

Minute of Meeting held Scottish Parliament

PRESENT

Margo MacDonald MSP, John Swinney MSP, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Clare Adamson MSP, Margaret McCulloch MSP, Dr Richard Simpson MSP, Peter Warren, Kim Atkinson, Lee Cousins, David McColgan, Bob Aitken, Oliver Barsby, Lachlan Bruce MSYP, Diane Cameron, Tim Dent, John Downie, Ian Findlay, Flora Jackson, Dr John Gillies, Beth Hall, John Hamilton, Duncan Hamilton, Suzanne Hargreaves, Jane Harvey, Robert Heatly MBE, Ian Hepburn, Nigel Holl, Ashley Howard, Flora Jackson, Maureen Kidd, David Laing, Nicola Lessells, Charlie Mackenzie, Alan MacNab, Niamh Martin, Walter McAdam, Tracey McGarry, Mark McGeachie, Jim McIntosh, Brian McKelvie, Euan Miller, Alan Miller, James Moyes, Ashleigh Oates, Niven Rennie, Professor Brian Robinson, Ronnie Sloan, Kenny Stewart, Jack Taylor, Simon Turner, Dr Brian Walker, Dougie Wands, Nick Waugh, Hayley Wotherspoon, Stew Fowlie, Morag Arnot, Stuart Younie.

APOLOGIES

Jackie Baillie MSP, Joe FitzPatrick MSP, Kenneth Gibson MSP, Jim Hume MSP, Kenny MacAskill MSP, Derek Mackay MSP, Kevin Stewart MSP, Humza Yousaf MSP, Emma Broadhurst, Patricia Cassidy, Bruce Crawford, Blane Dodds, Dougi Bryce, Fraser Govan, Colin Grahamslaw, Hamish Grey, Alan McMillan, Jane Moncreiff, Stewart Murdoch, Campbell Ogilvie, Neil Park, Pam Scott, Dave Morris, David Carey, Jenni Lloyd, Mark Ferguson, Leon Thompson, Steve Paige, Ron Sutherland.

Previous Minute:

Matters Arising – None.

Round Table Discussion

Margo opened the meeting by welcoming the guest speakers: John Swinney MSP and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, Dr Andrew Murray (Royal College of GPs) and Niven Rennie (Association of Scottish Police Superintendents). She confirmed this topical session would discuss preventative spend and the contribution of sport.

Dr Andrew Murray presented on the contribution of sport to preventative spend in health. Currently, only 35-45% of Scots reach the World Health Organisation's minimum exercise standards of 75 minutes of strenuous activity or 150 minutes of moderate activity each week. He started by outlining that exercise is medicine; that investment in sport and exercise is the best investment in relation to combatting: cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, certain cancers and mental health across all ages and society. In addition to improving health, Dr Murray stated that sport and exercise can also improve a sense of community and in relation to educational outcomes, where there is focussed investment.

Dr Murray was clear that prevention is better than cure and urged the innovative and sustainable investment in sporting activities which can help to improve our nation. Currently almost 2,500 Scots die each year, simply due to physical inactivity – yet 157 lives could be saved each year by increasing the physical activity levels of the nation by only 1%. He outlined the benefits for both the young and the elderly, as focussed on in the current spending review, confirming that the sociability of sport within the elderly is another important factor.

Niven Rennie relayed the contribution of sport to preventative spend within the justice arena. He outlined Scotland's continuing challenge with a poor diet and overindulgence in alcohol, tobacco and controlled drugs. Niven stated the importance of our nation, especially our young people, in challenging people to become more involved in sport. The importance of access to facilities and opportunities to take part in a range of sports were identified as critical to this involvement, which, from a policing perspective, makes perfect sense.

Niven spoke of the challenging cycles faced as a reality by many individuals in Scotland, involving alcohol, drug misuse, violence, crime, a lack of role models, poor literacy rates, limited school attendance, prison, teenage pregnancy and unemployment. The considerable efforts of the police in such circumstances are mirrored by the support of social services, health workers and other support services. The cost of a failure to provide an alternative way is high. Niven outlined that the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents has long held the view that sport can be used to break this cycle. By providing facilities at the right times and in the right places, opportunities can be given to those who are marginalised in our society. By training the correct individual and having them deliver these services, we will be providing these young people with proper role models and displaying to them a different set of social standards.

Niven highlighted his personal experiences as to the positive impact that such focussed investment in sport can have and noted the street sport cages in East Ayrshire and street football opportunities in Arbroath as positive

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case studies. However, he stated that throughout the country there are many examples of midnight soccer leagues, basketball, touch rugby and a host of other sports that have the same aims: to provide facilities, involve young people and reduce crime through diverting participants from the downward spiral previously cited. The involvement of police officers in many of these initiatives is key – not only to provide support and ensure good behaviour, but as a positive mechanism to assist in the programme and thereby build rapport with the young people, as well as providing a role model experience. The Association views such schemes as the ideal recipients of the CashBack for Communities investment; where better to spend funds seized from the assets of criminals than to prevent another generation of criminals from developing?

