



Official Report
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DRAFT

Health, Care and Sport Committee

**Comataidh na
Slàinte, Cùram agus Spòrs**

Wednesday 23 September 2026

Session 7



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HEALTH, CARE AND SPORT COMMITTEE **5th Meeting 2026, Session 7**

CONVENER

*Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP)

*Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)

*Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)

*Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

*Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

David Byrne (Hillhead High School War Memorial Trust)

Jon Doig OBE (Commonwealth Games Scotland)

Forbes Dunlop (sportsotland)

Colin Hutchison (Scottish Athletics)

John Lunn (Scottish Swimming)

Gavin Macleod (Scottish Disability Sport)

Professor David McGillivray (Glasgow 2026 Legacy Network)

Nick Rennie (Scottish Cycling)

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Health, Care and Sport Committee

Wednesday 23 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Commonwealth Games 2026 and Widening Access to Sport

The Convener (Helen McDade): Good morning, and welcome to the fifth meeting in 2026 of the new Health, Care and Sport Committee. We have received no apologies.

Our main agenda item is on building on the Commonwealth games 2026 and widening access to sport and exercise. This is the first time that the committee has focused specifically on sport, building on recent major events and those issues. We will hear from two panels of witnesses who can offer a broad perspective on the legacy of the games and issues affecting sport and physical activity. We have up to 90 minutes for discussion.

I am pleased to welcome our first panel. Jon Doig is chief executive of Commonwealth Games Scotland, Professor David McGillivray is co-director of the Glasgow 2026 legacy network, Gavin Macleod is chief executive officer of Scottish Disability Sport, and Forbes Dunlop is chief executive officer of sportscotland. Thank you for joining us.

We tried to add Scottish Women's Football to our panel to cover the issue of female participation—I realise that the witnesses who are here can also talk about that—but we were disappointed as it could not attend today. We might have a follow-up evidence session at another time.

Several witnesses sent us written statements in advance, which saves time for discussion. The committee has looked at what we have been sent, so we will not have introductory statements now. Thank you for the time that you spent on your submissions—and thank you for keeping them short, which is always a blessing.

We kick off with a question from Jack Middleton on the overarching issue of the legacy of the Commonwealth games.

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): As the convener said, I will kick off by exploring the legacy of the Commonwealth games, so my questions are for David McGillivray and Jon Doig. David, thank you for your interesting written submission. I thought that many of the legacy pillars that were discussed were perhaps rather

abstract. Jon, what three tangible key legacy pillars came from the 2014 Commonwealth games?

Jon Doig OBE (Commonwealth Games Scotland): First, the games were successfully delivered on time and on budget and they represented Scotland phenomenally well on the world stage. People were able to see that Scotland has that capacity and was able to deliver the games.

Another legacy is that the games will continue. Our stepping forward secured hosts for 2030 and interest for 2034, which is phenomenally important not only for Scotland's athletes now, but for our athletes of the future.

Another legacy relates to the fact that we had a phenomenally successful team. Our experience from 2014 is that the athletes—and not only those who won medals—inspired the next generation, and that effect is tangible.

Finally, when we set up the games, the legacy programme was embedded from the start. We had only two years to prepare for the games, and we were building on what happened in 2014 and events afterwards. Part of the process, through the story of change that was built into the games, was very successful in relation to the aims and objectives that were set out. The evaluation process is happening at the moment and the reports will come through by the end of the year, when we will get the first indications on the nuts and bolts. It is therefore quite early to speak on that.

Jack Middleton: That is really helpful. I assume that David McGillivray will want to come in on that, too. The 2014 legacy could be described as including the Sir Chris Hoy velodrome and the Glasgow national hockey centre—I think that there are two other locations that I am forgetting. The legacies of the two games seem quite different. Infrastructure that was built for 2014 still exists and can be used today, whereas, in 2026, it was about securing the future of the games and being broadly successful in medal terms. David, is there an imbalance between the legacies of the two games in terms of the impacts on the next generation?

Professor David McGillivray (Glasgow 2026 Legacy Network): There was a facilities legacy from 2014. The Commonwealth games is probably one of the biggest events that Scotland can host in terms of its scale. What happened in 2014 built on the 2012 Paralympics, which led to quite a big push around a variety of issues. The para sport dimension is pretty significant and, like the 2026 games, the Commonwealth games in 2014 was an integrated sport event. That is important in respect of what it drives in terms of people's understanding of disability and the opportunities for people with

disabilities. The idea of disabled athletes being showcased on this stage with non-disabled athletes in 2026 was something that was clearly replicated from 2014—in fact, it was extended in terms of the numbers of medals and participants. The integration of para sports is a really important element of the Commonwealth games. We should focus on that, and I am sure that Gavin Macleod will talk about that, too.

The ability to enhance Scotland's reputation was significant in 2014. Glasgow was perceived to be a really successful event. You may have seen in our submission the evidence of some polling that we did in 2024 about the impact of the Glasgow 2014 games. We found that the games were significant in terms of people's sense of pride and achievement and the facilities that were developed at that time. People had a clear understanding of the impact on Glasgow as a whole. Glasgow was able to host the 2026 games partly because of the success of the 2014 games in terms of facilities that were developed at that time. Although 2026 was a smaller event, it would not have been possible to host that event, or events that were hosted in Glasgow and Scotland in the intervening years, without those facilities.

There are many legacies from 2014 that enabled 2026 to happen. There was a different funding environment around legacy at that time, too. We might want to explore further the fact that there was a shorter timescale for the 2026 games, and that there was not the same scale of public investment as was the case in 2014.

Jack Middleton: You have specifically mentioned Glasgow a few times, but, when the Government talks about the legacy of the games and the impact that they have had, it talks about Scotland-wide issues. That is the approach that it takes. For example, we recently had the Scotland's summer of sport initiative. On that point, I do not feel that my constituents in the north-east of Scotland or those in more rural areas feel the same impacts as people in Glasgow or the wider central belt. Do you feel that people in the more remote areas of Scotland are getting any tangible legacy benefits? If not, how can we learn from that for future major sporting tournaments that are coming up?

Professor McGillivray: On whether the benefits extend to the north-east—I am from the north-east—I caution that we need to be really clear on what an event can achieve. The 2026 games were very different from the 2014 games—they were less than two years in the planning, and there was not the same level of public investment.

Extending the benefits across Scotland and developing programmes across Scotland requires funding and resourcing. We have to accept that the

2026 games were more focused on Glasgow. There are benefits to the Scottish sporting system, which I am sure we will hear about, in the catalyst effect and the activity, awareness and excitement that is generated by the event. One of the things that we are doing as part of a big evaluation of the games is looking at the realistic ambitions and benefits that were proposed as part of the "Story of Change" document, which was developed by the organising company and its partners. We should always try to be realistic about what can be achieved. There will always be ripple effects, but extending those benefits across Scotland was not a clear ambition for the 2026 games.

Taking a quick look forward, there are a number of upcoming events in Scotland, including the Tour de France grand depart and the Euro 2028 tournament. This is a moment to reflect on the 2026 games. I think that they were really successful and generated excitement, but they were quite contained. Looking to those upcoming events, we should recognise that this is the moment when we should start to plan and to invest in legacy ideas, because we know that you do not get legacy unless you plan strategically in advance and you resource that. The literature from the academic side demonstrates that. It is not an after-effect that happens by chance; you need to make it happen. That requires planning, a clear strategy within the sport ecosystem and resources, probably from Government.

Jack Middleton: That is really interesting. I will come back to that point later rather than jumping ahead now.

The Convener: Joe Long has a question that relates to what Professor McGillivray has just said.

Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Thank you for your written submissions. Over recent decades, more and more sport has gone behind paywalls and pay-per-view, and there was a question about the accessibility of the 2026 games given how they were broadcast. What was the impact of the television coverage that we had in relation to people's participation and inclusion in the games? How does the issue fit in with wider evidence on sport, broadcasting and participation?

Professor McGillivray: I do not have the specific figures for the broadcast reach. I am aware that there has been a contentious debate in that regard. All that I would say on that is that, clearly, in an ideal world, we would want the widest range of people to be able to watch these events, which are often described as inspiring people to participate in sport and so on. The evidence that people immediately transfer from being inspired to take part in sport to actually doing so is less solid than we might imagine, but the sports system can clearly use increased awareness and excitement

and an increased propensity on the part of the public to participate to seek to move people into the right club environments and the like.

There is a commercial dimension to the way that the broadcast deal was agreed, which I am not party to, but my overall view is that we want to ensure publicness in the way that we organise these events. If that is through people seeing the events on terrestrial television, we should encourage that where possible. That requires broadcasters such as the BBC and so on to be able to provide the resource to enable that to happen. There is a debate about whether big public events should be available on free-to-air television. There has been a history of that, which is important to bear in mind. However, there is, no doubt, a commercial challenge, and there is a changing media environment in which other broadcasters are willing to invest in such events.

I would encourage consideration of the link between the broadcasting of an event in the city and its publicness, and I would like that link to be there in relation to other events.

The Convener: Paul McLennan has a follow-up question.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): My question picks up on Jack Middleton's questions about legacy. Facilities were mentioned, but I am interested in the coaching aspect from the grass-roots and elite perspectives, which are different but can feed into each other. For me, the key thing about legacy is to ensure that people get involved at a grass-roots level and an elite level.

Professor McGillivray, will you share your thoughts on how we develop grass-roots activity as well as elite activity? I also invite comments from Gavin Macleod and Forbes Dunlop in relation to para sport and broader sportscotland discussions.

Professor McGillivray: It is important to say that the legacy network is not responsible for the proposals around grass-roots development or elite sport. The other organisations that are represented here have more to do with that.

The legacy network was formed early on, with some external funding. It is not part of the organising company's agenda, although we work closely with it. The reality is that an event drives activity: it excites people, so you can drive people to take action because there is a deadline. Lots of stakeholders are investing resources, time and energy, and it is possible to channel that effectively to make some things happen that might not have been easy to bring about before the event was announced.

Right from the beginning of the legacy network, we had lots of sports organisations attending meetings and shaping what became the "Story of Change" document, which highlighted how the games would be greener, inclusive, welcoming and financially sustainable. Going back to a point that I made earlier, I note that we had to be realistic about what could be done within the timescale of this particular event. Sports organisations continually develop pathways for youth coaching, volunteering and the like, so we had to think about what we could do in relation to this particular event to kick-start those things.

A number of initiatives came through, including some that are focused on youth coaching pathways and others that look at movement. There is a big physical activity initiative called Together We Move, which is really important, and a national forum on equality, diversity and inclusion in sport has been created to inform the way in which we think about sports. That is included in the evidence about the intersectional dimension, because multiple issues can make it difficult for people to participate in sport even when they have been inspired to do so. All those things will be really valuable—

09:45

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt, Professor McGillivray, but I would like to bring in Mr Dunlop and Mr Macleod on the grass-roots issue that Paul McLennan asked about.

Forbes Dunlop (sportscotland): On the 2014 games, the facilities are the obvious and tangible legacy, but there are a number of other strands. The fact that Glasgow could step up and deliver this year's games at such short notice is testament to the workforce and expertise that we have in Scotland and the Scottish events industry, which is another legacy of 2014. At the sporting level, we introduced a programme called community sport hubs in 2014, which has stood the test of time and has grown and developed. It is about bringing community organisations together—both sporting and non-sporting organisations. There is definitely a stream of different legacies from tangible facilities through to operational sport development pieces.

From sportscotland's point of view, our job is to develop sport whether there is a Commonwealth games or not. This year's games gave us another big opportunity to put the spotlight on sport, which was welcome. I am sure that the extra investment from the Scottish Government in this financial year was in no small part down to the fact that we hosted the Commonwealth games. The money and investment that we got from the Scottish Government did not go into the delivery of the games; it went out to local clubs, communities and

local authorities, and it has funded the summer of sport activity across all 32 local authorities. Our job is to continue to develop sport through a systematic approach whether there is a games or not. It is great when we get a games, the grand départ or the Euros, because it gives us extra profile and gives things a bit of energy, but we continue to do that work regardless.

On coaching, we invest in all 32 local authorities and our leisure trusts, and we work closely with 18 colleges to get higher national certificate and higher national diploma students on to the coaching workforce pathway. We invest in 50 governing bodies, with a big chunk of the investment going into coach education, which covers grass-roots or introductory coaching right up to performance coaching.

Another of the legacies and benefits that we got from 2014 is a systematic approach to performance sport and performance coaching. In relation to the athletes and medallists who took part in 2026, that did not happen two years ago, when the games were awarded to Glasgow; it happened 10 or 15 years ago or in some cases even longer ago. Jon Doig will have exact examples. There are brilliant stories of 2026 medallists who were inspired by 2014. They were then young athletes who were either in the crowd or in the very early stages of their careers, and they went on to win medals in 2026.

That is a broad answer. The important thing is that we invest in a systematic approach and use the inspiration of major events. However, we will continue to invest whether major events take place here or not.

Paul McLennan: On that point, Forbes—and Gavin Macleod will probably say the same—it is important to see an increase in grass-roots coaching numbers, but it is really important that quality coaches are coming through at performance and elite levels. We need to improve grass-roots participation, but we must have the best qualified coaches so that performance athletes reach their best. On those two levels, what are the metrics? Has there been an increase between 2014 and now as part of the legacy that has been talked about?

Forbes Dunlop: The performance sport metrics that we tend to monitor the closest are athlete metrics, including how many athletes are getting on to British programmes or British teams and how many are being selected for the Olympic or Paralympic games. We tend to look at athlete metrics rather than coaching metrics. However, this autumn, we are about to start a review of our work on coaching, because we have reflected that we probably need to do a wee bit more in the performance coaching space.

Since 2014, we have continued to invest heavily in performance sport, which we still see as really important, but we have tended to go back and look at the more participation-based initiatives and programmes. Investment in performance has been sustained, but we have not really gone back to review where we are with performance coaching, partly because we continue to be successful and our athletes continue to deliver.

