

# Cross-Party Group on Sport

30<sup>th</sup> October 2025, 1.30pm-2.30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP  
Carol Mochan MSP  
Maree Todd MSP  
Brian Whittle MSP  
Tess White MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Kirsty Morrison, CHSS  
Ailsa Wylie, sportscotland  
Megan Richardson, CIMSPA  
Liz Corbett, parkrun Ltd  
Fiona Reid, BayFirth Research CIC  
Maureen McGonigle, Scottish Women in Sport  
Stuart Brown, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland  
Lee Boucher, Scottish Rowing  
Stew Fowlie, SSS  
Heidi Vistisen, LEAP Sports Scotland  
Liza Linton, Scottish ClubSport  
Mark Woods, Sported  
Fraser Calderwood, Active Dundee  
Danny Bisland, Scottish FA  
John Shaw, Scottish Police Recreation Association  
Emma Logan, Scottish Disability Sport  
Mhairi Adam, Pickleball Scotland  
Louise Harrison, Pickleball Scotland  
Kirsty McNab, Scottish Sports Futures  
Eilidh McCall-Lawrie, Scottish Curling  
Mekala McGowan, Scottish Curling  
Chloe Maclean, Karate Scotland/ University of the West of Scotland  
Shirley Martin, Scottish Football Association  
Andrew Baptie, Scottish Golf  
Dan Gerrard, Spartans Community Foundation  
Mark Gaffney, Scottish Disability Sport  
Adam Martin, Scottish Rowing

Kim Atkinson, SSA  
Gregor Muir, SSA

## Apologies

Graham Law, Scottish Rugby  
Stuart Brown, CHSS  
Joan O'Sullivan, Swimtime  
Jeremy Balfour MSP  
Clare Adamson MSP  
Fraser Calderwood, Active Dundee  
Laura Graham, Scottish Rowing

## Agenda item 1

### Matters arising

- Approval of minutes of 5th March 2025 meeting
  - Proposer, Brian Whittle MSP
  - Seconder, Tess White MSP
  
  - Minutes approved
  
- LS gave condolences on behalf of the CPG to the family, friends and colleagues of former Olympic swimming coach Charlie Raeburn upon news of his passing - Charlie was well known to many across Scottish sport and was a longstanding member of the Cross-Party Group.
  
- Since the last meeting of the Group, the Birthday UK Honours list was announced, with recipients from Scottish sport including:
  - Zahrah Mahmood, Ramblers Scotland president, awarded an MBE for voluntary service in Scotland.
  - Richard Vallis, awarded an MBE for services to theatre, to sport and to people with a disability.
  - Colin Dalgano, Strathaven Rugby Club president and Whiteshawgate 3G Sports Trust chair and volunteer, awarded a BEM for services to the community in Strathaven.

Congratulations were given to all of the individuals recognised in this round.

## Agenda item 2

- **AGM business**

### Election of Office Bearers

The following were all re-standing for nomination:

- Convener: Liz Smith (LS) MSP (Conservative)
  - Proposed by Kim Atkinson (KA)
- Co-Deputy Conveners: Jeremy Balfour MSP (Independent), Clare Adamson MSP (SNP)
  - Proposed by KA
- Group Officers: Carol Mochan MSP (Labour), Brian Whittle MSP (Conservative) and Tess White MSP (Conservative)
  - Proposed by KA
- Secretariat: Scottish Sports Association (SSA)
  - Proposed by LS

All nominations were approved.

## Agenda item 3

### **Topic for this meeting: Female participation in sport**

LS opened the meeting by noting the success of the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Week initiative, which happens each year and has been successful in raising the profile of women and girls in sport across a range of different themes. Despite the progress of recent years, however, there remain some sports where women and girls are still treated as second class citizens.

Tess White MSP shared her reflections from the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry and report into female participation in sport in 2023. The report's recommendations still hold value and TS noted that it is important to take the opportunity to reflect upon these and the content of the evidence sessions to remind us all of the experiences of women in sport and see what progress we all still need to make.

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport Maree Todd MSP reflected on a very positive summer of women's sport on the international stage, including the Women's Scottish Open, the Euros and the Women's Rugby World Cup, and for the

first time ever equal billing for the shinty/hurling and shinty/camogie internationals for men and women on the same stage. These all provide inspiration for the next generation.

There remains a long way to go. The 2024 Scottish Health Survey results were published just last week and demonstrate that the gender gap in physical activity still exists. However, there are notable figures within the results - for example, 40% of women use sport or physical activity to manage symptoms of menopause or perimenopause, which is a higher proportion than those using HRC and those relying on vitamins, minerals or supplements. So that reflects a growing awareness of the holistic benefits of movement, not just for your physical health but also for mood, sleep and overall well-being and hormonal changes. As well as that has been an increase in the number of women meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines compared to previous years. That message is definitely getting through to people.

