HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

SUBMISSION FROM NHS Orkney

1. To what extent does social prescribing for physical activity and sport increase sustained participation in physical activity and sport for health and wellbeing?

The use of the term social prescribing is unfortunate, due to its medical connotations, and underplays the importance of self management and control by the individual. It is crucial that any such activity does not further widen inequality gaps. Social prescribing of Physical Activity and Sport in my view forms a vital part of creating a healthier lifestyle for people that may not be currently participating. The inclusion of physical activity in any Social Prescribing model for people that may not be currently participating is imperative in my opinion as it will undoubtedly benefit not only physical aspect of an individual’s wellbeing but will also impact there mental health as well as presenting the opportunity to get them into a more social environment which in turn may reduce feelings of exclusion. Whilst many will focus primarily on individuals that are not participating, and rightly so, it can also provide great benefit for people’s recovery from injury or illness and encourage partnership working across multiple agencies to ensure that our ever dwindling resources are utilised to the optimum for the benefit of those in our community who often need it most. Furthermore this increase in physical activity and its subsequent benefits can reduce the reoccurrence of the need for ongoing medical intervention and the associated cost thereafter.

2. Who should decide whether a social prescription for physical activity is the most appropriate intervention, based on what criteria? (e.g. GP, other health professional, direct referral from Community Link Worker, self-referral)

Should social prescribing be considered, any such decision should be undertaken in conjunction with the individual. Appropriateness of the level of exercise and potential benefits of type of exercise may require clinician input depending on the underlying diagnoses.

3. What are the barriers to effective social prescribing to sport and physical activity and how are they being overcome?

There are a range of barriers, these include cost-effectiveness and long term impact, focus on places of sport or gyms which in rural settings with poor public transport may widen inequalities. Barriers can also include GP time to assess an individual as being “fit” for a sports programme when those programmes include the need for assessment. In addition the services offered through social prescribing are often delivered by the voluntary and community sector and are therefore free. A large percentage of the activities/sports in Orkney are provided by the Local Authority and local Leisure Trust, and all have some element of cost linked to them. One possible solution to this is that “chargeable” activities are offered at cost, or as a loss leader with the facilities then aiming to ensure people continue to use their facilities and activities following the end of the prescription. The Pickaquoy Centre Trust would be prepared to offer “chargeable” activities at cost, or as a loss leader to give patients the best possible start through any prescribing process, with
our role thereafter being one which builds a sustainable relationship in ensuring people continue to use our facilities and array of activities following the end of the prescription.

4. How should social prescribing for physical activity and sport initiatives be monitored and evaluated?

Specific qualitative and quantitative review of well defined programmes looking for longer term outcomes is required. Otherwise there is a risk of organic growth of non-evidenced programmes with little population impact. Approaches which incorporate being more active in every day activities may be better suited to some cohorts of individuals that those initiatives branded as sport. This would link in to the Councils Physical Activity and Sport Strategy which has a priority of Increasing Participation, and also Sportscotland’s corporate strategy Sport For Life.