Paul McLennan: Gavin, is there anything that you can add on the para sports side? I think that the same attributes are required, but it is really important to get disabled athletes—para athletes—into para coaching as well. Can you say more on grass-roots, elite and performance coaching in para sports?

Gavin Macleod (Scottish Disability Sport): Sure. The games were fantastic from a disability inclusion point of view—they were the most inclusive games ever. To see high-performance athletes and their coaches performing alongside non-disabled high-performance athletes and coaches is a great model, and it is unique. That inspires, without a doubt.

The work that we do is primarily around supporting people to be confident and competent to work with disabled athletes. That is not so much at the performance level, which we leave to the governing bodies; instead, we work with the governing bodies to embed disability inclusion training within their coaching infrastructure. That can vary from sport to sport: it can be embedded in level 1, level 2, or level 3 coaching, and it can be delivered as stand-alone modules or a bit of both.

We always heard that there was a real fear factor in working with disabled athletes. It is not that people do not want to do it; they are just scared of getting it wrong—of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing—so we developed a disability activity inclusion model to guide people. We embed that model within strategy, but it largely happens within coach education and learning, to support the journey for the coaches. That is the approach that we have taken.

At the moment we are working with, I think, 23 sports governing bodies on their coaching infrastructure, and we have seen real change on the ground. I have been around for a few years, and I think that we were working with six governing bodies when I started. Now we are working with around 50 governing bodies—with the 20 or so around coaching, and we are also supporting governing bodies in other areas such as club development and performance sport. The tide has turned for the good, because that is what true inclusion should look like.

The Convener: It is great to hear about all the work that Scottish Disability Sport is doing,

particularly with organisations on the ground. Following on Paul McLennan's question about coaching, I will come back to Forbes Dunlop.

There are some terrible stories out there about coaches, and some of us have seen or heard them. We are very dependent on the grass-roots and volunteer coaching. My question is about how the performance of coaches is managed—by performance, I do not mean how the kids are doing and whether they are qualifying, but whether the kids are being looked after well and coaches are not shouting at them or screaming at young kids in the dressing room.

That certainly happened in the past, when my daughter played football—her coaches did not do that, but it was well known that such behaviour happened. Sometimes, that behaviour was associated with very well-known clubs that had a real focus on performance in terms of, “You have just lost to some team that is not at the top of the league,” for example.

How can you manage all of that? It is very difficult to get enough coaches, and coaches are at risk of being accused of things that have not happened, but equally we have to protect children, so what kind of programmes do you have for managing that?

Forbes Dunlop: About 850,000 people are members of sports clubs just now, and those sports clubs are 99.9 per cent led by volunteers. About 150,000 volunteers are involved with sport: about 70,000 of those volunteers are coaches, with the others being officials, administrators, helpers and all the other roles that we know come with running sports clubs. It is a pretty big system.

All those clubs and coaches are affiliated to a governing body. Ultimately, the governing body has the responsibility for the education of those coaches and for the disciplinary, child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing policies and procedures. If someone is a member of a sports club, they will do the governing body's qualification and they will abide by its rules and, if something goes wrong, the governing body's policies and procedures would be followed. We support those governing bodies to do the education piece and to put in place a system for when things do not go right.

You are absolutely right that, with that volume of people and the size and scale of involvement in sport, there is inevitably some bad practice, there is some poor practice, and there are some people who are in it for the wrong reason. We need to continue to make sure that our system, and approach to and process for dealing with that, is as robust as possible.

We invest quite heavily in Children First to provide support to governing bodies. We also invest in a number of other expert resource organisations so that governing bodies have access to legal expertise and other specialist support when things go wrong. Things sometimes go wrong in a system as large as that and involving so many people.

The Convener: I think that Heather has a question on this topic.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): Yes, I want to ask about coaching. I was lucky enough to get through to the Commonwealth games—and I met Gavin Macleod that day. There was such excitement at the venue, and the flying mullet, Finlay Davidson, was inspirational. It was such a shame that the event was not broadcast across Scotland.

My question, which is probably for Jon Doig, is: how did you try to compensate for the fact that we did not have terrestrial television coverage? There was so much going on that was amazing, but it was not permeating across the airwaves.

My other question is for Forbes Dunlop and Gavin Macleod. What support does your organisation give to those elite athletes to help them to give back to communities and pass on that inspiration? In Dundee, we have benefited massively from Eilish McColgan and Giving Back to the Track. That initiative has provided assistance to Dundee Hawkhill Harriers. Does your organisation assist those athletes in building grass-roots support?

Jon Doig: A range of broadcasters covered the games. Internationally, there was more broadcasting than ever before. Within the United Kingdom, the games were broadcast by TNT Sports, which is on HBO Max; BBC Alba; S4C in Wales; and Channel 5, which carried the highlights every day on terrestrial television.

Probably what we are all dealing with at the moment is the changing nature of broadcasting. The way that people view sport and other activities is changing. I have three boys, and certainly the online world is where they are at the moment. We can look at visibility in other ways: there were 370 million social media views through Glasgow 2026, and we had 60 million views on Team Scotland channels. A huge focus of ours has been reaching people through different mechanisms, while still recognising that traditional broadcasting mechanisms remain phenomenally important.

I will pause there, but coverage certainly was not going down one particular track; we were trying to spread it across a range of platforms because we recognise that young people in particular are

consuming media and sport in so many different ways.

There will be challenges for us as we move forward and think about legacy. What will the broadcasting system look like over the next four years? There are broader debates about the future of our terrestrial broadcasters and, indeed, some of our more established streaming platforms as well. We will have to keep track of that to ensure that, by the time we get to the next Commonwealth games and other events, we are not only on the right platforms but on the platforms that people are moving to as well.

Heather Anderson: I, too, want to express my appreciation for your saying that we saved the games, because we do not really make enough of that fact. We stepped in at very short notice, pulled something out of the hat and made it happen, and that was an incredible effort.

Jon Doig: I attended the Commonwealth sports ministers meeting. Ministers from all the countries were present, and they said that Scotland not only saved the games but changed them. I think that the innovations that we introduced in these games will continue into future editions.

Anybody who was there at the games over the summer would have seen the quality of what was provided, not only inside the venues but outside them, and the quality of the broadcasting and the images that were projected. Anybody who went to the games or watched it could not have failed to have been impressed by that. Those impacts will last, and Scotland's reputation has been enhanced. I think that the president of Commonwealth Sport spoke about that innovation and referred to Scotland as "Scotland the brave".

We had a collective sense of pride, because the games could be delivered only with the input from so many people. Forbes Dunlop mentioned the investment in people from 2014 onwards. We had people who were ready to step up and deliver, which was hugely important. The facilities that people saw in front of them have already been mentioned, and they were also repurposed and revised using funding following our input.

10:00

However, our major input regarding legacy up to this stage and beyond relates to people. There were 4,000 volunteers. We dropped to 16 the age at which people could volunteer, so we had 16-year-olds volunteering for the first time. During the games, we had 16-year-olds through to a 96-year-old working as volunteers. Tremendous work was done, and a number of partners were involved. There were trainee programmes in relation to the host broadcaster, and there were 75 paid roles in venue production for young people.

I could outline a number of those kinds of issues. We used the games as a platform, not only to inspire through sport but in relation to the wider community and business.

Heather Anderson: I go back to my question about elite athletes giving back to the track.

Forbes Dunlop: We are very lucky that our elite performance athletes are committed to giving back to sport more generally.

I am mindful of not stealing the thunder of those who will be speaking in the second evidence session, but I draw the committee's attention to athletes such as Duncan Scott and Toni Shaw, who have been learn to swim ambassadors for more than 10 years. Recently, the Scottish Government committed to providing funding for school swimming. We are talking about the world's best athletes and, as well as doing their thing in the pool, there are not many swimming pools in Scotland where you will not see Duncan's or Toni's image and where they have not been in the pool with a bunch of young schoolkids, promoting swimming and enthusing them.

Another example is Chris Hoy, who has been in the news quite a lot recently. Since before 2014, he has been an ambassador for Scottish Action for Mental Health. As a Scottish sportsman with the highest profile, he continues to promote and push the importance of mental health through his support for SAMH, a fantastic charity that we work with.

I could go on. Not many of our performance athletes do not play a significant part in giving back to the wider sporting system. We are very fortunate in that regard.

Heather Anderson: Does your organisation support them to do that? Do you find them sponsorship or give them training? How do you support them?

Forbes Dunlop: A lot of that work is done by the relevant governing bodies—I am sure that Scottish Swimming will talk about the work that Duncan Scott and Toni Shaw do—because they have those direct relationships. We support all the athletes through the institute arm of sportscotland. We give them physiotherapy, strength and conditioning training and physiology—all the various performance services—and we help them with media preparation. Lots of the performance athletes come to various sporting events and active schools events for us, and we help them with that. However, the support that you mentioned comes predominantly through the governing bodies.

The Convener: It has been good to hear about that.

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
(LD): I will round off the theme of large events. It has been mentioned that Euro 2028 is coming up. Mr Dunlop, has sportscotland got plans in place to ensure that there will be wider benefits to the public from that large event? What is being done by sportscotland and other organisations that it works with to ensure that the benefits reach the grass-roots level of Scottish football?

Forbes Dunlop: The work relating to Euro 2028 has been going on for quite some time. Sportscotland has been working closely with the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Government and the UK Government through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, because the 2028 games will be a UK event.

Significant money has already been invested in pitches. In each of the past few years, the SFA has invested a stream of money in 3G all-weather pitches, which are absolutely about grass-roots football.

The planning and preparations for Euro 2028 have been going on for a number of years. Having a long lead-in time for such major events is a significant benefit, because the lack of time was, of course, one of the challenges with the Commonwealth games.

Also—and I hope that I do not jeopardise it—it has been made very public that there is a UK bid just now for the 2035 women's football world cup. We hope that that will be confirmed later this year, and if it is, it will give us a significant lead-in to what will be a fantastic event and a great opportunity for us to further develop women's and girls' sport.

The Convener: We have time for a very quick question from Jack Middleton before we move on.

Jack Middleton: I want to follow up Adam Harley's question on Euro 2028 with a question for Forbes Dunlop and David McGillivray, in light of what they said to me earlier.

David, I note that, in your submission, you talk about the need to

"Embed legacy conversations and planning well in advance".

As someone who has watched the Scotland national team at a major tournament, I know how exciting it is when the whole country gets behind them, as we saw with the world cup in the summer. However, people can be priced out of these things. I have much more faith in the leadership of the Union of European Football Associations than I have in FIFA, meaning that greed will not be the key factor in this Euro 2028 tournament, but the tickets will still be hugely expensive for people to get their hands on.

We have six games at Hampden park and, all being well, Scotland should be playing there, so I think that we should be looking right now at what the Scottish Government and sportscotland can do with UEFA to secure some tickets for young Scots either at a discounted rate or for free. I would just like to hear your views on that and on whether that work can get under way as soon as possible, if you agree that such an initiative should be put in place.

Forbes Dunlop: I absolutely agree. Many of us are sports fans, and we know that taking families to sports events, in particular, can become expensive. We always compare such events with music events; you might be happy to pay £80, £90 or £100 for a music event, but being asked to pay something similar for a sports event feels more challenging. The difference is when public money is involved. When we have that kind of money and investment, we need to continue to look at pricing structures and policies.

I absolutely support finding ways and mechanisms to ensure that there is wide representation at Hampden during the Euros. I know that fan zones, for example, are a good way of reaching a wider audience who might not make it into the stadium; indeed, we did something similar with the live site at this year's Commonwealth games. I am happy to take that up and have that conversation.

Professor McGillivray: I concur with Forbes Dunlop. Part of the issue relates to the overall budget for these types of events, but my understanding is that the Euro 2028 organising company is already looking at that idea of retaining a certain proportion of tickets at a certain price point to alleviate the sorts of concerns that you have just expressed. Ticketing became a massive issue, perceptually, at the men's world cup this year, and a whole series of challenges arose with regard to affordability and people being able to go. We must absolutely ensure that that is not the case with Euro 2028.

Another issue, which is linked to the Commonwealth games, too, is the availability of community tickets and having a strategy for encouraging clubs. Clearly a lot of this debate is about participation and grass-roots activity, and the need to ensure that football clubs at grass-roots level can access these matches and that young people—girls and boys—get the opportunity to see that kind of massive tournament.

Jack Middleton: I will be very brief, convener, but what sticks in my mind is how Mayor Mamdani of New York came to an agreement with FIFA on affordable tickets—the number was capped, I think, at 1,000 tickets. Clearly, those tickets were just for New York, and what I would not want to see

here is, as I touched on with the Commonwealth games, the benefit of this being felt only in Glasgow. Therefore, would you back a strategy that allows us to spread across the country any affordable or free tickets that we might be able to get hold of for our young people and create a mechanism that gives equal parity to those in the Highlands and Islands as well as those in Glasgow?

Forbes Dunlop: Of course, and I know what work the SFA does and the work of community football clubs in every town, village and city of Scotland. I am happy to pick that up with the SFA. I do not know any detail or the legal part of whatever input it might have into the ticket-pricing strategy, but I am very happy to pick that issue up, and I would, of course, support such a move being Scotland-wide.

The Convener: That would be great. I am sure that we will come back to that.

As we are short of time, I would appreciate short questions and answers so that we can get through everything. Although it has been great to hear about the success of Commonwealth games 2026 and what has come out of that event, we will move on from elite sports to look at grass-roots and health and wellbeing issues. They have been touched on already, but we are obviously very interested in those aspects, and Heather Anderson has a couple of questions on them.

