17 February 2017

Dear Neil,

Thank you for your letter of 23 January. I am grateful to the Committee for setting out their comprehensive conclusions following my attendance on 6 December with regards to your inquiry into obesity.

In the letter the Committee posed a number of questions which I will endeavour to answer. You will of course appreciate that several questions concern possible future actions. In our discussion I informed the Committee of the commitment to produce a new strategy on diet and obesity in line with our Programme for Government. It is our intention to publish such a new strategy in 2017 after a consultation exercise.

It would be premature to outline any specifics before the consultation has been undertaken. I do though wish to offer the Committee my assurances that I will consider the evaluation by SCOTPHN as I give consideration to the development of a package of measures which support the culture change we all seek.

In line with the Government’s approach we will focus on inequalities and delivery. As well as ensuring we continue to monitor and evaluate both the scale of the task and our effect upon it. Where actions demonstrate success it is my intention when circumstances allow to enable and support their expansion.

I trust you will find the following information in the attached annex informative in response to the Committee’s further enquiries.

AILEEN CAMPBELL
The Scottish Government is committed to increasing rates of physical activity and supporting people to sit less and move more and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework sets out our ambitions for a more active Scotland. To increase activity levels, a range of targeted and population level interventions are needed. Actions are already in place to support participation in sport and physical activity, including those aimed at specific groups furthest away from meeting physical activity guidelines – older adults and women and girls. At the population level, behaviour change is supported by interventions that help create an environment in which it is easy for people to make active choices. We are taking action in each of the settings listed in the internationally acclaimed Toronto Charter (environment, transport, workplace, health and social care, education and sport and active recreation). We will be publishing a new physical activity delivery plan during 2017 which will set out our refreshed approach to achieving a more active Scotland.

To complement this there is a strong policy framework in place for active travel, including in the refresh of the National Transport Strategy which restated the sustainable travel hierarchy promoting walking and cycling in preference to car use. The Active Travel Vision sets out the changes needed in order to achieve this.

With our the National Walking Strategy, we recognise the important role walking has, being one of the best things people can do for their health and generally inexpensive and accessible – the 2015 Scottish Household Survey showed that recreational walking (walking for at least 30 minutes for recreational purposes) was by far the most common activity, and up from 64% in 2014 to 69% in 2015. The Scottish Government provided funding of £1.2m to our partners, Paths for All, this year to promote walking.

Our recently published refreshed Cycling Action Plan for Scotland sets out the actions required to increase cycling for travel. Ultimately, this will be monitored by the National Indicator ‘Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active travel’, although information is also available in the annual Scottish Transport Statistics.

The Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets budget will remain ring-fenced. In addition, there is a commitment in the Programme for Government to maintain funding for active travel through this session of Parliament.

Scottish Government is funding several programme of work to remove barriers to participation in both walking and cycling. These include projects such as Bikeability Scotland (teaching people to the skills and develop confidence to ride bikes) as well as bike loan and repair schemes. Under the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places travel behaviour change programme, local authorities are working with partners on both cycling and walking projects, such as the Velocity Inverness Cycle to Health project and Living Streets Scotland working with schools to increase walking to school (over 45,000 pupils across 20 local authority areas).

Both the National Walking Strategy and the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland set out the requirements for infrastructure to support walking and cycling. The Place Standard Tool, Designing Streets and National Planning Framework 3 all support planning for walking and cycling. As well as direct funding to local authorities, several organisations are grant funded to take forward programmes of work to support infrastructure, such as Sustrans with the Community Links and Community Links Plus programmes, Paths for All for Community Paths and the Central Scotland Green Network.
You asked specifically about jogscotland - it is important that the programme could be put on a sustainable footing particularly in the context of on-going pressures on public budgets. For this reason, sportscotland, Scotland’s national agency for sport, has provided Scottish Athletics with a one off payment of £65,000, in partnership with Park Run UK, to enable them to develop and pilot a system that records individual participation and activity by using mobile phone technology. The purpose of this system is to provide Scottish Athletics with the ability to fully demonstrate the impact jogscotland is having and to use a database to generate commercial income.

