



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 4 June 2013

Session 4

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HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

18th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

*Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

Stewart Harris (sportscotland)

Donnie Jack (Scottish Government)

Jean Maclellan (Scottish Government)

Michael Matheson (Minister for Public Health)

Shona Robison (Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Health and Sport Committee

Tuesday 4 June 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:46*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Duncan McNeil): Good morning and welcome to the 18th meeting in 2013 of the Health and Sport Committee. As usual, I remind those present to switch off mobile phones and BlackBerrys, as they may interfere with the sound system. People in the public gallery may notice that some members and officials are using iPads instead of hard copies of their committee papers.

Item 1 is a decision on taking items 4 and 6 in private. Item 4 is consideration of a letter to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, and item 6 is consideration of the committee's approach to national health service boards budget scrutiny. Do members agree to take items 4 and 6 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Community Sport Inquiry

09:47

The Convener: Item 2 is a follow-up to the publication in January this year of our report on support for community sport. There is a strong focus in today's evidence on volunteering, and I welcome Shona Robison, the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport, who is accompanied by Donnie Jack, deputy director of sport and physical activity in the Scottish Government, and by Stewart Harris, chief executive of sportscotland. I invite the minister to make her opening remarks before we ask questions.

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): I feel a bit old-fashioned without an iPad, but I shall stick to my paper notes.

This is a great opportunity for me to explain to the committee what the Government is doing to address the specific recommendation on volunteering and coaching that was highlighted in the committee's report. I hope that the written submission was helpful, and I am happy to answer any questions on the subject. I want to highlight a couple of key points from what I believe is a strong and positive story on volunteering and coaching development. We all agree that volunteers and coaches provide the backbone of our sporting infrastructure. It is fair to say that, without their input, the whole of our club network would fall apart.

The figures are quite amazing: 195,000 volunteers work in sport in Scotland, which represents 4.5 per cent of the Scottish adult population, and, of that figure, more than 90,000 are coaches. When we consider what that means in terms of the time commitment alone, it is among the highest levels of voluntary contribution anywhere in Scottish society, which is fantastic. It is right that we should concentrate our efforts on supporting and maintaining that high level of commitment.

I am pleased with the range of interventions that sportscotland, working in partnership with the governing bodies, has put in place to tackle the challenge of supporting volunteering; details are set out in my submission. Sportscotland has invested more than £9 million in volunteering and coaching over the past three years, and local authorities also make a substantial investment.

As the committee is aware, the recruitment, retention, and development of people who volunteer in sport is a key part of sportscotland's commitment to the creation of a world-class sporting system at all levels in Scotland. Central to

that commitment is sportscotland's volunteering framework, "Volunteering in sport 2011-2015—A framework for volunteering: at the heart of Scottish sport", which has been developed in conjunction with Volunteer Development Scotland.

Alongside its partners, sportscotland is committed to supporting, encouraging and working with volunteers to grow sustainable approaches to the development of their skills and knowledge. That commitment extends to ensuring ethical standards and inclusivity in sport, and I am happy to inform the committee that work is well under way to ensure that those values are embedded throughout all aspects of the volunteering framework.

As with many aspects of sport, I firmly believe that we in Scotland are ahead of the game in having in place not only the political commitment to support our volunteers and coaches, but a robust infrastructure to underpin that at a practical level. Again, our submission contains examples of that. Direct support for club growth, the additional investment in individual sports clubs and our plans for retaining volunteers provide the right framework on which we can build a more resilient and robust sporting sector.

I recognise the challenges ahead and we are not complacent, but I believe that the collaborative approach that sportscotland has adopted with its key partners will stand us in good stead when it comes to meeting those challenges and building for the future. I am happy to take questions.

The Convener: Apart from the household study figures that you mentioned, which show that 4.5 per cent of the population are involved in volunteering in sport, what other work has been done to audit the number of volunteers?

Shona Robison: Sportscotland does a lot of work with governing bodies and we ask them to submit regular information about the activities in the club infrastructure in Scotland, so that we know the position. The toolkit that is referred to in the submission will help us to do that in a lot more depth, because we are asking clubs not only to identify the resources that they have—volunteers and coaches are an integral part of that—but to begin to identify the gaps and what they require in order to grow their club infrastructure. Working with the governing bodies gives us a huge amount of information. Stewart Harris may want to elaborate on that.