Heather Anderson: I am interested in the information in the sportscotland submission on your commitment to prevention. You say clearly that you see your work as a core plank of prevention, and you set out staggering statistics, such as the fact that 3,000 deaths a year in Scotland are attributed to physical inactivity. You also have a statistic that a tiny amount—10 minutes—of physical activity a week makes a difference. What is your evidence that 10 minutes of physical activity a week makes a difference? I think that Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill will ask a similar question in relation to the role of social prescribing. What evidence do you have that that level of activity makes a difference? How will you ensure that there is a budget line for prevention through physical activity?

Forbes Dunlop: I believe strongly that everything that we do is about the preventative agenda. Being physically active—whether that is going for a 10-minute walk or taking part in elite sport—is part of the preventative agenda. Everything that we do sits in the context of the physical activity for health framework, which has been adopted by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It sets out roles, responsibilities and all the things that are needed. There are eight factors, all of which need

to work if we want to make a difference on physical activity at population level. We are part of that, as are all the other organisations that you would expect.

The statistics that you mention come from Public Health Scotland publications, which we are happy to send to the committee. We work closely with Public Health Scotland, which is the expert in research. However, we all know anecdotally, without hard evidence, that going for a 10-minute walk each day can make a huge difference to your physical and mental health, and that going with someone else can make a huge difference to your social health. There is lots of evidence over a long period on the impact of physical activity and sport on people's physical, mental and social health. As I said, we work closely with Public Health Scotland, which applies the academic rigour, which I am sure we will hear more about, and looks at the numbers.

Heather Anderson: We all know anecdotally and within ourselves that prevention makes a difference, but we have to justify transferring money from one area to another, so we are trying to get as much evidence as possible. I think that we are about to talk about social prescribing. What do you want to see evidenced more so that we can say, for example, that putting money in one place prevents somebody from having a stroke?

Forbes Dunlop: I believe that there is more than enough evidence, and it is undisputed. I do not find anyone who disagrees with the evidence on the impact of physical activity on people's health. I appreciate the challenge of moving budgets that are about treating people here and now upstream, as we say, into the preventive agenda. I understand the difficulty in making those decisions, but there is no shortage of evidence.

The Convener: It would be good to have anything that anybody can provide as we look at the budget.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill wants to follow up on that.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): My question is on disability and is for Gavin Macleod. Obviously, not everyone can walk. We get a lot of data, recommendations and guidelines that fit only certain people, and other people can feel quite isolated and put off by that because those things do not fit them. Your written submission talks about recommended guidelines and about disabled people compared with non-disabled people. Exercise and mobility will look different for all disabled people. Can you talk a little about how you can address that in the inclusive whole-system approach?

Gavin Macleod: The whole-system approach is absolutely fundamental from our point of view. In education, we still hear about disabled pupils not receiving physical education or not being involved in school sports and instead going to physio or the library, despite all the great work that we are doing on training PE teachers for the future.

Similarly on health, 40 per cent of people—I cannot remember the statistic from our national survey—said that they are not being referred into physical activity and sport. There is a fear factor around litigation and responsibility for people with a disability. We need to break down those barriers, because that is what will make the change. Twenty per cent of people doing no physical activity at all is a shocking figure.

10:15

Our message is very clear: any physical activity at all is beneficial. We give out that message through our education and learning programmes. The programmes that we put in place are much less about high-performance sport—because the governing bodies deal with that—and much more about engaging and participating.

We work with our branch infrastructure across the country. We have 14 branches, from Shetland all the way down to Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders. They are increasingly the go-to starting point for engagement in physical activity and sport. We are delighted that we have some new resource coming into the branches for the first time ever. They are largely run by volunteers, so we will be able to get people on the ground to support that work.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill: My second question is on the statistic about 40 per cent of respondents being worried about losing social security. Have you had any conversations with Social Security Scotland or the Department for Work and Pensions on that?

The convener mentioned that one of the tests for mobility-related benefits is how far you can walk, which is ridiculous. Have you had any such conversations? What can we do as members to influence that conversation to encourage more social prescribing, because it is out there? It is a barrier that should be removed.

Gavin Macleod: Absolutely—it is a very real barrier, as you can see from the research. There is also research from England by the Activity Alliance that backs up that point about the fear of losing social security. It is a disincentive to be physically active. How are we living with that in 2026? The fear of losing benefits is there. It does not really matter whether it is real or perceived—it is still there as a barrier.

We have been speaking with the Scottish Government about the move of responsibility for social security north of the border. It is an opportunity to try to change that in Scotland and make being physically active more incentivised. That would change some of the matrix around poor health and inactivity in Scotland. We need to be able to influence and engage with people in those groups.

We did a piece of work with NHS Tayside, the get out get active campaign, which we ran with support from the Spirit of 2012 trust. That was a hugely influential learning experience for us, because what came back is that not everybody wants to go to a sports centre or join a sports club. There is a percentage of the population who do not have the confidence to do that.

What we found was that it was about going from being inactive to active; in the programme, disabled and non-disabled people were active together in their local communities, led by local people who were trusted. We were engaging with sections of the community who would never have engaged with us as a sports organisation. Should it have been us doing that? I suspect that perhaps it should not, but we tried to be part of the solution.

Unfortunately, the money ran out and the programme came to an end, but part of the legacy has been embedding physical activity in hospital wards and hospital grounds. That work has continued through the physical activity leads in NHS Tayside. Those are the types of interventions that we need at grass-roots level.

The Convener: It is great to hear about bringing those things together. There is a slight caveat on the point that exercise is good for everyone. There is a group of illnesses for which that is not the case. It is important that, when people are saying that everybody must get out and be active, people need to be aware of the differences between different disabilities and, to come back to Kayleigh's point, not everybody can do the same thing. You do not want overenthusiastic people saying, "Of course you can do this—it is just fear that is stopping you."

It is great to hear that you are talking to the DWP. It is hard to see how we get around the issue for people who have an illness that comes and goes. If their response is "yes" when they are asked whether they can walk to the end of the street, but they are able to do that one day out of 20, that would mean that their disability benefit would be stopped. There is a real problem, which Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill has referred to. There needs to be better understanding across the board in sports, as well as in medicine and social care.

Heather Anderson: I want to come back to the concept of social prescribing and how we might

better use it. If a general practitioner has suggested to someone who is in receipt of social security that they join a walking club or go to a community centre, that would give them some protection. What are the panel's thoughts on how we can use that as a model so that we do not disincentivise people from being active? How can we support GPs to understand where they should refer people to so that they are pitched at the right level?

Forbes Dunlop: We work closely with the leisure trusts across Scotland that deliver the sport, leisure and recreation responsibilities on behalf of 24 local authorities. I regularly meet that group of people and they all have an extensive programme of social prescribing. From a national perspective, my challenge to them is that they all do it slightly differently, in that they call it something different and the offer is different. It is hard to aggregate it and talk about it in the collective to a committee such as this.

Heather Anderson: We are reforming public services at the moment.

Forbes Dunlop: Absolutely. There is some excellent practice and there is definitely room for an awful lot more. Too often, I hear that a particular strand of work is funded one year and funding stops the next year. For example, there might be a focus on slips, trips, and falls, and the next year, that funding stops and the focus shifts. Long-term, consistent and committed funding would be welcome. Some good work is being done and there is something to build on, which is important.

Joe Long: We have heard about what sporting organisations and community organisations are doing. Surely, one of the biggest barriers to participation must be time. Have you seen any good practice from employers and workplaces to encourage physical activity? How might we support that at policy level?

Forbes Dunlop: That is a good question. Most big employers, including sportscotland, have some kind of policy and we see lots of them. The policies might involve giving people a wee bit of time back to volunteer or take part in sport. However, when sportscotland says to me, "You can have an hour back to be physically active," I am not sure that I take the time back. There are many policies that are well intended, but I am not sure whether people take advantage of them. I am not close enough to it to know how those policies translate to people feeling as though they can take an hour back during their week or whatever it might be to volunteer or take part in physical activity.

The Convener: That links to inequalities, which we have been talking about. Adam Harley has some questions about female participation.

Adam Harley: In 2023, our predecessor committee took evidence that found that women and girls face barriers to participation. Some of that is because of fears of harassment and safety concerns. Has anything changed since 2023? What needs to happen to improve things? I am not sure who is best to kick off on that. I will go to Forbes Dunlop, and someone else may want to chip in.

Forbes Dunlop: At a macro level, have things changed? The honest answer is no. We have the same drop-off of teenage girls in sport and inequalities with female participation are still built in at most levels. We do not see too much of a drop-off until the end of primary school, but that starts as pupils transition into secondary school. We invest heavily in the active schools programme, which is successful in that 47 per cent of young girls participate, so it is getting us closer to where it should be.

We are all very aware of the barriers that have been talked about in previous committees, but, if I am honest, addressing them and finding solutions continues to be a challenge. We have lots of good initiatives, including young female leaders programmes. We have young ambassadors programmes, where we see real dominance in the numbers of female ambassadors. There is some really good stuff going on, but, when you look at the top-line numbers, you still do not see a significant move, if I am honest.

Adam Harley: I want to drill down into why the work has not been done or why people say, "We know about these issues and it's hard to address them." What is the reason for that? Is it a lack of accountability or lack of clarity about who should take the lead, or is it because some of the issues are about the wider culture that it is hard to address in a specific way? Can you talk more about exactly why we cannot get this right?

Forbes Dunlop: It is just really complex. If there was a single issue that we were trying to address through a single body or organisation, I have no doubt, given the commitment to the issue, that we would have found a way forward. However, it is a very complex issue, like many that we face. There are multiple reasons why women and girls take part or do not take part in sport at different stages of their lives, so it is just really complex. It is also not just a Scottish or a UK issue—it is a worldwide issue. Some of the trends that we see in female participation are seen across most countries in the world.

That does not mean to say that we do not continue to work hard and look for solutions. As with many things, we find brilliant examples with young female leaders in schools, motivating girls and creating opportunities for other girls in the

school. We see lots of good local practice that we could take up and use to make a policy change or do something, top down, to make a step change. The fact that this remains an issue speaks to the complexity of the challenge.

Jon Doig: I can add context at the upper level. At the last games, we had more women than men in our team—it was relatively even at 89 to 88. There were more women's medal events than men's, and we had sell-out sessions at the OVO Hydro, with 10,000 people watching our netball. Visibility, access and impact are getting better, with a lot of direct policies being introduced to actively create not only opportunities but visibility. It all fits as part of the wider system to address the different parts of the issue.

The Convener: It is great to hear that.

Paul McLennan: Forbes Dunlop, you mentioned that, when they get to 15 or 16, a lot of girls drop out of sport, so can you say more about coaching pathways? There is maybe a gap between leaving sport and going on to do coaching. Is there a specific objective or priority in relation to getting girls to go down a coaching pathway at that early age, to make sure that they continue in the sport?

Forbes Dunlop: That is a really good question in relation to female participation, because we find that there is a lack of female coaches compared to the number of male coaches. The lack of female participation, including in relation to coaching and at chief exec level—it is not lost on any of us that there are four men sitting in front of you—means that there is not participation at the level of senior decision-making positions and chairs of governing bodies. We see male dominance throughout the sporting system, from participation right through to all those roles.

We have a number of initiatives in relation to young female leaders getting coaching qualifications. What we perhaps do not do as well is track those people to see what happens to the 16-year-old who goes through one of our young ambassadors programmes, so that we know what happens to them by the time that they are 20 or 24.

Going back a bit, some of the evidence that I saw in the past put quite an emphasis on giving people the confidence and competence at a young age, when they are more inclined to participate. There was a recognition that some people will move away from the sport, but that if they have been active at a younger age, there is a greater chance that they will come back to it later in life. That applies to men and women. We need to continue to give people as many positive opportunities as we can and to do whatever we can to reduce the drop-off in participation. We

need to accept that there will be a drop-off, but be confident that people are more likely to come back to physical activity later in life if they were active when they were young.

Paul McLennan: Have you set any targets for that? You said that the level of female participation in coaching is lower than that of males. I know that there are governing bodies, but have you set yourselves targets or metrics for getting to a certain level or increasing participation by a certain level by a certain time?

10:30

Forbes Dunlop: We do not have specific targets for that. In the past couple of years, a number of governing bodies have published specific women and girls strategies for their sports, which have more detail in them, but sportscotland does not have an aggregate target.

Jack Middleton: I want to build on Paul McLennan's point about the drop-off in women's and girls' participation in sport, and specifically in football, which continues to be one of the fastest growing sports in the world. It sticks out to me that Scotland's participation in the 2019 world cup was a really big moment and there was a genuine buzz around the country, but I feel that that dropped off and tailed away. Whereas England has massively developed its domestic game, I do not think that Scotland has done that to the same extent. We have world superstars that play for Scotland in women's football, but we are not capitalising on that.

Is sportscotland aware of that? Ahead of what we hope will be a successful 2035 world cup bid, what strategies and actions are in place to improve the grass-roots game and get more women and girls into football ahead of time so that we have that momentum in Scotland?

Forbes Dunlop: We work very closely with the SFA, and its two headline priorities just now are women's and girls' football and facilities. It is very clear that the organisation's focus is on a significant growth in participation. At the performance level, sports are becoming increasingly competitive, so qualifying for major championships and progressing in them becomes ever more challenging.

You are right to point out what is happening in England. England has hosted the European athletics championships and the rugby world cup, and during the summer it came second in the women's cricket world cup, which it also hosted.

In the UK, we have some very good performance-level sport and we are seeing a real surge in participation, particularly in football. I guess that it is taking a wee bit of time to close the

gap between those two things. However, the more people play, the higher the standards that come through clubs and regional squads and pathways, which ultimately impacts at the performance level. The SFA has clear strategies in place to focus on that work.

Jack Middleton: Is it a matter of investment? Does there need to be more direct investment in the women's game, not just in football, but across all sports?

Forbes Dunlop: I would always advocate for more investment in all sports. However, I sound a cautionary note. In my experience, we can focus investment at the performance level and target a group of players—a squad—to achieve high-level results, but the important bit is sustainability, which requires us to take the investment and put it through the entire system. We have seen many examples around the world of the hothousing of athletes to get performance results, but I am not a fan of that. We need to invest in the full system to get results over the long term.