Since the inquiry in 2023, the Scottish Government has continued to deliver a range of programmes that are aiming to get more people more active more often, and that includes targeted work for women and girls. We delivered our Physical Activity for Health Framework last year which is a whole systems approach to sport and physical activity. That framework is a commitment to systemic change to address inequalities and participation and to support a more active Scotland.

Our Active Schools programme is successfully engaging girls in sport and physical activity in every Local Authority area across the country and last year we delivered on our Programme for Government commitment to make the active schools program free of charge, with close to 50% female participation. It is one of the most gender-balanced large scale sporting programs. With it now being free of charge, it is accessible irrespective of social-economic backgrounds.

Earlier this month, we once again celebrated Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Week, my favorite week of the year. I was absolutely thrilled to have our campaign endorsed by former Scotland football captain Rachel Corsie and I'm pleased to see that there was support for the campaign across all five parties in Parliament.

Earlier this year, we were delighted to work with the Welsh Government to fulfill our Programme for Government commitment to deliver a women's sports summit. That event was hosted in the margins of the Women's Rugby World Cup and it explored the visibility, engagement and leadership in women sport, bringing together governing bodies, sports councils, media, academics, charities and sponsors. The Women's Sport Trust presented the Shaping the Future report that was funded by the Scottish and Welsh Governments, which highlighted how Scotland and Wales can harness the momentum in women's sports to drive long-term growth, including harnessing media opportunities and leveraging online engagement. The 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow is identified as the next major opportunity to propel women's sport further and that's really exciting. I felt at that seminar that we held in down in Manchester it was the first time we tangibly thought beyond describing the problem and into some of the solutions - that research has been powerful at shining a light on the fact that women's sport is a different product and we can attract investment in different ways.

I was delighted that Scotland stepped in to host Glasgow 2026. We've got a proud history of hosting major sporting events and it will provide a really important opportunity to further increase the visibility of women's sports. We know that major events provide an excellent platform for new partnerships and for sustained growth and investment in sport, so there's a real chance for us to build on these opportunities and I look forward to doing that.

The Scottish Government remains focused on increasing participation of women and girls across all aspects of sport. Achieving this will require continued collaboration across parties, partners and the sporting sector and I'm encouraged by the real appetite for progress that there is in this room. I really value the expertise and the commitment that you bring to these discussions and I'm eager to hear reflections from this group on progress and on opportunities and where further challenges exist.

TW took over the chairing of the meeting as LS had to leave for a prior engagement.

Following the update from the Minister, questions and discussion were raised by attendees.

Liz Corbett shared statistics on Parkrun, reporting that for the year ending July 2025, there were 277,000 female participants, representing a 17.2% year-on-year increase. Walkers are predominantly female (71.2%), and 55% of volunteers are female, with the movement trending toward health and well-being reasons rather than speed. Parkrun is also focusing on tackling deprivation, which has traditionally been a barrier to participation, with targeted events in areas where participation is low.

Chloe Maclean from Karate Scotland discussed significant barriers for women's participation, including menstruation, noting that 65% of participants had missed classes at some point due to their period. Further to this, not all facilities that hold activity, like community centres and church halls, do not have sanitation products available to those who may need them.

CM also highlighted gender violence as a barrier, as participating in physical activity (and getting all the many benefits that it brings) can be intimidating for survivors, who need specialised support to avoid traumatising.

Mekala McGowan and Eilidh McCall-Lawrie from Scottish Curling presented on their new female initiative, which aims to improve engagement and participation by educating on female health. The organisation has a 60/40 membership ratio (male/female) and is tackling stigma, improving inclusion, and increasing understanding of female physiology.

A survey conducted by Scottish Curling revealed knowledge gaps concerning menopause, bone health, and mental health in females. The next steps involve internal education for staff and the board to complete the "Sport and Female Athletes" module to lead by example and build organisational understanding.

Dr Fiona Reid, Bayfirth Research CIC, emphasised the importance of understanding and celebrating female pioneers in sports to ensure their voices are heard. Work in women's cricket revealed that documenting their experiences was impactful, as the history of some sports may not adequately include the women's side.

The recognition of past female achievements can help address the current lack of female leaders and volunteers by showing that their contributions matter. Celebrating the importance of women playing at a club level as equal to men could help recruit more people into leadership positions.

Mark Woods from sported reported the significant barriers they are aware of to participation for girls, citing a lack of confidence (58%) and the need to address issues like finance and transport. The charity also observes that inspiration from national success is variable and that getting women involved in volunteering opportunities and to ensure that coaches are equipped to welcome and engage with girls remains a struggle.

Kirsty Morrison, Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland shared an update on their partnership with the Scottish Football Association and work through the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan, where CHSS focuses 10% of intervention time on physical activity. They have created recreational sport sessions for women, seeing over 15,000 attendees, and host festivals to provide educational messages around prevention. The programme has been a great success story of health and sport coming together.

Shirley Martin from the Scottish Football Association added that the CHSS partnership is one which they really value and there have been very positive results about the messages of prevention but also people getting involved in activity that they enjoy and gain confidence from.