Stewart Harris (sportscotland): We draw up an annual action plan with each of the governing bodies, to look at their aims for recruitment, retention and deployment. It is worth considering how robust we have made our active schools monitoring. We have more than 15,500 deliverers in the active schools system, which covers every

local authority and school in Scotland, and 84 per cent of them are volunteers. Our data is much better now, which gives us a platform from which to spring forward, and we are still a good time out from the Commonwealth games. Members will remember us talking last year about a world-class system. Schools, clubs and performance are important, but people and facilities will drive it.

The Convener: I am looking at the sportscotland response and trying to burrow down into Scottish figures. A lot of the sports organisations that are cited give United Kingdom figures for statistics such as the male-to-female ratio, the fact that 75 per cent of coaches are volunteers and so on. If all that work has been done, why is information relating to Scotland—which is of interest to the committee—not available at that level of detail in your response to our inquiry?

Stewart Harris: The UK figures are very indicative. We work with each of the sports to look at the breakdown of those figures. We are working to improve the data. We have done a lot of work on the data from active schools and we will continue to do more and more work to ensure that governing bodies can collect that data. Our job will be to amalgamate the data, which has always been difficult because different methodologies have been used to collect it. We are trying to make the data much more consistent. There is a lot of data around that can be broken down sport by sport.

The Convener: Yes, but I am trying to get behind the 4.5 per cent, the 90,000 volunteers and the 13,000 clubs. Do you have anything apart from the household survey to share with us this morning?

Shona Robison: Only what we have described in terms of the figures that underpin the work with the governing bodies, the active schools network and the community sport hubs, all of which are gathering databases around usage and new members coming into sport. It would probably be best for us to share that new information with you when we have got it ready.

You will appreciate that a lot of the information on community sport hubs is quite new. Sportscotland has been doing a lot of work in drilling down. I can give you a commitment that we will come back to you in a few months with some new figures that might give you some of the detail that you are looking for, beyond the figures that we have highlighted already, if that would be useful.

The Convener: I appreciate that, but we have been discussing this with you and sportscotland since October 2012. The committee's report focused on understanding the capacity that we have. We will come on to the issue of legacy, but the committee's view was that if we are to

maximise the legacy, it will be delivered not by the people in this room but by others. If we do not have the figures broken down, how do we confirm or audit the figures and how do we get an understanding of how many volunteers we will need to ensure that there is a legacy from the Commonwealth games?

Shona Robison: Part of the response to that is the club self-improvement tool, which I mentioned earlier. A lot of work has gone on in the past year to have very direct support for the clubs. Traditionally, a lot of work has gone on with the governing bodies, which obviously support their clubs. The difference now is that there is a very direct relationship between sportscotland and the clubs, which has led to the club development support through the regional sporting partnerships; the direct club investment programme, which we have not seen before; and the club self-improvement tool, which looks at where the gaps are and where the capacity of clubs needs to be built up. All that is part of the funding relationship with sportscotland through the various funds that are available. In response, targets will be set with clubs around the growth that they would expect to see in the club environment, whether that is in the number of volunteers being recruited, coaches being developed or participants being brought in.

That arrangement is quite new. The relationship between sportscotland and the clubs was a bit more removed, but it is now far closer. The statistics that will be gained from that relationship, in terms of what is delivered through the new arrangements, will be very helpful to us all in seeing where the growth is.

The Convener: So, not yet, but we will have some of this—

Shona Robison: I would say that it is work in progress.

The Convener: It is work in progress. The headline figures are all very well, but there is work in progress to establish the reality behind them.

What auditing is done by sportscotland on groups of people who apply for grants? Do we take their word for it that they have X number of coaches or X number of volunteers? Do we do a sample audit of those organisations? Is there any such information that can be shared with us?

Stewart Harris: Yes. For every organisation that receives funding, particularly the governing bodies, there is an audit that is usually on a four-year cycle, although it can be done whenever we deem it appropriate.

I was going to say earlier that it is important from our perspective and, I think, from yours to realise that the headline figures are fine but that we use the detail that each governing body

provides to allow us to examine their capability and capacity to develop the infrastructure.