The Convener: That is great to hear. I am sure that we all believe that that is the right approach.

On the difficulties of getting women and, in particular, girls to stay in sport, I think that there are a number of factors. One of them could well be money. It is only very recently that women footballers could hope to be paid the living wage, let alone be paid at a high level. However, I am also thinking about the transition from primary to secondary school. My daughter played rugby at primary school, but she was the only girl and the boys would not pass the ball to her. That was the end of rugby for her. She played football and she actually qualified as a coach. She did not really coach, but she still does sport, so I think she is an example of what you have just mentioned.

We need as many people as possible to take part in sport, whether they are good at it or not, and people should never be told that they are bad at it because they might just walk away.

I want to ask about mixed-sex sport and the issues that have come up there. All sports have grappled with this. Please correct me if I am wrong, but I think that, in primary schools, pupils can play with anyone. At what point does that become female only? There is no doubt that a lot of girls will be put off either by having to be in changing rooms that are not clearly defined or by having to play with more physically able boys and therefore, if it is a contact sport, being put at risk. How do you grapple with that in the 21st century?

Forbes Dunlop: Again, the headline answer is that each individual sport will have their own policies to address that sort of thing, because sports are so different. With a non-contact sport,

males and females—boys and girls—might well train together and compete separately, while, with contact sports, there are mixed teams in football and rugby until a certain age and stage. As soon as the young people enter puberty, there is, for obvious safety reasons, no joint activity in those sports. Each sport will make an assessment of their sport, the pathway involved and safety and fairness considerations as athletes progress.

Things become clearer and clearer as you go along that pathway into the competitive pathway after puberty and then up the performance ladder. Indeed, we have seen very recent and public debates on this, with the International Olympic Committee stating its position and other world federations starting to take a clear position and clearly defining where male and female athletes should compete separately. That sort of thing becomes clearer as you grow older and become more performance focused.

The Convener: Okay, thank you.

Heather Anderson: Just before we leave the theme of inequalities, I would like to ask about money and access. You learn a lot from taxi drivers. When I was going to a sports centre in Dundee, my taxi driver was telling me how people were coming from all around and outside Dundee to go to a stroke rehabilitation exercise class, and it was costing them £16 each way in the taxi. That sort of activity was so scarce and so important that they were having to spend what little money they had to get there. Great work is also being done in Dundee with amputees through chair yoga, but, again, that activity is rare, and people have to get a taxi there. They cannot use ordinary transport.

That brings me back to the idea of social prescribing, and the need to support people to physically get to what are very scarce exercise opportunities. Do you think that there is anything that we can do to ensure that that money is available and protected, whether through social prescribing or some other means?

Forbes Dunlop: As we know, finance is a barrier to many things, and we would always advocate for more investment. That said, the balance that we always need to understand, and to strike, is where these responsibilities lie—do they lie local authorities and local partners or with national bodies and, ultimately, the Scottish Government? We need to find that balance and look at where those roles and responsibilities are. I would always advocate for having provision as local as possible, which would mean not having to use a taxi in the first place. Why does the local church hall down the road, for example, not offer the same services? If costs are a factor and a barrier, who offers the best solutions to that, and where can they be found?

Heather Anderson: So we need more coaches for stroke exercise classes.

Forbes Dunlop: Absolutely.

The Convener: That question brings us to our last group of questions, which are on funding and facilities. Adam, I think that you wanted to ask something on this.

Adam Harley: I guess that this is another question for Mr Dunlop. In its estates review of sporting facilities, sportscotland found a need for improved planning and stronger partnership across sport, health, education and local government. Can you just say a little bit about what is not working at the minute and what needs to change to make that relationship work better?

Forbes Dunlop: Sure. The report of the estates review had three key themes: data, planning and the strategy behind it, and the investment model. On the first, when we did that piece of work, we found that it was really hard to collect accurate data on the facility estate in Scotland, because every local authority calls things something slightly different, captures information in a slightly different way and reports slightly differently. Indeed, that will happen even within a local authority. It means that when we try to get a picture of what, say, 3G pitches look like in Scotland, their state of repair and how well they are being used, we find that everybody captures and reports on that differently. Data is really important when it comes to looking at the state of repair and usage of the estate.

The second key theme of the estates review, which your question was about, related to strategic planning and thinking. We still see examples where the school estate has certain provision that is not connected to the community estate or to the local college or university, and which does not take account of a facility that might be just two miles over the border in a different local authority area but, instead, compares it with a swimming pool that is in the same authority area that is 15 miles away. Those are the types of issues that the report found.

We have already started to work with local authorities, groups of local authorities and other partners that have facilities in the area to identify what provision they have, how well it is being used and, most importantly, what is needed in the future. They are all at different stages of their planning. That work is important because we know what the current estate looks like, but that is not necessarily what we will need in the future. On the back of the report's publication in June, we are starting that work.

I will touch briefly—although I am sure that we will come back to it—on the third strand of the review: finance. As we know, capital budgets—both of local authorities and of the Scottish

Government—have reduced quite significantly. Building things such as a new swimming pool or a new ice rink, or replacing 3G pitches—I could go on—costs an awful lot of money, and there is not necessarily the investment in the system to do that, so thought might well need to be given to different financial models.

Adam Harley: I want to pick up on your second point, which was about the need for a better strategy for access to sporting facilities. For example, in my constituency, we have some good 3G football pitches that are attached to a local high school, but young people cannot access them outside of term time—in other words, in the school holidays, which, it could be argued, is when they most need to be able to access them. Do you think that there is a need for a national strategy to make a better plan for access to such sporting facilities? The authority in that regard probably sits at local government level.

Forbes Dunlop: Our view, which is reflected in the report, is that we first need to address the issue at the local authority level and then the regional level. The national strategy said that how we overcome it will be different in different authorities, which will be at different stages of their public-private partnership contracts. That could be done when the contract is renewed or when it comes back into the local authority. Different local authorities will be in quite different places in that regard. The review suggests that we should work with partners on a local and then a regional basis on that, because we absolutely recognise the situation that you described. I am sure that, at some point, the committee will hear from the Scottish Football Association. If the SFA were here, it would describe the situation that you have described.

Even when such pitches are open, if the school is not open, the toilets and the changing rooms will not be open. We have talked about the situation with regard to women's football. Even if people can go on to the pitch, they cannot go to the loo if they need to. There is a raft of issues there. We are having such conversations on a local authority by local authority basis. Many of the issues are wrapped up in the original contracts relating to the building and running of, and the access to, the schools.

Adam Harley: That was helpful—thank you.

The Convener: I should mention that we received some statistics from local authorities on how much it costs to hire their pitches—I thank them for providing that information quite quickly—so we have some background information. However, Forbes Dunlop is right in what he said about the need for people to have access to facilities to go with that. If people want to have a

football game, there needs to be a toilet for them to go to, but that is sometimes not the case.

The Convener: Paul McLennan has something to say.

Paul McLennan: This picks up on Adam Harley's point. About 10 or 12 years ago, I was lucky enough to go on a study tour with the SFA on this very subject. We went to Holland, where we found that there was a regional approach, whereby the responsibilities of clubs and local authorities when it came to upkeep, maintenance, access to pitches and so on were clearly delineated. This is more of a comment than a question, but I certainly think that we need to look at a regional approach.

That was about 10 or 15 years ago, and there has not been a huge amount of progress in that regard. The complexity of the arrangements is a significant barrier to increasing participation. We have heard about the cost of private finance initiative schools. When the school is not open, the cost of using the facilities is prohibitive. You spoke about the need for a local and regional approach in the first instance. Do you see that developing into a national approach when it comes to how we fund that on an ongoing basis in future? That was a significant barrier 10 or 15 years ago, and it is still a significant barrier.

10:45

Forbes Dunlop: We always talk about local, regional and national facilities—that is the approach that we take. However, the funding does not take that approach: it is usually local, although there is some national funding, which helps to leverage a bit of money. The funding that we currently invest in facilities is pretty modest. We have just doubled our budget. That sounds exciting, but we have gone from investing £2.5 million a year in facilities to £5 million a year. That covers every local authority and every sport, and clubs that own their own facilities all have the ability to tap into that, so £5 million really does not go far. What it does, however, is leverage a significant amount of other money. We will always advocate for the national Government to invest in facilities by putting a pot of money in the middle of the table, which will then pull in local investment.

A good example of that is the cycling facilities fund—I know that you will talk to representatives of Scottish Cycling later in the meeting, and they might well say more about that. That fund is made up of £4 million of national money, £4 million of sportscotland money and some local authority money that has been leveraged into it.

On the pitches, I often cite the 3G pitches in particular as being one of the real successes in the past 25 years. Previously, a lot of football was being played either on grass pitches, which were

mud baths, or on red blaes pitches, which gave people infected knees. In the past 25 years, we have completely transformed the situation, and there are now 3G pitches everywhere in Scotland. That has had a huge impact. However, the 3G pitches that were installed in the first wave are now at the end of their lives, and the cost of replacing them or upgrading them is a challenge.

The Convener: That is very useful. I am sure that everybody was delighted when you got rid of the red stuff.

We have done well. I thank everyone for being concise. We have 10 minutes left in this part of the meeting, so I invite each of our witnesses to tell us what they are most proud of about their organisation—or about the games, in Professor McGillivray's case—what they think we should all be working towards, and whether there are any issues that they think that we should have mentioned that we should go away and consider.

Jon Doig: I would just re-emphasise our pride in the fact that we turned the games around and reinvigorated them. That is phenomenally important to our athletes, and we know, from all the research we have done, that it is also important to the Scottish people, as they are the only multisport games that we compete in as Scotland.

In terms of changes that could be made, it is important to state that what happened with the games was possible only because of the existence of the wider sporting system. We have talked about the legacy coming through from 2014 onwards in terms of facilities and so on, and I note the welcome boost that we received from the summer of sport funding. My plea is that that funding should be annualised, so that we can build on what we have done in the interests of those young athletes and others who were inspired by what they saw from this summer, be it the football world cup, the Commonwealth games or whatever. That will enable us to go forward to 2030, 2034 and so on. We know that there are athletes who were inspired when they saw the phenomenally good 2014 games 12 years ago, and we want to see people in 12 years' time saying that they were inspired by the 2026 games, and were able to take advantage of the channels that existed to develop their full potential.

From our point of view, we sit at the top of the apex, but we are there only because of investment further down.

Professor McGillivray: I would just build on the idea of legacy and how we plan for that. In our research, we talk about the importance of being strategic about leveraging activity, and that needs to start early.

The Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth games was organised on a short timeline, which made it a little bit more difficult to have all the stakeholders and agencies involved in what the legacy would look like and how we should invest in that. However, the upcoming events over the next few years, which Jon Doig has described, give us opportunities to ensure that they have a wider geographical reach and impact, but that needs to be planned and resourced, and we need to involve all the stakeholders early in order to ensure that there is a deliberate and intentional strategy, as opposed to something that might happen if we are fortunate.

You can make things happen if you have a clear strategy and clear strategic oversight. The legacy network that we have been leading provides us with an opportunity to sustain activity, as it has enabled a large number of organisations to come together to share experience and learn what they can do and what they can invest in. That has also leveraged additional resource into projects that can deliver on some of the agendas that we have discussed today.

The Convener: That is hopeful.

Gavin Macleod: We started to touch on the significant barriers that are faced by people with disabilities. I would just draw your attention to our call to action, which was shared with you all. If we are going to move things forward for people with disabilities around physical activity and sport, you have to look at that call to action and its plan to include. Inclusion must not be an afterthought but at the forefront of strategy and policy. If it is not, we will just continue doing what we are doing.

We touched on the whole-system approach and the need for inclusion to be built into that, particularly around education and health. The work that we are doing through the higher and further education institutions to train every PE teacher is important, but it is fragile. We need that activity to be much more strategic.

We need to acknowledge that the benefits system works as a disincentive, and that we need to work on that. We must also work on the social care system, as people cannot get to physical activity and sport if their carer is not there—we heard a horrendous story from one of our athletes who was trying to get back into sport but spent the night sleeping in their wheelchair because care did not arrive to get them to bed. Those are the sorts of things that we have to address if we are going to make our population healthier and more active.

Lastly, as was touched on, the intersectional approach is important. We are not all defined by one particular trait or set of characteristics. Within disability, we are trying to learn from that approach. If you are a woman from a minority ethnic group and are part of a low-income family

and also have a disability, all of those characteristics impact on you. We are speaking to Active Scotland and sportscotland around that intersectional approach, and it is gaining traction. It comes back to our activity inclusion model, which is a person-centred model with the needs of the individual right in the middle, and that is what we need to get to.

Forbes Dunlop: It has been a fantastic summer. We have talked about the summer of sport, which included the Commonwealth games, the men's football world cup, the women's Scottish cricket team competing in its world cup, the hockey team competing in its world cup for the first time in 24 years, and a whole heap of other Scottish athletes and sports competing around the world. It also meant that there was investment in ensuring that young people across Scotland had the opportunity to access free or low-cost sport. I am passionate and enthusiastic when I see local club sport or a group of volunteer-led young people doing amazing things. I remain passionate and enthusiastic about the sporting system and the work that is done by volunteers across Scotland to deliver sporting opportunities. I think that it is fantastic.

Our number 1 challenge just now concerns what is going to happen with regard to our facilities in the next five, 10 or 20 years. We need to focus on a long-term plan for the replacement of facilities across Scotland. You will see from our report that many facilities are already way past their planned lifespan. Ultimately, that issue is underpinned by funding.

The sector does an amazing job—the professional sector, local partners and our national partners, and particularly our volunteers in clubs and communities. It is fantastic and something to be really proud of. We need to continue to support that by investing in it.

The Convener: I am sure that we all agree that we need to focus on the challenge that you outline, as it is with us now.