Ailsa Wylie from sportscotland reflected that there are significant examples of excellent work going on across the sporting landscape. There are so many tangible things happening around prevention and initiatives, but policy and the ambitions of making systems-based changes from a national perspective are not going to see overnight change. AW also noted that the effect of peer-to-peer discussions on periods and menstruation on the self-esteem of teenage girls today will not be fully apparent for years.

AW added that sports governing bodies and organisations need to improve sharing of existing female athlete health resources to avoid "reinventing the wheel". There is a lot of knowledge and expertise available. Similarly, the teenage drop-off issue is not unique to Scotland and there are learnings out there and solutions including increasing girls' confidence, boosting their self-esteem, and getting them into leadership positions early.

The International Women's Group Global Summit is being held in the UK in July and that will be looking at themes including participation, leadership and governance, so there may be opportunities to attend and learn from that event.

Andrew Baptie from Scottish Golf noted the recent introduction of their new women's strategy, which has a challenging goal and will require collaboration to make an impact, with improving participation rates for women and girls being a key focus for the organisation.

Maureen McGonigle from Scottish Women in Sport valued hearing what other organisations are doing and noted that there were opportunities to share information and support across SWIS and the wider sector. MM cited the impact that programmes

such as their Young Women in Sport initiative has had in growing participant confidence and skills and preparing young women for leadership roles.

The Minister reflected that we remain very good at describing the problem but don't always get to providing solutions. One of the reasons behind the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan is the recognition that women face inequalities, and a creator of inequality is the lower exercise rates for women. Sport can be intentionally used to change culture and society - a lot of the barriers that women face in sport are the same issues they face in wider society. MT emphasised the need to increase women's representation in leadership roles, including the boardroom, coaching, and official positions, to shift the current status quo.

The Minister shared an example of a successful golf program in a socioeconomically deprived area that offered classes to children, subsequently getting parents involved. MT emphasised that understanding how women's hormones and life stages (menstruation, pregnancy, menopause) impact participation is crucial, as the stigma around these topics has fallen away.

Mark Gaffney from Scottish Disability Sport noted that SDS has a strong commitment to the female voice, with 70% female representation on their board, staff, and tutor workforce. He stated that changing culture is achieved through education and training and noted that their national survey had 60% female representation in responses, which informs their Call to Action.

There is a recognised lack of confidence among some people to participate in sport, particularly with intersectional barriers, such as a female with a disability, which stack up before other characteristics are considered. Programmes like the Youngstar program, which supports participants with a mentor to achieve Level 1 certification, have helped increase the representation of people with disabilities in the coaching workforce from 2% to 8%, with a huge female voice within that program. Inclusion must be addressed across the whole sporting landscape and infrastructure, and a four-point "Call to Action" is available for organisations to engage with.

Carol Mochan highlighted that it is necessary to keep the issue of female participation at the top of the agenda in policy-making, especially in a busy field. Efforts are needed to reach out to young girls and women to convey the message that everyone is welcome, whether in elite or grassroots sport. Furthermore, addressing the attitudes of boys and men toward women participating in sport is critical, requiring promotion by educators and coaches to counter the domination of boys in spaces like school playgrounds.

MT highlighted that the Government firmly believes that sport can change people's lives and wants it to reach those it is currently missing, including women, people living in socioeconomic deprivation, specific geographies, people with disabilities, and Black and minority ethnic communities. A key focus is on making sport and physical activity more available to more people.

TW noted that the report is a showcase of strong cross-party work, and the convener Gillian Martin MSP and members of the Committee were rightly proud of the report and want to build on it.

There are simple changes and interventions that can be made that will immediately improve the way a sport can welcome girls and women - white sports gear should be eliminated. The cost and availability of bras are also significant barriers, contributing to girls dropping off sport participation around 11 to 13 years old. Kit is important.

Additionally, the lack of adequate changing facilities is a major issue, with examples cited of female rugby players having no appropriate facilities available.

Sport is life changing and we want to make sure that it is available to all women and girls.

Kim Atkinson thanked committee members for their ongoing commitment to championing women's sport and the recommendations of the report. In terms of the work of the SSA, KA noted that women's sport continues to be an enormous priority across governing bodies. Work is underway to promote women on boards through the On Board for Sport programme, which involves sharing sessions with female business leaders on joining boards. Discussions have focused on sharing good stories about women's leadership, including how women help each other lead, and the importance of male allyship, particularly men calling out bad behavior and advocating for women when they are not in the room.

The first priority six months out from the election is securing money, including championing the doubling of the sport budget. There is also a need for other Government portfolios to invest money in sport, recognising that prevention efforts, such as those related to stroke and heart health, can be supported through sports. Volunteering is a continuing priority, as fewer women volunteer in sport compared to other sectors.

The existing barriers to sport are also barriers for women, although they are often exacerbated for women, including access to community facilities. KA added a call to action to champion the achievements of women in sport by nominating them for UK Honours, using this as an opportunity to promote role models and celebrate their achievements.

Thanks were given to all speakers and attendees.

Date of next meeting was TBC.

Meeting Closed