If more people are going to participate in athletics, we have to know the athletics story. We also have to know the swimming and basketball stories. We set a lot of store by working with the governing bodies so that, in return for the resources that we give them, which in some cases are significant, we see that return. We are working with all the governing bodies on the methodology to try to ensure that the returns to us give the collective overall picture that you are looking for.

10:00

The Convener: But in the past, the money has been handed over and spent. We will discuss the outcomes later, because those are part of the issue. You hand over all that money and you have an audit that shows that there is increased activity and participation, but on whose say-so?

Stewart Harris: The governing bodies do that. Whoever we give the money to will give that back.

The Convener: So there is no monitoring.

Stewart Harris: Of course there is monitoring.

The Convener: Who does that?

Stewart Harris: Our staff do that. Working alongside each of the governing bodies, we have a partnership manager, a high-performance manager and a coaching development team. Our process is not a grant-making one. We receive a plan from a governing body and we then attach resources, ambition and targets to it. Our staff then work with the governing body to ensure that that happens. At the end of each year, we have a report on all areas, such as development, performance and capacity building, and that gives us a picture of whether the sport has been successful.

The Convener: Who audits that? Do we just take it at face value?

Stewart Harris: We audit it directly, but we also engage auditors to provide financial accountability and to go through the outcomes. All of that is done, and we can make that information available to the committee.

The Convener: That would be interesting.

Shona Robison: It is fair to say that, over the years, the relationship between sportscotland and the governing bodies has changed. Some governing bodies might have found it difficult to have a level of scrutiny that perhaps was not there previously. That is the right thing to do but, as you will imagine, it has led to tensions. Where public money is involved, it is absolutely right that targets are set and that, if they are not reached, questions

have to be asked and future funding might be affected. As you will imagine, that has led to difficult discussions, but it is absolutely the right approach.

The Convener: When did we start applying that scrutiny?

Shona Robison: Just previous to my becoming sports minister, in 2009, a new and far more robust relationship between sportscotland and the governing bodies began, with an expectation of far more drilled-down targets and delivery for public money. All that is now very open to public scrutiny, because the information is all on the web. Every governing body's plan and information on delivery and what it has achieved or not achieved is there for everybody to see. That brings a lot of transparency, but it is difficult for organisations that have not achieved. However, that in itself brings pressure to up their game for the next time.

The Convener: I will let other members in, although I want to return to the cashback scheme later because, despite strenuous personal efforts to get that level of detail on that scheme, I have been unsuccessful.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The convener had interesting questions about how we audit. I have a degree of sympathy on the point about how robust audits can be, either by sportscotland of the national governing bodies or by the national governing bodies of individual clubs. Is an audit a paper exercise or do people physically turn up to see what is going on? A balance needs to be struck between a degree of scrutiny and allowing professionally run clubs to get on with the job that they are doing.

I want to move away from the sports organisations on the ground and think more about how sportscotland and the Scottish Government predict future demand. In the committee's community sport inquiry, we found that, depending on the media coverage of tennis, athletics or cycling, young people might self-present at sports centres across the country saying, "Can I play tennis?" or, "Can I get on a bike?" or asking to do this or that. People across the UK were a bit taken aback by the sheer level of demand that was caused by the great success of the Olympic games. However, that was perhaps not built on in many places because there was not sufficient capacity in local communities to make full use of people's keenness to participate.

On the Commonwealth games, has any modelling work been done—or do you intend to commission any—to work out precisely where the people are who will be keen to participate? When the feel-good factor of the Commonwealth games sweeps over the country, younger and older people will be more likely to get involved in certain

sports, which will create pressure points in leisure facilities across the country.

I am relaxed about that, because it is a good thing. I want the facilities to be put under pressure so that we can develop and expand sports participation in this country, but we need to know where the pressure will come. There is no point in investing a lot of money in one sport only to find when we turn up at a community centre on the Monday morning after the Commonwealth games that it is not what young people want to do.

That was a fairly long way of asking where the modelling work is. How can you predict where the demand will be? How will you funnel the resources on the ground? That might be done using volunteer capacity; I suspect that a huge amount will need to be volunteer capacity. Can you assure me that that is work in progress, and that you are doing that?

Shona Robison: I will start and Stewart Harris will add more detail.