We thank all four of you very much. It has been a really informative session. I know that there are lots of things that you would like to have told us but did not get a chance to. If there is something that you think that we really should have heard and we have not, then feel free to drop us a note afterwards.

You have given us a lot to think about. Thank you for attending.

10:54

Meeting suspended.

11:09

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. We will now hear from a second panel of witnesses. We are joined by John Lunn, from Scottish Swimming; Colin Hutchison, from Scottish Athletics; Nick Rennie, from Scottish Cycling; and, online, by David Byrne, from Hillhead Sports Club. Welcome to you all, and thank you for finding time to join us.

We have a few minutes for introductory statements, if you would all like to tell us briefly what your organisation does—it is mostly in the names—and the key things that the committee should look at. We will ask you about various matters, including the legacy of the Commonwealth games and the summer of sport, as well as about other interactions that are involved, such as health and wellbeing, funding and facilities, but perhaps you could introduce your top few issues.

John Lunn (Scottish Swimming): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today—we really appreciate it. We submitted written evidence, but our basic starting point is that we are responsible for aquatic sport in Scotland, which is everything from grass-roots sport right through to the tremendous performances that we saw at the Commonwealth games. However, we have responsibility for not only Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic sports but open water swimming, artistic swimming and so on. We also see Scottish Swimming as having responsibility for and a focus on the life skill that swimming provides, and access to swimming pools in communities gives people that benefit, which is why we have campaigned hard for primary school swimming. We want to see swimming lessons being made available in every primary school, and we are pleased that the Scottish Government has resourced that as part of the legacy of the summer of sport, which you spoke about earlier.

We see the value of sport in the long term. In the earlier evidence session, you talked about prevention, and we see that as a big element of what we do, which links back to primary school swimming as a life skill. It should be an entitlement. That links into community learn-to-swim provision, whereby we can advance those skills. Ultimately, if people, including children, choose, they can move on to swimming clubs and other participation and recreational opportunities in and around aquatics, but, if people do not have the basic skill and the opportunity at the start, they will never get that opportunity. It is very difficult to teach those skills later in life, although we do that and have campaigned on that. However, it is difficult for people to pick that up later.

We would like the Scottish Government to follow through on its manifesto commitment, which is to deliver sustained school swimming provision. The current commitment is for three years, but we would like to see it go beyond that. We would like to see statutory consultation on swimming pool closures. That issue probably links more to your earlier evidence session, when you talked about facilities and the estates review that sportscotland carried out. That could be encompassed in a wider piece of work, and we would like to see a task force formed to look at the sustainability of facilities, because, although we have some knowledge, expertise and understanding of how to programme it and what good looks like, others have expertise in building structure and sustainability and in planning models. Those are our asks at this point.

Nick Rennie (Scottish Cycling): Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to join you. I am the chief executive of Scottish Cycling, which is responsible for cycle sport. We are very fortunate that cycling is not just a sport but a mode of travel, and we take on our responsibility as being wider than sport. We take a holistic view of cycling, and hence our vision is of developing a nation of cyclists, including looking at how we get more people on bikes, commuting and travelling and getting the many benefits that cycling can bring. We hope that getting more people using bikes will translate into numbers in the sport, which is a continuous cycle of fantastic performances, such as at Glasgow 2026, inspiring the next generation of cyclists.

We are particularly excited to host the Tour de France grand départ in Scotland next year. That is a massive opportunity to inspire more people to cycle all different types of bikes and at different levels, so we are working hard on that. We have been entrusted with leading the social impact programme for the Scottish Government to capitalise on that huge inspirational event.

If we have time, I would love to chat about sustained funding for sport. I appreciate that there are many hungry chickens that want their element of funding, but we feel passionately that sport gives a great return on investment, so it would be great to explore that further.

The Convener: Yes, we will certainly come back to that.

Colin Hutchison (Scottish Athletics): I thank the committee for its interest by inviting us all here. I represent Scottish Athletics, which is the national governing body for athletics in Scotland. Our vision is to give everyone in Scotland the opportunity to take part in athletics and running and to achieve their personal ambitions. That reflects the ambitions of our performance athletes, right

through to the volunteers who are working on the ground in our clubs at the grass roots of the sport.

We have a relationship with UK Athletics, which manages the performance aspect—the world-class programme for athletics, including the para programme—while everything outside that is the responsibility of Scottish Athletics, including the development of our clubs, coaches and officials, the domestic competition programme in Scotland and funding and support for the development of our athletes up to world-class programme level.

11:15

We would like to see a similar focus on investment to that in Scottish Cycling. There was the really successful running on empty campaign, which was led by the governing bodies over the past 18 months and resulted in increased investment in sport this year. However, there had not been an increase in investment since 2021. There was a real threat that the Commonwealth games' legacy for our sport would be a reduction in programmes and staffing, which would have been hugely detrimental to the next stage of our sport's development.

Alongside that, another area of focus for us is facilities, which we have heard about this morning. In athletics, our clubs generally do not own their facilities, so we are entirely reliant on local authority and leisure trust facilities.

Another part to consider, as was just mentioned, is the development of people. We recently went through a member survey as part of our strategy, which highlighted the biggest problem we face: people were loud and clear that the lack of recruitment and development of volunteers across the country has been the biggest threat to our sport.

David Byrne (Hillhead High School War Memorial Trust): I am chair of Hillhead High School War Memorial Trust. We started in 1892, so that is not yesterday; it was quite some time ago.

We want to talk about the coalface of community sport, and it is a great honour to do so. As a provider, we aim to reach 1,000 members and are close to achieving that this year. We see enormous benefits from participation, but we also see the practical challenges of delivering community sport every day. In terms of demand and ambition, our services are probably running ahead of capacity—that includes our ageing facilities.

Climate change is an issue that we would like to talk about—for example, it increasingly affects the usability of our grass pitches. There is also the accessibility issue, because being open to everybody is not the same as being genuinely

accessible to everybody. Understanding participation rather than simply counting it is a challenge for us. We want to talk more about that.

From our perspective, if Scotland wants community sport to deliver more in health, prevention and inclusion, we also need to think seriously about the capacity of the community organisations that are being asked to deliver that and the support that is available to them.

The Convener: Thank you to all for those introductory remarks.

We will start with a more overarching theme by reflecting back on the legacy of the Commonwealth games, the summer of sport and what they meant for your organisations.

Adam Harley: I have a question for you, Mr Lunn. In your submission, you spoke about the “detrimental” impact of diving not having been included in the Commonwealth games. I am also aware that there is a lack of proper diving facilities in the west of Scotland. I believe that there is only one diving school, which might be set to close—you can talk a little bit about that.

On that basis, are you concerned about the future of Scottish diving?

John Lunn: As we put in the submission, we have invested significantly to support diving in Scotland. We passionately believe in it as a sport within aquatics. You are right about the Ayr swimming pool: its platforms cannot be used any more. The need for staff to flood the pool beyond its usable depth means that using the platforms is increasingly challenging. That leaves us without a facility in the west of Scotland. Indeed, the only three facilities where you can dive from 3 metres are the Edinburgh Commonwealth pool, Dundee's Olympia leisure centre and Aberdeen Sports Village. Ayr had been the only other facility.

At the games, I spoke to the First Minister about the fact that, at Tollcross international swimming centre, there is a space behind the starting area that looks like a big cavern. That was built and set up for a diving tank, but it was never installed, and nor were the platforms. The intention was to do that at a follow-on event that did not happen, but there is space in the room at Tollcross to create something within existing provision.

We are seeing growth in diving. As I said, we have invested significantly in the north and the eastern corridor. We have recently recruited more staff. We have put on a schools programme for diving taster sessions, to which we have attracted more than 5,500 children. We will look at transitioning them into clubs and programmes to support the use of those very important facilities, and to give children the opportunity to try one of

the aquatic sports that they would not necessarily consider.

Adam Harley: To come back to the Tollcross facility, it would be good to tease out the impact that the lack of adequate facilities in the west of Scotland is having on young athletes who could have a promising future. A constituent of mine, Heather Graham, was a gold medallist in diving. She would have to travel all the way over to Edinburgh weekly to continue. Could the lack of proper facilities mean that we are missing out on athletes from a huge area of the country?

John Lunn: Definitely, purely because of geography. We know that when we can give people the opportunity to do the activity, there is a higher likelihood of them continuing to do it. If they cannot get that opportunity because there are not adequate facilities, that absolutely limits where they can go.

Children usually start at deck level or pool level when they start diving, so they need springboard set-ups and 1m provision. There is some of that, but anything beyond that requires you to go to Edinburgh or further north, which is a limiting factor. That will have an impact on the diving club in Ayr, where the pool that I talked about earlier cannot accommodate it any longer.

Paul McLennan: I asked a question in the first evidence session about coaching at grass-roots and elite level. One of the key things for me is how we develop that. Colin Hutchison, you touched on attracting volunteers, which is a real concern in respect of what we can achieve. How do you see your grass-roots and elite performance coaching going forward?

Colin Hutchison: The numbers are still strong, but we are starting to encounter challenges in the capacity of clubs to grow further, because we do not have the coaching provision to help us to do that. Many clubs are operating with waiting lists, which is not ideal in a sport such as athletics, where we want as many young people as possible to be given the opportunity to take part.

We have a challenge around volunteer recruitment and development. As a sport, we still rely on volunteers. There are very few paid coaches. As we go into our next strategy cycle, a key focus will be on the professionalisation of coaching. That will be key to the development of our sport over the next 10 years.

At the elite level, the situation is very challenging. We have very few high-performance coaches in Scotland. That is partly down to not having the coaching provision itself, but it is also down to the whole environment that is required to support high-performance athletes.

A key strategic objective for us is to create environments in Scotland that enable athletes to stay here and achieve world-class performance levels. We have examples of that, but increasingly, more and more athletes travel across to the States in their late teens and early 20s because of the opportunities that come from the athletics system there.

Although we might not be able to compete with a country and a programme that invests more than \$1 billion a year in athletics, we are trying to work with the university sector in particular to create environments in Scotland that enable us to retain athletes here. A big part of that is coaching and having world-class coaches in Scotland, so that our athletes have that provision.

John Lunn: We have a big coaching and teaching infrastructure. As I said, swimming is a life skill, so we run an extensive programme with teachers. We have many club coaches. We recently did a membership survey, and our coaching group fed back to us that they are under the most pressure. They find increasing demands not only on their time but on what is expected of them. We are working on and are acutely aware of that.

Having coaches in good clubs in good facilities that are accessible and affordable is all linked. If we do not have all that together, we will not be as accessible, and we will not produce the enormous successes that we have all seen.

Nick Rennie: Cycling is in a similar position. We cannot develop a sport at any level without good coaches. There is a sportscotland subsidy targeted at underrepresented groups, which really works. We have done well on getting more females into coaching: we had a 20 per cent target by the end of this financial year, which we have already surpassed, and that subsidy and our work have helped. Historically, females have been underrepresented in cycling, and having more females as role models and involved in coaching young girls makes a huge difference. We are really pleased about the impact that we are making. Similar to what Colin Hutchison said about athletics, our clubs have capacity challenges. We need more coaches, but people seem to have less time to volunteer these days, which is a challenge.

There are lots of good interventions to get young people into coaching—not just participating but coaching—from an early age. Young people are easier to coach if they themselves have coached as part of their education and training, so we need more of that. We also need to look at how we can professionalise coaching at all levels of the sporting pathway, to offer a better product and to support volunteer coaches better, because they can sometimes feel a bit exposed.

Paul McLennan: David Byrne, you mentioned your ambition to get to 1,000 members. Without your coaches, you will struggle to get to that level. From a grass-roots perspective, how do you see coaching development as part of the sports club itself?

David Byrne: We have five sports, and those all operate differently—the norm for each of them is different. For example, in rugby, it is common to have paid coaches. Obviously, that incorporates professionalism—they are getting their own coaching, training and development—but it is very difficult to ask the same thing from, say, ultimate frisbee coaches, who are all volunteers and have other lives. We find that volunteering is increasingly strained. We struggle to get people to volunteer in the way that they used to do. Our club is so old that we have a history of people doing part-time jobs—sometimes close to full-time jobs—and being willing to devote that amount of time. We are not seeing that any more, or we are seeing it shrink, so it is difficult.

Let us take tennis coaching as an example. An issue for us is that we have six courts, and one-on-one coaching is great—for elite athletes and for the development of elite tennis players and so on—but that kind of provision takes away the ability to have four people just hitting the ball about on the court, which is better for increasing participation. If the club has to choose between those two things, we have to make the choice to have four people on the court, rather than providing the coach-led experience, so that is an example of the conflict between performance and participation.

For run club, we have to have professional coaches. They are volunteers, but they have to go through the training to ensure that they are conducting the sessions properly. As soon as you go out running on roads, there are safeguarding issues, for example.

As I said, it is complicated and it is different for each sport, but, in the main, we are trying to professionalise coaching in order to be able to compete with other clubs—the David Lloyds of the world, for example. All David Lloyd coaches are paid and are up to date with their development courses.

Paul McLennan: Thanks for that. It is clear that coaching and volunteer development are a major part of the issue.

The Convener: Yes, absolutely. It was useful to hear from everyone on that subject.

Jack Middleton: We hear about legacy, especially in relation to the Commonwealth games, and one of the legacies that you are driving for is an increase in grass-roots participation. Do you see evidence of that coming about from this

summer's Commonwealth games? Nick Rennie might want to reflect on the UCI road world championships, which we have held in the past. Have you seen an increase in participation and demand as a result of those championships?

Nick Rennie: It is a good question. There were some challenges in relation to Glasgow 2026, given that the decision to host was taken fairly late, and the funding model probably did not allow the amount of resourcing and time that is needed for a full legacy programme. Although I do not have tangible data, we did a lot of activation—at the Kelvingrove live site and at the velodrome—and the sites were really busy. Lots of people came to try cycling, and we provide a pathway and links to local activity and clubs, so the games will not have had a detrimental effect. I am not yet sure about the extent of the effect of that work, but I am sure that it will be positive.