John Swinney responded by sympathising with the demoralising challenge for medical practitioners in regularly dealing with the declining health that a lack of activity brings. He enforced the importance of a sense of responsibility of individuals in improving their own health through increased activity, with the Government taking a role in enabling people to lead healthier lives. This is against a backdrop of being the first Government in over a decade to be required to spend less money.

The two key challenges within the recent comprehensive spending review were 1) how to increase economic recovery and 2) how to prioritise preventative spend within the budget. A decisive shift towards preventative spending in Scotland is required in relation to early years, the elderly and in relation to offending. This isn't the Government's sum total of preventative spending work, nor is this limited to public sector work. Obesity is a priority within this work with a range of approaches being undertaken to encourage those leading more sedentary lives to engage in physical activity and sport; recognising that earlier intervention can lead to individuals leading healthier lives.

In relation to the justice agenda, Mr Swinney recalled the success of the CashBack for Communities programme and the discernable impact it makes at a local level as petty crime decreases when activities are scheduled. The increased physical activity for these individuals is a further benefit which should not be forgotten.

The comprehensive spending review is a signal that public sector practitioners need to increasingly support the preventative spend agenda, especially in relation to health and justice. Mr Swinney also introduced the Young Scots Fund, which will encourage new opportunities for activity and sought the input from the Cross Party Group on this, as he recognised the role that sport has to play in the preventative spend agenda.

In the questions that followed Margaret McCulloch MSP initiated a positive discussion as to how sport can work to persuade organisations to financially support preventative spend through sport in relation to health and justice. Nigel Holl provided an example of a programme within Scottish Athletics, called JogScotland, which is funded through a special grant from NHS Health Scotland. Nigel explained that a GP Surgery has recently started its own JogScotland group, having accessed free support and training for the volunteer leading the group through the JogScotland programme. Mr Swinney agreed that it was important to challenge such boundaries in relation to preventative activity. John Gillies, the Chair of the Royal College of GPs, agreed that we are only now starting to witness the consequences of limited physical activity and that we must look ahead towards a step change to prevent the epidemic which will result if more people are not more physically active.

Mark McGeachie introduced the Girls On The Move programme and their focus of involving young people in designing the activities which has resulted in increased levels of participation. Dr Richard Simpson MSP reflected on the different approaches taken within schools and that leadership within the school is a vital and determining factor. Parental power was emphasised as a key driver in increasing the levels of PE, sport and activity within schools and he commended the School Sports Award programme the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport had recently announced.

Ashley Howard from Scottish Swimming spoke of the funding invested in the governing body to provide a top-up programme of swimming in all 32 local authorities. This has led to waiting lists within many swimming clubs. She stressed the importance of partnership working, to look at the whole sporting pathway to ensure there is a pathway for individuals within each sport to retain participation.

Lachlan Bruce MSYP worried that cost was a barrier for young people in accessing after school activities and reiterated the importance of quality PE. Jim Moyes disagreed with pricing as a barrier and emphasised the need to open up the school estates to community sports clubs and groups. Margo agreed with the school estate as a priority and confirmed that this would be a future agenda item of the Cross Party Group.

Mr Swinney reflected on his own running activities and how he felt physically and mentally better after running, along with the better mind-set this brought.

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The importance of 2 hours of quality PE in schools for all pupils, including those with a disability, was raised along with the need for sporting qualifications to be recognised with the same credibility as other curriculum subjects. This was supported by Stew Fowlie from Scottish Student Sport who reminded those present of the 600,000 students in Scottish further and higher education and the opportunity a programme such as 'active students' could provide at this transition time when many new habits are formed.

Clare Adamson MSP supported the CashBack work undertaken within her own constituency and called for recognition as to the work of and support required for volunteers. She also reflected on timetable challenges which are prohibitive to lunchtime sporting activity.

Euan Miller from the SPL Trust spoke of their Fit for Fans programme which targeted 35-65 year old men to engage them in activity. My Swinney agreed that lots of activity was required across the country and encouraged organisations to share practice in this area. He agreed that promotion was required to better communicate the benefits of sport and activity and also that activities need to be readily accessible to individuals.

Nigel Holl raised the challenge for Scottish Governing Bodies in supporting both elite athlete programmes along with the participation/health agenda within existing budgets.

Mr Swinney concluded that there is a necessity for funding for elite sports but that this is not at the expense of everyday activity. He asked as to how we maximise this activity and motivate people to make a constructive contribution to their communities. The focus must be on motivating more activity across the country.

Mr Swinney requested the Group's input as to a constructive response to preventative spend and for the CPG to follow up with Minsters, noting that everything doesn't always require more money.

Margo thanked the three guest speakers and all those for attending for a lively and positive discussion.

Meeting ended at 8pm.

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