In addition, a one off supplementary investment of £50,000 to Scottish Athletics was made by sportscotland for 2016-17 to further support the transition of the jogscotland programme to a more sustainable model. In total, sportscotland has approved an investment planning figure of up to £3.825m for Scottish Athletics for the 2015-19 investment cycle, including investment of £980,000 in 2016-17.

Our actions on diet and obesity have increasingly considered inequalities, whether in focused action or as the evidence has demonstrated in applying a whole population approach. Improving food access is an important aspect of the Scottish Government’s work to tackle health inequalities and close the opportunity gap. The Scottish Government has spent over £3 million from 2012-2017 in supporting Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS). CFHS supports work within low-income communities to improve access to and take-up of a healthy diet by working with individuals, groups and agencies at local, regional and national levels, providing networking, skills development and training, practice and policy development.

The Scottish Government’s social marketing campaign, Eat Better Feel Better (EBFB), targets mums of young families, particularly in more deprived areas. The aim is to encourage home cooking by breaking down the barriers that people may have, such as the cost, time or difficulty. By showing that home cooking is achievable, we steer people away from takeaways and ready meals to a more balanced diet. Focusing on young families helps children eat healthier and avoid illness later in life.

The campaign communicates through traditional advertising, new media, and partnerships with retailers. Since the launch of EBFB in 2015, we have engaged with over 60,000 members of the public at field events throughout Scotland. Our Eat Better Feel Better website continues to go from strength to strength with over 160,000 visits in the last 12 months, 41,000 in January 2017 alone. We now have over 25,000 followers on Facebook. We also continue to build our Partnership Programme with major and local retailers throughout Scotland and work to strengthen our partnerships with local community groups.

Free school meals are an integral part of tackling inequalities ensuring children receive a nutritious meal, while saving parents around £380 a year. We know from the evaluation of the English pilot of universal free school meals (2012) in primary schools that there was some positive impact on nutrition and health and an increase in attainment, strongest amongst pupils from less affluent families and amongst those with lower prior attainment. Our policy to provide a free school meal to every child in Primary 1 to 3 has had huge take up, helping to ensure every child in Scotland has the best possible start and get every chance to succeed at school and in life. Latest statistics for Scotland show that over 134,500 P1-P3 pupils across Scotland are now benefitting from a nutritious free school lunch and over 102,000 more primary school pupils took a free school meal in 2016, compared to 2014.
Finally Football Fans in Training is a hugely successful lifestyle programme originally aimed at men aged 35+ and with a waist size of 38 inches or more. Delivered at professional clubs, by professional clubs, participants get the opportunity to learn about diet & nutrition, healthy lifestyle choices and take part in gentle physical activity. Each programme runs one evening a week for 12 weeks at the participating stadium, with participants building up their ability to take part in some football related activity.

There are now 33 senior clubs in Scotland that are active participants of the Football Fans in Training initiative which is run by the SPFL Trust and funded by the Scottish Government (£264k per annum). There are also now an increasing number of separate Women’s FFIT programmes. The FFIT programme has been developed to include the latest scientific approaches to weight loss, physical activity and diet. These are delivered to groups of Scottish football fans by community coaches at their favourite professional football club.

The FFIT programme has been fully evaluated in a major research project, led by the University of Glasgow. The research project included the first ever randomised controlled trial of a health intervention delivered through professional sports clubs with the results published in the Lancet.

The article established the impact and cost-effectiveness of the programme, showing that the men who participated in FFIT lost more than 9 times as much weight as men who had not done the programme. As well as losing weight when they were on the 12 week programme, nearly 40% of men who participated in the programme maintained a weight loss of at least 5% of their original body weight a full 12 months later, an outcome associated with lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, and other health problems. The study also found that FFIT had other benefits it helped men reduce their waist size, body fat and blood pressure. Participants also increased their physical activity levels, and improved their diets and mental wellbeing.

The cost-effectiveness analysis of FFIT revealed that the intervention was relatively inexpensive to deliver, suggesting that FFIT could offer good value for money for local and national health providers.