11:30

We had a longer run-in to the UCI cycling championships. We were focused and did a lot of activation around all the events in Scotland, and what a great opportunity that was for all our young people to race on the roads, trails and tracks that the world champions were going to be riding on. We saw a 10 per cent increase in youth members that year, which is more than double what we would normally have, and we are very focused on ensuring that we have an increase in cycling participation as a result of the Tour de France next summer. We already have 18 projects under way, and a whole pipeline of projects will come on stream—we will probably have more than 30 in total—which will provide the legacy and social impact as a result of that major event.

The Convener: On a related point, I happen to live where the etape Caledonia is held, in Pitlochry. Lots of statistics have been put out about what it does for the local economy, which you can discuss, but there has been quite an effort to increase cycling in the area, as a byproduct of the etape. I have to say that, for most of us, Highland Perthshire is a bit of a challenging area to start cycling around—you have to be quite keen or younger than me to be doing that.

Do you have any statistics on the etape? It is used quite a lot as an example, and it has now been accepted—it is going to come, it will shut people's roads and they will not be able to get out of their house for eight hours, at the worst, which is quite an impact on people. People sometimes wonder whether it would be better if it could be an off-road event, which is one aspect, as has been said, but also whether there could be more environmentally friendly events, if I can describe them like that—events that are not so high level.

Do you have statistics on how the etape helps people into cycling?

Nick Rennie: There was a large evaluation of the UCI cycling road world championships, so I can look into that research and share it with you.

The Convener: Thank you.

Nick Rennie: What a beautiful part of the world Perthshire is—and you are right that it is quite hilly, but that offers benefits, too. Some of the best mountain biking locations in Scotland are in that area.

Jack Middleton: Would any other witnesses like to come in on my question about legacy? I see that Colin Hutchison wants to come in, but I am also keen to hear from David Byrne, because I think that would be interesting, given that you are based in Glasgow, too.

Colin Hutchison: At the moment, what we know about legacy is anecdotal and it comes mostly from the clubs in Glasgow, which have seen an increase in new members.

Going back to Glasgow 2014, from 2014 until now—taking out the Covid-affected years—Scottish Athletics has had a continuous increase in membership, which, this year, has risen to over 19,000 for the first time. Glasgow 2014 and Glasgow 2026 will have played a part in increasing membership, but, as was noted earlier, the most important factor in ensuring the success and legacy of those events is continued and sustained investment in sport. As much as we, as the governing body, facilitate and support our clubs and train volunteers, including officials and coaches, to set them on their way and support them through the journey, ultimately, the biggest impact is made on the ground, through Hillhead Sports Club and athletics clubs across the country. The most important thing is to sustain support in the period between the major championships, to ensure that, particularly when they are in Scotland, we can make the most of those opportunities.

John Lunn: I think that I said earlier that part of the legacy is the primary school swimming programme, and we are grateful to the Scottish Government for its support for that. Our vision is for everyone to be able to swim, and giving people that life skill early on is an important part of the jigsaw puzzle. There is also a big safety element to that provision, because a lot of what the swimming programme teaches is awareness and confidence in and around water—it is not necessarily about children being able to swim at the end of it—which we see as a major component.

In relation to direct activity around the Commonwealth games, we have some district-led activities that give children and people from local communities the opportunity to come in, engage

with a club and try things out, in the hope that that will attract them to the sport, as well as our usual activity of connecting with community learn-to-swim programmes to improve transition rates.

Our learn to swim framework, on which we partner with 38 leisure trusts and local providers, has about 88,000 children and people taking part in community learn-to-swim provision a year. It has been running for 10 years and has had over 210,000 participants. The framework, which is run in partnership with Scottish Water, has been a great success, but we can build on it and continue to do more. The Commonwealth games were a showcase and an opportunity that will help us to raise our profile and build a little bit more.

I will tie that back to one of the things that has been talked about, which is performance athletes and their role in communities. For example, I will be leaving here this afternoon to go through to Barrhead to meet Duncan Scott, who has eight Olympic medals and is Scotland's most decorated Commonwealth athlete, and Toni Shaw, who is a para-athlete who medalled in her first Commonwealth games. Tonight, they will be at a community learn-to-swim programme in a club, where they will speak to children and sign autographs for winners of a competition that we have been running.

Those athletes do such things all the time. They are incredibly important to us and—I am sure that this is the same for other sports—they reach out and engage with the communities that they came from. None of them initially set out to become Olympic, Paralympic or Commonwealth champions; they set out to be safe and confident in and around water. That is what their parents and guardians wanted them to do. They do not forget the journey that that has taken them on, and they often go back into their communities.

That is part of the legacy that we now have: we have more heroes and heroines, including para-athletes, who can go back into those communities. Out of a team of 33, we had 20 athletes who were at the Commonwealth games for the first time.

Paul McLennan: On Monday, I was at a community skills event in East Lothian that Duncan Scott attended. It was absolutely fantastic.

John Lunn: I will feed that back to him. Thank you very much.

Paul McLennan: To back up what you said, he was a real motivation to a lot of people, not only because of his swimming but also because of his attitude, his coaching and what he needs to do. I just wanted to mention that while you were here.

David Byrne: On legacy, I would say that the connection between major sporting events such as the Commonwealth games and increasing grass-

roots participation does not happen automatically. It has to be deliberately created and supported.

I imagine that many volunteers throughout the country feel that they are very good at what they do. For example, as a volunteer-led organisation, we have done such work for more than a century. We do it week by week and month by month really well, but anything additional that we throw at volunteers who are increasingly under pressure is a struggle—we struggle to get them, for starters, so I mean the ones that we do have. If we have a major sporting event coming up and are expecting to get as much benefit out of it and as many people involved in sport as possible as a result, we would really benefit from support for that. As I said, it is an additional ask, but we struggle to provide anything additional.

The Convener: Thank you. If I got you correctly, it is already a struggle to get volunteers, perhaps more so than it was in the past. That is the same for almost anybody who uses volunteers. Some of that might be because of increased regulation, but a lot of it is because people are really stretched—for example, women working full time and looking after their families—and that is cumulative.

It is perhaps not only money that could help with that situation. Do you have suggestions about what would really help in the circumstances that you have described, where you need to do extra to get extra?

David Byrne: We launched an initiative called “clubs together”, which brings whole clubs together, whatever the sport, because we find—I am sure that many people listening will do, too—that, when it comes to volunteering, people are more likely to do it for their own sport. We are multi-sport in that we support five sports, so club-wide initiatives are a little bit more difficult.

Clubs together is held one Saturday morning per month. To get people involved, we did a litter-pick session, which Patricia Ferguson MP came down to help us with.

That is a little touchstone for people to get involved by just a tiny amount—we call it microvolunteering. It gets people involved and they help out their club and see that there is a tangible benefit to that. I do not want to say that it will get them into the cult, but we hope that it will encourage them to see that maybe they can do a committee role for a couple of hours a week or help with a one-off event. If we think of it as a product, I suppose that it is about selling the product differently and lessening the commitment. I keep talking about the aim of having 1,000 members. If you have 1,000 members doing even half an hour or an hour a month, that turns into a volunteer army pretty quickly.

On the wider issue of volunteering, recreating a culture of volunteering has to start early, in primary and secondary schools. We would love to welcome volunteers from outside the club, and I think that we would be able to do that. Again, however, it is about the additionality and working out the issues of safeguarding, insurance and so on. With the litter picking example, what does it mean if somebody gets injured and they are not a member of the club? All those kinds of things are additional, so we would be hesitant to get involved. I am not asking sportscotland to do everything for us, but it would be good if there was some kind of resource out there that could help. That cultural change of getting lots of people involved and more people doing less—if that makes sense—cannot come just from us. We can all contribute a little rather than what happened in the olden days, at least in our history, when some people did quite a lot.

The Convener: That is useful to think about. Joe Long wants to say something on that.

Joe Long: While we are on the topic of the legacy of the games, we heard from the previous panel about the success of the incorporation of disability and para sports into the main event of the games. That has been a feature of the Commonwealth games for some time now. I remember that it was a big innovation in Manchester in 2002. However, as far as I am aware, outwith the Commonwealth games, we still do not see that in individual sporting events, whether it is athletics, cycling or swimming. Is there movement on that in individual sports? How might we get to the place that the Commonwealth games has arrived at on the integration and celebration of para sport?

John Lunn: That is a good question. We actually do have some of that. We are starting to incorporate some para events in British-level championships, and we have done the same in some of our Scottish-level events. We are trying to do that where we can. Particularly in swimming, the schedule can be really busy, so there are issues about how much capacity and time we have to do that. However, we are increasingly trying to mainstream and integrate para events.

Our activity is integrated at clubs and through our performance pathways. We have fully integrated swimming clubs where coaches get the opportunity to learn how to adapt what they do and learn about what would be more inclusive. That picks up on some of the stuff that Mr Macleod said in the earlier session about inclusion training—our swimming coaches have that. Swimming has from the start been one of the sports where there has very much been parity, in that those with a disability or impairment are mixed with able-bodied swimmers. It was the same for the team at the

Commonwealth games—they were not separate; they were all together.

We are starting to see more of that. Can we do more? Yes, but the issue is how we balance it with capacity, in terms of not just space and time but the costs associated with the ever-expanding programmes in many swimming competitions in particular.

Joe Long: That is encouraging. Does anyone want to add to that?

Colin Hutchison: Similar to what John Lunn said, domestically, we have full integration in our national championships and have done for several years. We work closely with Gavin Macleod and his team at Scottish Disability Sport, who the committee heard from earlier. We have had real success not just with integration but in the development of athletes who have gone on to represent Scotland and Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

It is more of a challenge at European and world level, because of the separate organisations that exist, so we do not see that integration there yet in athletics. However, that integration is a real positive of the Commonwealth games and is certainly a benefit domestically.

11:45

Heather Anderson: How are you getting kids from less advantaged backgrounds into elite sport? We have talked a lot about elite sport, activity, performance and participation. The discussion has been helpful in enabling us to see things as a continuum rather than an either/or.

How do you reach young kids who would never consider taking up a sport such as diving or trying to become an elite athlete? What are you doing specifically to bring them into your sport? I put that question to all the panel members.

Colin Hutchison: I am happy to start. That has definitely been a challenge in athletics, although the financial barriers to taking part are perhaps not the same as they are in some other sports, where equipment can be a significant cost. Perhaps that is becoming more challenging in running, given the types of shoes and trainers people feel that they need to have.

In 2023, we established a community impact and health team, whose focus was on addressing the three biggest areas of underrepresentation that we had identified in athletics: people living in poverty and on a low income, people living with disabilities and people from ethnically and culturally diverse communities. At the time, the statistics showed that participation rates among

those groups were 5 per cent, 5 per cent and 2 per cent.

The programme is not about quickly bringing thousands of people into the sport, because that will not happen. It is about intentionally going out into those communities to understand the real barriers to participation and to train leaders in those communities whom young people would recognise and build relationships with.

We are still at the very early stages. We are three years into the programme and have two projects. Initially, the focus was in Glasgow, because the intersection of those groups was greatest in two areas in Glasgow.

The first programme was set up in partnership with Scottish Sports Futures. It runs activities on the football pitches just outside Glasgow international arena, and 70 young people come along every week. It is interesting that, when you look at the stats for those two programmes—the second one is in its early stages—95 per cent of the young people come from Scottish index of multiple deprivation 1 and 2 areas, 40 per cent come from ethnically and culturally diverse communities, and 20 per cent identify as having some form of disability.

We know that we can play a role in supporting growth in participation among those underrepresented groups, but that work needs to be intentional. It needs to be long term, because the first year was very much about building relationships in those communities. At that point, we had not delivered any activity.

Heather Anderson: What has worked? How did you get the breakthrough?

Colin Hutchison: There were two key aspects. The first was building relationships with organisations that already operated in those communities. They already had that understanding, and they had the respect of people there. The second aspect was identifying leaders from those communities and then training them to deliver those activities.

In our first programme, the young coach Kebba Sanneh, who I think is only 18, has been a huge part of the success of that programme. That has been recognised through volunteer awards in Glasgow.

The big challenge now is how we scale that up. What learning can we take from that, how can we develop it and what investment can we find to scale that up into other areas across Scotland?

David Byrne: I would say that two extremes of Scotland are on our doorstep, with the types of data zone that we have just been talking about. Around 700m to the north of us is a data zone that

is identified as the 21st most deprived in Scotland, yet just 300m to the south, in Hyndland, is the 47th most affluent data zone.

Given where we are, I often think that there might be a Federer to the north who will never be discovered if they do not have access to tennis and, particularly to start off with, a good racket and membership et cetera, which can be quite costly in comparison with something like playing football.

I will be perfectly honest that trying to get that potential Federer to come to the club and try our sport is difficult. It goes back to the issue of additionality. We are very good at doing what we do, but it is difficult for us to do anything extra. At the moment, we are advertising a modest sponsorship co-ordinator role for two to four days a month, with the aim of using the additional revenue that we bring in to fund scholarships and subsidise memberships for potential Federers, the next Gavin Hastings or whoever might be coming through. The next Serena Williams could be in Maryhill—who knows? For us, that is a really powerful idea. However, at this stage, it remains aspirational.

We have an aspiration to be the best multisport club in Scotland. All those initiatives will add to it. I hate the word, but we are currently pupating between being something that is quite internal and navel gazing, and looking externally and learning about all those things and how to do them, because historically we have not been very good at that at all.

Nick Rennie: As per our vision of developing a nation of cyclists, we want to make not only our sport but cycling as accessible as possible. That is a priority for us. Our flagship project in that space is rock up and ride, which is exactly as it sounds. It provides free opportunities for young people from underrepresented backgrounds to get on a bike, have fun, develop their confidence and competence, and experience the many benefits of cycling. We have bike libraries, and we sometimes provide children with bikes that they can keep. The project is funded through Transport Scotland and the regional transport partnerships. It is working, because 5,000 people a year get that opportunity, which is brilliant.

