks like that situation will continue to worsen.

Meeting chair handed to Brian Whittle MSP as JB had to leave meeting

Gavin McLeod, Scottish Disability Sport

Noted the significant impact of recent issues on people with disabilities - with this group still recovering from Covid impacts, the financial crisis on top of a reduction in social care support, and finding opportunities harder to fund. GM highlighted that the health and physical activity gap between active and inactive people is monumental at the moment and is only growing. SDS are trying to look at doing things differently, working with different partners such as NHS Tayside, to connect up services across sectors to try and combat issues.

SW added there is no magic solution. Positive partnerships are needed between sports clubs, governing bodies, leisure trusts, with everybody pulling together - SW suggested leveraging support through community sports hubs as a potential solution.

Rick Kenney, Scottish ClubSport

Raised a question of the extent of CoSLA engagement regarding challenges for sport and leisure and community use of facilities.

Kirsty McNab, Scottish Sports Futures

Working with young people adversely affected by poverty, SSF is trying to remove as many barriers to provision as possible (and having to do more of this than in the past, e.g. provision of clothes, food). Asked about opportunities for groups to access discounted rates to get them engaged with sport/PA.

KC noted that concessionary access is different across LAs and Trusts.

Also noted that CoSLA are engaged and facilitate a sport and leisure group with a range of stakeholders, however the organisation doesn't have the capacity to focus on this - CLUK would welcome a post being funded for CoSLA to have a position in place purely focused on sport/leisure provision.

Mark Woods, Sported

Highlighted that for grassroots clubs there is significant jeopardy in place with the rise in cost of facilities and the rise of cost in running facilities, noting a rise in energy bills, rise in insurance, and rise in rent prices. The outcome will be a negative impact on participation, with fewer young people able to attend and families being priced out - even where fees are taken out, there are other costs that are barriers to participation such as transport.

Raised issue that support is not reaching grassroots clubs currently. Some facilities are now stuck in a vicious cycle where fewer attendees means raising fees to cover costs, in turn meaning fewer attendees again. In terms of support, it has not yet been confirmed if Westminster facility support will be replicated.

Kevin Lee, Scottish FA

Having launched the Football for All strategy in November, have seen through consultation with clubs that that facility access issues remain front and centre. KL said that is a need for reform of the historical model that currently exists that charges

members. No other health and social care outcome makes its money through charging its beneficiaries and any financial business model where you have to charge members automatically puts barriers in place.

Maggie Still, Scottish Squash

Queried whether Scottish Government departments recognise the crisis facing sport.

BW noted that he is looking at ways the cross-portfolio contribution can be brought to the attention of the Parliament Chamber, possibly through a debate highlighting how the reduction in sport participation would impact across all departments of Government.

Chair passed to Kim Atkinson, SSA

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, sportscotland

Noted that while Scottish Government has committed to doubling the central budget for sport and active living, it is worth recognising that Audit Scotland cited that 90% of the sport and leisure spend in Scotland is through LAs. If the trend continues to double the central budget but reductions at LA level continue, we'll end up with less money in the pot for sport and leisure come the end of the parliamentary term. Doubling the central budget would be a great thing and a step change but in terms of the overall picture, the sector needs to be realistic about where this is currently going.

MDS added that while sport and leisure are often described as non-statutory services there is a duty in the 1982 Act for 'adequate provision' of sport and recreation facilities. It has been very hard to say what 'adequate' means, but in the bleak scenarios where zero management fees are being discussed, that question may need to be revisited and put to councils about their role in that provision where they intend to step back from it so completely.

Hilary Lumsden, East Fife Sports Council

Highlighted the importance of supporting volunteers and working with clubs and volunteers to bridge the gap between SGBs, volunteers and facility operators given the current significant number of barriers for volunteers.

KC noted opportunities to share good practice, looking at positive working between clubs and leisure trusts. Delivery should be tailored to local circumstances but CLUK hosted a session with Scottish ClubSport to highlight effective working models and ideas on how we can work better together.

KC called for attendees to continue to focus on collaboration, to align messages, and work collectively to build the case to local and national politicians and generate buy-in from Government and LAs about the cross-portfolio contribution of sport and physical activity, to champion the value of sport and try to come together to overcome barriers.

SW also highlighted the importance of mutual advocacy, with everyone focusing on being a stronger collective to protect access to facilities.

KA thanked speakers for their contributions, attendees for questions and to conveners for chairing the discussion.

Agenda item 4

Date of next meeting was to be confirmed post Parliamentary recess.
Next meeting date: TBC