We have been working with governing bodies on learning the lessons from the Olympics. The governing bodies have looked through their club infrastructure to find out what the bounce was, where it happened and what it looked like. Did it occur in different sports or different areas? Were there geographical variations? That work is under way, and the governing bodies are gathering a lot of that information.

Can we transfer those lessons learned to the Commonwealth games? We can learn the lesson that there will be an uplift, probably across all the sports that feature in the Commonwealth games. It will be interesting to see whether that uplift is maintained; part of the challenge is that when people go along to a club to try a sport, some of them might find that it is not for them and the participation statistics go down again. However, that might not be the case for all sports. We are looking at the lessons learned from the Olympics and considering how we can apply them to the Commonwealth games.

One reason for the focus on direct club support, club development, club resourcing and the toolkit is to enable the clubs to identify what they need to do, in the light of the lessons learned from the Olympics, to ensure that their club has an adequate infrastructure in place to take advantage of an increase in demand. What the clubs need to do will be different for different sports in different localities, but the toolkit will allow them to look at their club and their resources and to establish what additional resources they have. That will open the door for a discussion with sportscotland about how it can help the club to meet the anticipated demand.

It is partly about lessons learned and partly about trying to apply the toolkit to individual clubs. We are doing some modelling around that, because like everyone else we want to maintain the level of interest and to avoid a peak in participation followed by its falling off the edge of a cliff if people do not maintain their interest.

Stewart Harris: The committee will probably remember that I mentioned that we started capacity building a number of years ago, prior to the Olympics and Paralympics, with every community in mind. Our relationship with all 32 geographies through local authorities and their partners is key. We now have 114 of 159 community sport hubs up and running.

The committee reminded us in the recommendations in its community sport report not to forget about clubs that are not part of the community sport hub system. We have therefore put in place, in a total of 28 sports, a workforce of sport-specific regional development officers whose sole job is to look at capacity building in clubs that are identified locally. Five sports were initially covered and the number is now 28, so there has been a huge increase in our workforce of officers who will be focused solely on two things: the development of people and the development of space plans.

You will probably be aware that swimming has a very good water management plan. There need to be similar capacity plans for indoor sports and pitches, and we are working on that with all our local partners. Without a shadow of a doubt, the demand is there. We have always said that we would use the Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth games as milestones and motivators to increase capacity. We are well ahead of where we could be.

Bob Doris: You used swimming as an example. That might be a good example to explore, because swimming has a fairly advanced infrastructure. Will Scottish Swimming have done an audit of all the swimming clubs across the country? Does it know how many swimming sessions will take place across each local authority area in any given week? Does it know where the spare capacity is? Is it asking its clubs to consider whether they could cope if a dozen more teenagers were to present to a club the week after the swimming part of the Commonwealth games finishes? Is it asking clubs what their contingency plans are and how they will develop them? Is Scottish Swimming having those practical conversations with its clubs? Given that everything else is abstract, we hope that, via national governing bodies, every sport is having those practical conversations. I seek reassurance on those issues.

Stewart Harris: Yes, absolutely. From that perspective, we have learned a lot from sports that had an infrastructure or had developed a system. I reiterate that we are trying to put in place a system for sport across school, club and performance sport, so that there are no gaps.

Swimming has done really well. A swimming coach I spoke to the other day said, "If there's a puddle, we'll use it." They are keen to use whatever available capacity there is. There are a couple of new 50m pools. Obviously, there has been a rationalisation of pools, but we are ensuring that we use the capacity to its maximum. I just talked, from a governing body perspective, about now having a workforce for 28 sports that will be solely focused on capacity building and will be deployed across the regions. The region brings together the various local authorities and the governing bodies, so it is a very good place for people to meet and develop plans.

Bob Doris: Finally, the reality is that each national governing body will be at a different level of preparedness, because that is how life works. When some national governing bodies are not quite as advanced as others, will you call the heads of those bodies in for some quite frank conversations to get them to where they have to be?