The challenge is how, after that initial interest and having fun on a bike, someone progresses through the pathway. That does not necessarily mean an elite pathway; it could simply mean cycling regularly with a club or a group of like-minded people. That is a challenge because there are costs associated, and parental commitments often come into it, because parents might have to transport children at weekends or in the evening.

There are solutions to that. We have a fantastic project with Movement Park Glasgow, which gives

children the opportunity to go to the velodrome and the BMX track and to enter that pathway. We hope that that will give them the confidence to enter competitions, even if they are just at a low level. You need to do that locally, in partnership with community groups and with funding in place. Rock up and ride is going well, but the next bit is that we would like to do it in more places in Scotland. How to continue that level of participation is the challenge.

Heather Anderson: Our streets are full of young people on bikes. Can we divert them into these activities?

Nick Rennie: You are correct that the question is how we channel that.

The Convener: That moves us seamlessly into talking more about the grass roots and the barriers in that area.

Jack Middleton: I want to build on Heather Anderson's point. We have talked about the cost of membership fees. When I was young, with a single mum, playing football in boys clubs, it was about £200 or £300 for the season just to play football. I dread to think how much that has risen in the 10 or 15 years since I was doing that. What are the rough costs for club memberships in your sports?

It was really interesting that David Byrne touched on subsidies for memberships. Would that come down to clubs introducing subsidies themselves, or would it be more beneficial to have a national pot of money to help subsidise membership costs for those from lower-income families?

Nick Rennie: The cost of club membership in cycling varies, but it is generally really low—at around £20 for the year. However, that probably masks the overall cost of participation, because you generally need a bike. Travelling to take part in an event involves costs, too. The overall package is what matters. Given that, clubs are very good at recognising people who perhaps need help and need their membership fee to be furloughed.

In cycling, we are fortunate to have nine different disciplines, and you do not need a bike for more urban sports such as BMX and cycle speedway, because you are provided with one at the facility. It is about developing such opportunities so that people can take part in cycling.

Colin Hutchison: Our position is similar to Nick Rennie's. The costs of club membership and of membership of the national governing body are really quite low in comparison with most other sports. However, as Nick Rennie pointed out, if an increase in the cost of membership of the national governing body leads to an increase in the cost of

club membership, and if the facility that a young person accesses also increases its costs, that becomes quite a significant hit for families, particularly if they have more than one young person involved in the sport.

The impact starts to trickle through if there is no increase in investment in the governing bodies. Over seven years, our costs have increased by £700,000, and investments have gone up by £400,000, so we have had to find £300,000 from elsewhere. That starts to impact on volunteers coming in through coach education and officials education, because those costs go up. When you put all of that together, we have a challenge, although our sport is still fairly accessible in terms of cost.

John Lunn: We are probably the opposite of what Nick Rennie and Colin Hutchison described. Because of the time commitment and the types of facilities that we use, our sport is really expensive, particularly at the upper end. We regularly hear of clubs that charge more than £100 a month for training access. For children who are spending less time doing the activity, the cost will be lower than that, but some senior squads charge more than £100 a month to cover the pool hire costs and the costs of the coaches—we have a significant paid coaching workforce. In addition, there are travel and equipment costs and competition entry fees.

For children in particular, we have capped the permitted technology regarding swimsuits, because that can be prohibitive at the top end. Swimsuits can be really expensive and they do not last very long, so we have tried to mitigate that in competitions involving children.

We work really hard with providers. We offer advice on how they can balance a programme of access. Pool programming is a big factor in how they can make the best use of the water space they have. Not every club or learn-to-swim group can get the 7 o'clock session on a Tuesday, which everybody seems to want, so people need to think about how they can plan the use of facilities more effectively to strike a balance regarding income generation.

We get a lot of favourable treatment by local authorities and leisure trusts in the interests of keeping pool costs down but, at the end of the day, they are trying to run facilities that are getting older. A couple of years ago, the swimming pool study that was done ahead of the estates review showed that the average age of a swimming pool in Scotland is more than 38 years. They are expensive to run and they break down and have issues that you cannot always plan for. Consequently, we are seeing increased costs in

community learn-to-swim provision, which is one of the main routes into the sport.

As I said, the sport is expensive. A lot of clubs offer hardship funds and other financial support to members when they can and when they are aware that there are difficulties, but cost is an ever-increasing barrier to participation in the sport.

Jack Middleton: What is the level of those hardship subsidies?

John Lunn: It varies. As you can imagine, that is quite a personal issue for the individuals concerned. In some cases, clubs might waive fees or cover the cost of travelling, competition fees and everything in between. A lot of clubs are well aware of the issue and try to reduce its impact. We also heavily subsidise our youth and academy programmes and junior and squad programmes. There is no cost for a lot of our activities, but some of our activities have costs attached, because we cannot cover everything.

The Convener: Would David Byrne like to add anything? You have spoken to some degree about the costs that are associated with running your club, but can you say anything about the costs to individuals who are taking part in activities, given that you have five sports in your club?

David Byrne: I would say that our membership costs are quite reasonable for most of our sports, although some of our rugby players might disagree with that. The problem on the other side is obviously the cost of running the sports. This year, the board looked at the club's recurring revenue—the money that we bring in—and the reality of the cost of running the sports, and it identified a structural subsidy there. Basically, the membership fees for our sports are not bringing in what they cost us to run them, so we get a subsidy from the use of the facilities—we have a cafe and a bar and space for evening classes and so on.

We do not have sinking funds—other than for tennis, because that is required—so we have really been in a kind of survival mode for quite some time. Our strategic plan is called “From Surviving to Thriving”, and our aim is to get to a stage where a combination of funding, sponsorship and so on contributes towards the cost of our sports and makes them more sustainable.

12:00

Nobody is saying that sports should not be subsidised. We are a non-profit organisation, and we exist to promote participation in and the playing of all sports, so we are not opposed to subsidising, but you still have to pay the bills at the end of the month—you still have to think about not just this afternoon but tomorrow, next month and 10 years

from now. Next year, we will have been around for 135 years, and we want to be around and providing sports for at least another 135 years. If we are going to do that, we have to have that injection of financial reality.

That is a difficult thing to do in an organisation that has been around for as long as we have. At our recent annual general meeting, I talked about the fact that, to a degree, we need to be able simply to turn up and play sport and not be constantly thinking about the pressures of money and membership and how much things cost. We have to play our sports—that is why we are there: we are a living memorial to that purpose. However, at the same time, in order for us to have that escape each month—or whenever I play a bad volley on a tennis court—there has to be a correlation between what things cost on each side.

I mentioned sinking funds. That is an important issue that we are not really dealing with at the moment. I do not want to be too dramatic but, to pay for the minis and juniors of today, we are robbing from the minis and juniors who will be around 10 or 20 years from now. If we do not do something now about incorporating sinking funds, we will simply transfer the problem to those who come after us, when it becomes their turn to look after the club and be its guardians.

The Convener: That is a vivid example of the struggles that many clubs will be looking at, although not many will be on the same scale as yours is. Congratulations on how long you have been going, but, obviously, looking forward, you do not have your challenges to seek.

I will continue to pursue the issues of grass-roots participation and health and wellbeing. We have mentioned before that sport is not always so open to women—I was going to say girls, but that is not where I am going here.

Mr Lunn, you mentioned that Scottish Swimming is interested in all kinds of water sports. I swim in a loch—until the pandemic came along and people started doing that, I never thought that I would. It has been absolutely great. You think of it as a free activity—and, if you do not keep buying wetsuits and things, it is. There is obviously a safety issue with swimming in lochs, and you mentioned the importance of everyone learning to swim.

When did it become the case that every schoolchild did not learn to swim? I am going back a long way, but I certainly learned to swim at school, and so did my children. Maybe it is just to do with where we live, but all the schools that I know of did that. I am surprised that we are now having to get back to doing it. When did that drop off?

John Lunn: That is a good question. I am not quite sure when it started to drop off. I am a bit like yourself: I learned to swim and got engaged in the sport when I went along to the local pool to take swimming lessons in primary school.

The provision of those lessons has decreased. It has fallen victim to budget cuts over time, with more and more local authorities dropping the courses in order to make cost savings. Some local authority areas now have no provision; some have partial provision, with the lessons being provided at the discretion of the individual school or the headteacher; and others still have full provision, so all primary school children get something, although what that is can be quite variable in terms of how often and how many lessons.

We have been campaigning on the issue for several years now—that activity predates my involvement by a long time—because we believe that swimming is an essential life skill and is something that everybody should get the opportunity to learn. However, I could not give you an exact date for when it stopped, or when it started to become a budget issue.

The Convener: It is welcome that the primary school swimming programme that you mentioned is going forward, but a question remains about facilities. Outside the central belt, sometimes there are facilities and sometimes there are no facilities, so it is hard to see how, in practice, that programme could be delivered to everyone. I am not sure that anyone has an answer to that, but I would be happy to hear your views.

John Lunn: That is another good question. We have mapped the situation, so we know the distances of primary schools from swimming pools. Some of them are a considerable distance away and some are not—a few months ago, I was at a swimming pool in Edinburgh that was within walking distance of five primary schools. There is a wide spectrum of distances. In many urban areas, pools are a lot closer to schools and are therefore a lot more accessible, but, in rural areas, children have to spend 45 minutes or more on a bus to get to a pool. We recognise that that is a challenge.

As part of the roll-out of the primary school swimming programme, we ran some pilots, including rural models, which we evaluated. The pilots looked at various ways in which the programme can be delivered, because the ambition is to give every primary school child, ideally in primary 5, some experience in and around water, so that they can be safer and more competent in and around it. The programme is not necessarily about teaching them to swim—that might be something that they achieve in that time, but it is not necessarily the primary objective.

You talked about those who are less well-off and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. That is where the biggest gap is. We do not have relevant research in Scotland, but we know from England that the incidence of poorer children who can swim is roughly half what it is for children in the more affluent communities: about 75 per cent of children in England from more affluent communities can swim, and about 30 to 35 per cent of those in less affluent communities can. Programmes such as ours are the only way to ensure that the opportunity to learn that life skill is universally provided to children.

The Convener: Obviously, that is a necessary life skill. Sadly, every year more people drown. Some of them would have drowned anyway, but some of them did not have a chance because they could not swim.

Joe Long: You mentioned that you have done mapping work. In the area where I live, west Fife, we see public pools closing and, when the old school estate is renewed, pools are often not included in the new buildings. Have you done any sort of projection of how many pools we would need nationally if everyone were to have one locally? Is there a per capita formula?

John Lunn: There is some statistical information on that, although I do not think that we could simply have a per capita formula, partly because of geography. There is more complexity to the issue.

There are 295 swimming pools in Scotland, and some areas have a reasonable amount of pool stock, although, of course, most of that stock is ageing. We have a mapping tool, so, if a pool is up for replacement or if the construction of a new pool is being considered, we can map that and show the population density and what the likely uptake is. We have worked with some partners who are looking at new builds, because we recognise that the school estate probably has to be different from what it was previously.

You mentioned school pools closing and the need in the local community. That links to some of the points that Mr Dunlop made earlier. We need there to be more joined-up thinking about such provision, not just within the local authority, between the education department, which has the primary responsibility for the schools, and departments such as leisure services, but across local authority borders. We see situations where a community facility is being closed, but a school is being rebuilt across the border. If there was a more joined-up approach, the necessary resource could be made available to put a good community facility in that new building. There are some good examples of that happening.

Heather Anderson: I will ask about the prevention issue later, but I want to talk about the issue of facilities first. I was quite surprised by what you said about all your facilities being provided through local authorities and leisure trusts. Is that correct?

John Lunn: Yes.

Heather Anderson: I am a local councillor in Dundee, and I know that the issue around swimming pools is energy use and the cost of energy. You talked about wanting a task force to address that issue. What stage is that at? The idea of using the heat demand of swimming pools for district heating has real potential. In Dundee's first proposal in relation to that approach, the Olympia centre would be a key part of that network. Have you done much thinking about how pools can tie into heat demand and energy use as part of bigger schemes, or is that the plan for the task force?

John Lunn: Again, that is a really good question. I wish that the task force was up and running, because we have been talking about it for a long time. We feel that it needs to be led jointly by sportscotland, the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and ourselves. All those levels need to be involved.

There are some good case studies of such initiatives. We know of some new-build facilities that are operating to Passivhaus standards and have achieved significantly reduced energy costs. Our research estimates that, with the right adjustments to facilities, such as better filtration systems, improved heating systems, solar panels and pool covers, energy costs could be reduced by about £5 million a year. Estimates that we made a few years ago, which are probably out of date, suggest that swimming pool heating and energy requirements are about £40 million a year. There are definitely ways of mitigating energy costs and making pools better in terms of energy retention and lower energy usage.

Heather Anderson: There is going to be a three-month consultation on local government reform and national health service reform, but many local authorities use arm's-length external organisations such as leisure trusts, so there is a need to think about where all those facilities sit at the moment, and about ways of ensuring that we do not reduce people's ability to access them. Earlier, one of our witnesses talked about the fact that there are lots of amazing facilities in schools but they are not accessible at the weekend. I encourage you all to be very active in that consultation about access to those facilities in future models.

The Convener: Jack Middleton has a quick follow-up question.

Jack Middleton: I will be as quick as I can, convener.

John Lunn, I am keen to get some further information for the committee on the roll-out of the primary school swimming programme. What were the pilot areas initially? Has the roll-out faced any barriers in terms of working with 32 local authorities or their umbrella body, COSLA? Was any prioritisation given to coastal areas, where children are more likely to find themselves in immediate danger, which means that swimming is a life-saving skill?

John Lunn: I cannot tell you about the pilots in detail, as they took place a few years ago, but we can provide those reports to the committee. There was a spread of rural and urban areas, and we looked at the different models. We engaged with the providers to get evidence and information from them about what the best models would be.

The primary school swimming framework, which is what we want the roll-out to be mapped against, is a flexible model. We advocate for seven and a half hours as being the optimal amount of activity that the children should get. Some of that does not need to be in the swimming pool; it can involve safety messaging, and it can take place in other environments, including on the bus on the way to the pool. We have resources and tools to develop the approach, so that people can make the best use of the time that they have.

We have not encountered any barriers in working with any of the local partners. Since the roll-out was announced, everyone has said that they want to work with us, and the local authorities and leisure trusts that were already delivering primary school swimming have continued to do so.

However, we have had some challenges in relation to COSLA. When the roll-out was announced at the start of the year, it wanted to go through all the cost modelling and apply some rigour to it, which I have no issues with—we would absolutely expect it to do that. In the end, the approach was supported by COSLA leaders—we have had that assurance—but it has taken an awful long time to get from the announcement in January, which came off the back of us taking a letter signed by 30 of our performance athletes to the First Minister in November, saying that primary school swimming and school swimming were critical provisions. The programme then surfaced in the budget—that took us quite by surprise, to be honest—in January. Since then, we have spent an awful long time discussing with COSLA what the programme will look like and how the modelling works. COSLA has tested our assumptions, and I think that we are now at the point where we should start to get some roll-out and see some impact.

The Convener: We all hope that that gets started very quickly.

If everybody can keep their questions short and their answers quite short as well, we might get through everything that we want to ask about. Jack Middleton, have you asked all your questions on facilities?

Jack Middleton: Yes.

The Convener: Joe Long, do you have a question on funding and facilities?

Joe Long: I already asked about swimming pools. That is all I have on that.

The Convener: We are getting on better than I thought—brilliant. Heather Anderson, have you already asked your questions?

Heather Anderson: I have asked about district heating, but I have not had a chance to ask the panel about the prevention of ill health, which sportscotland said was one of its key aims.

We have a huge gap in relation to healthy life expectancy, so I would like to hear our witnesses talk about what they do in the field of prevention. Earlier, we spoke about social prescribing, which is a bit like the sponsorship model at Hillhead Sports Club that David Byrne talked about, and whether that type of model would help. How can we make sure that people who do not normally get a chance to participate can be supported to do so?

12:15

Colin Hutchison: I am happy to go first. From a governing body perspective, I think that it is important to say, first of all, that we need to protect the core of sport and everything that we know creates the infrastructure that makes sport happen, and to ensure that people across the country have the opportunity to participate. As a governing body and as a sport, we recognise that, and we have clubs that already do really good work in that space; indeed, we think that we can play more and more of a role in that regard. However, we need more investment to be able to do that well and, for example, to scale up the project on community impact and health that I mentioned earlier.

I want to draw a couple of specific examples to your attention. We are just approaching 10 years of our partnership with Scottish Action for Mental Health; it started off as support for Jog Scotland, but it has grown into support for our club network, particularly for our coaches and officials. We now have nearly 3,000 jog leaders trained in mental health awareness, and we have created and delivered menopause-friendly campaigns and jogging groups. We have also created what we call the “I’m here” pledge, part of which involves

volunteers in the sport who are recognised as having mental health awareness training being open to having conversations and giving direction and support to people who face difficulties. That work with SAMH has been core to what we have been doing over the past 10 years, and it continues to grow and expand, which is fantastic.

More specifically with regard to children and young people, we are doing more and more work directly through the daily mile, and we are also working across the UK with other home country athletics partners to try to support the ambition to put it into 100 per cent of schools across Scotland. Alongside growing that in schools, we are looking at how we can work together to improve the physical competency of young people in schools and how we can build connections in local communities and then feed people out into the club network, including for athletics and running. We are doing a couple of projects in that space.

As for social prescribing, I would say, if I am being honest, that we have only scratched the surface of that. That sort of thing has happened more through Jog Scotland's work with SAMH, with pilot projects in some local areas, but we have not quite fallen on an answer that will allow us to scale those pilots up to national level. Our clubs and jogging groups are well prepared to take in people who have been prescribed health and physical activity, and the sport itself, particularly athletics, offers such a variety that there tends to be something for everyone.

Nick Rennie: I could not agree more. The preventative agenda is so important—it is all about spending to save, isn't it? It is challenging to invest now if we might not see the benefit of that investment until a different parliamentary cycle, but it is important to take a long-term view, whether on ill-health prevention, antisocial behaviour or finding ways of getting people out of cars and on to bikes and ensuring that they move around in different ways.

The best way to go about it is to get to young people when they are forming habits; over the years, these things become what they know and what they do, and they do them for the rest of their lives. All the sports bodies, sportscotland and local authorities work hard to give such opportunities to young people, and we need to continue to do that.

We also need to look at interventions. As with the athletics side of things, which Colin Hutchison spoke about, we, too, have lots of programmes and initiatives focusing on mental health and wellbeing—again, it is all about ill-health prevention. For example, we have trail therapy, which involves facilitated small-group rides and getting people whose mental health has suffered out into the countryside on a bike. You feel better,

anyway, when you are out in the countryside and active, but it is all about creating an environment in which people can have those discussions without feeling pressured to do so. There are times in sport, particularly in cycling, when you do the activity side by side, and especially for middle-aged men who might have depression or other mental health and anxiety issues, the initiative creates a nice environment in which they can discuss such matters. We also have a bike and blether project that helps clubs to create spaces for people to have a chat while they are out on their bikes.

We need sustained investment to provide those opportunities and to be able to scale them up so that they happen in local communities right across Scotland, not just in pockets.

The Convener: Did you want to comment, too, David?

David Byrne: Yes. On the value of community sport, we at Hillhead provide a wider support ecosystem around our sports. Speaking anecdotally, I see that in the way that friendships are made and the socialising that takes place before and after across sports. I would also mention volunteering; intergenerational relationships, which are really important and are, perhaps, increasingly rare; community connection; and a sense of belonging—in other words, all the good stuff. It is about not only the actual sport and the physical health associated with that; it is also about mental wellbeing, reduced isolation, social connections and community cohesion. All of that good stuff contributes to preventative health measures.

We might be biased, as a multisport club, but I would argue that, through economies of scale, we can provide such things almost naturally, because we have all the various sports happening at all different times, which allows people who might never have done so to interact with one another. That is the intergenerational element—you might have an older demographic playing tennis, and a younger demographic playing rugby, and the two will meet in the bar, the café or whatever afterwards. There is something really valuable in that, but it is very hard for us to measure.

The *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* magazine has, I think, published research undertaken by the Copenhagen city heart study, which found really strong associations between participation in socially interactive sports and longevity. Tennis came out top, but team sports were included, too. There is a huge amount of evidence that these things are real and can contribute greatly to preventative health.

The Convener: It has been good to hear from you all on that issue.

We are getting close to our time, but I think that Paul McLennan has a question or two.

Paul McLennan: I just wanted to ask about facilities with regard to swimming and, in particular, athletics—cycling is slightly different, because people can just go out for a cycle and, at the elite level, there is the Chris Hoy velodrome.

Colin, what are your thoughts on investment in facilities for athletics? I know that people can take part in that sport in a number of ways, but, for performance at the elite level, investment will be needed in facilities and to have a decent level of track. What do you see happening in that respect in the next five, 10 or 15 years? That brings me back to the question that I asked Forbes Dunlop, who was on the previous panel, about whether we need a national strategy, particularly when it comes to athletics.

I directed the question at Colin Hutchison, but it is open to other witnesses on the panel, too.

Colin Hutchison: Our existing national facilities strategy, which was formed just a few years ago in 2022, set out quite big ambitions with regard to the development of the facilities infrastructure. As John Lunn did with swimming, we carried out a huge mapping exercise prior to our strategy's publication, but no sooner had it been published than we were in crisis mode, with the closure of Grangemouth stadium and a number of others being under threat of closure.

We are pretty well off for 400m track provision, but the biggest challenge is, as the estates review highlighted, the investment that will be required to ensure that the tracks are maintained to a certain standard, whether it be a training track that is accessed regularly by a club or a competition track that needs to meet the particular requirements of the UK-wide TrackMark scheme in order to host competitions. In our strategy, we looked at areas of the country that perhaps lacked provision, but which did not necessarily need a 400m track, and we found some brilliant innovation in compact athletics facilities. For example, a great piece of work has been done in the Borders over the past five to 10 years to put seven compact athletics facilities into school settings. There is one 400m facility at Tweedbank, and everything gradually feeds into that centre. It is a great model.

Aside from the challenge of investing in facilities, and the need for our local authority and trust partners to plan for that investment—after all, it can be a shock to have to find £800,000 to replace a track, if you do not have a sink fund for it—the biggest challenge that we face is with indoor provision. We have one 200m track in Scotland, at the Glasgow international arena. It is a world-class venue, but it is not available all the year round; it is

an events venue, too, and it needs to generate income in other ways.

If we are talking about performance environments and retaining our athletes in Scotland, the fact is that we need more than one 200m track. By comparison, Denmark has three tracks, while Sweden has nearly 30—although I realise that it has double our population. Nevertheless, we could have more indoor athletics provision here.

Thinking of our rural areas, I would also point out that between Perth and Inverness, and beyond, there is no indoor provision at all—not even an indoor straight. That is definitely a big challenge for us when it comes to creating the environments that we were talking about earlier.

The Convener: David, do you have a quick comment to make?

David Byrne: Yes. With regard to outdoor facilities, the elephant—or, I should say, the woolly mammoth—in the room is climate change. Something that we have noticed over the past five years or so is that our two rugby pitches and our training pitch, which is almost a full-size rugby pitch and which we use for frisbee and cricket, become a bit of a mud bath, and increasingly unusable, in the winter. For us, that means using external rentals, which are expensive. We are also getting hotter and drier weather in the summer, which requires sprinklers and means that the pitches are, again, not as usable. Therefore, we are seeing a contraction in the usable time for grass pitches, and that will only continue.

We talk about our ageing facilities and estate, but this issue is at the back of our minds, too. It might not feel as though it is happening today, but our experience is that it is increasingly happening, and we are now having to think about covered courts for tennis et cetera, which will double costs, if not more. Such issues will increasingly come on to the agenda, but they are already very real to us and do not seem to be abating.

The Convener: Nick, would you like to say something?

Nick Rennie: I just want to mention a great example that is a direct legacy of the 2023 UCI road world championships—the £8 million cycling facilities fund. Indeed, Forbes Dunlop mentioned it earlier. You could not get a more tangible example of a positive legacy from a major event. From that £8 million investment, we have so far put in place 33 cycling facilities across Scotland, ranging from mountain bike and BMX trails to pump tracks and closed-road cycle circuits. They provide multisport facilities for wheeling and cycling, and many of them also provide safe places where people can

go to learn and develop the confidence to commute and cycle in different environments.

I should also say that every pound invested from that fund has unlocked a further £1.42 in match funding, so it is generating even more money, and our evaluation of the 33 facilities indicates that they have also generated £48 million in social value. I know that £8 million is a lot of money, but we get a fantastic return from that. Obviously, I would be happy if all the money went into cycling, but I am sure that it would translate to other sports, too.

The Convener: It is great to have that example, as it allows people to think about how we get more money into badly needed facilities.

We are running out of time, but I want to ask specifically about women's and girls' participation in swimming. One issue that has come up is people feeling comfortable in the facilities—the changing rooms, the toilets and so on. I note from your information that a significant majority of incidents of reported sexual assaults, harassment and voyeurism in public swimming pools and leisure centres occur in mixed or village-style facilities, whatever they are. That statistic is out there—[*Interruption.*] Well, if it is not in that information, it is certainly in one of the papers before us. Do you recognise that as an issue?

John Lunn: I have seen the report that you have referred to, but it was not information that we had communicated. We do not own or operate any swimming pools, but what I would say in the context of swimming and the sports that we oversee is that we take the welfare and safety of those who use swimming pools really seriously, and any reports of inappropriate behaviour in changing rooms or any such conduct are treated seriously and reported to the police where appropriate.

We provide training and support to our clubs, and we know that the operators take the matter seriously, too. We support our volunteers, and we have robust policies and guidance in place. Operators are looking at the issue in the round, because they know that it is a challenge and something that will have to be looked at in the longer term.

The Convener: I was not putting it at your door. I was asking about facilities and whether it is a recognised issue. If the statistic can be disproved, that is one thing, but it feels as though it is a recognised issue because of the nature of getting changed for swimming. I am thinking about when pools are built. Are they set out in a common way? You do not need to answer that now, but I think that it is worth considering what facilities are doing to ensure that people feel safe in the environment.

12:30

John Lunn: I agree that people should feel safe in those environments. Our survey indicates that 93 per cent of our members feel safe in a swimming club. I would not say that we can control it, but we can influence it. I understand that things have shifted societally with the prevalence of mobile phones. There have been increasing instances of inappropriate behaviour and the use of mobile phones in and around swimming pools and changing rooms, which we provide additional training on. We recognise the challenges of that.

We have spoken about female participation. Our membership is 57 per cent female, which has increased in recent years. There was discussion earlier about the retention of women and girls in sports. Our numbers are increasing and we have better retention of female members; ironically, there is a bigger attrition with teenage boys—it feels as though we keep going around on the issue. The main thing is that we want to retain our young people and keep them active and engaged for as long as we can.

The Convener: Absolutely.

Each of you can have one minute if there is something that you feel you have not said, but if you feel as though you have covered as much as you can, I will bring our session to a close.

I thank all four witnesses for joining the meeting and for their evidence and expertise. You have given us a lot to think about, and I am sure that we will follow up on quite a lot of it. Have a safe journey, wherever you are moving on to.

12:32

Meeting continued in private until 12:52.

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