Shona Robison: Those frank conversations happen regularly. This goes back to what we said previously. Sportscotland drives quite a hard bargain these days with governing bodies when it comes to what is to be delivered, not least now when bodies that are overseeing Commonwealth games sports are under particular pressure. However, there is recognition that some of the smaller governing bodies of some of the smaller sports, if you like, perhaps do not have the infrastructure and capacity that some of the large governing bodies have, so they have had to receive particular support and have sometimes linked up with other governing bodies to help with training and with the infrastructure that they might not have themselves. That said, despite those issues some of the smaller governing bodies deliver really well. You can be reassured that, when that is not happening, a very robust discussion takes place.

The Convener: Are there figures that show increased participation and an increased number of coaches coming through as a result of all that activity?

Shona Robison: Yes. Sportscotland produced figures on the coaches who have come through its investment in coaching programmes.

Stewart Harris: More than 14,000 coaches have been through our continuing professional development programmes and, over the past three

years, 12,000 coaches have gone through qualifications.

The Convener: But have we measured the increase in participation? Given all the work that you are doing and all the money that we are putting in, is there measurement of whether an increased number of people are participating and whether we are reaching kids who would not usually participate? Is there information on that?

Stewart Harris: For the first time for a long time, the Scottish household survey last year showed that there was an increase in participation.

The Convener: Just the household survey.

Stewart Harris: Yes.

The Convener: As part of your monitoring system, do you not have any other figures?

Stewart Harris: As I think the minister said, we go down almost into the individual sites of, for example, community sport hubs. That is a good example, because we have 114 community sport hubs up and running and we will monitor every single one.

Governing bodies also have programmes. For example, Scottish Athletics has had a nine-month programme and it has increased its number of coaches by 600 and its number of participants by almost 2,000. That is quite a significant little case study and it shows the value of looking at each sport individually. We can aggregate the figures, but when we look at each sport individually that gives us a picture of the impact that each sport is having on its constituent groups.

The Convener: I am trying to get to how we measure success in terms of the increased number of coaches that we will need and the level of participation. Are we involving kids who would be involved anyway, or are we involving those who would otherwise be less likely to be involved?

10:15

Shona Robison: The community sport hubs have recognised the need to identify specifically that it is not just a case of kids who are involved in every club going to new clubs. They measure new participation—participation by young people who have never been involved in sport before—to ensure that we get that information.

When money goes direct to clubs as part of the direct club investment programme, they will be expected to tell sportscotland what the growth in participation will be in the club. When money goes out the door targets are set, whether for volunteers, for coaches or for participation. It is expected that the targets will be delivered for the investment received.

The Convener: I am sorry to be a pain, but I think that the committee is looking for some information. If the target is set, is it set by the recipient of the funding?

Shona Robison: It is set in conjunction with the recipient. There would be a discussion with sportscotland.

The Convener: Are there consequences if they do not meet the target?

Shona Robison: Yes. The targets for the governing bodies for growth, for the number of volunteers and coaches and for the delivery of elite sport are all published on the internet. If governing bodies are not meeting the targets that have been set for elite performance, their funding is reviewed.

The Convener: How many bodies has that happened to?

Stewart Harris: A significant number. Our board has asked for presentations from sports that are struggling to meet their targets. The sports' governing bodies have been able to give some reassurance, but I reiterate that our staff work with them on an on-going basis to ensure that we get an early warning. This is not about hitting them with a stick; it is about trying to work out how they can turn round poorer performance.

The Convener: I know that responsibility lies with the three of you in front of me, but I think that the committee found that there was an issue. Whose overall responsibility is it to ensure that we get the outcomes that we seek? There is a myriad of organisations involved, including sportscotland, local authorities and sport organisations.

Shona Robison: We give sportscotland the resources and charge it, as our national agency for sport, to deliver a world-class system, whether that is for elite performance or community participation. Sportscotland will therefore have a negotiation with the governing bodies. In addition, it has a direct relationship with clubs through the direct club investment programme. It will tell us regularly what delivery looks like and highlight where there are tensions or perhaps underperformance.

Given that we have a very ambitious target for the number of medals to be won at next year's Commonwealth games, it is worth mentioning that, when sports have not been delivering on elite performance, the Scottish Institute of Sport has on occasion taken some of that work in-house, so some very direct interventions take place when governing bodies are not delivering what is required.

Governing bodies are under no illusion that they are required to deliver and that if they do not deliver, there are certainly consequences.

Stewart Harris: When we add value on matters dealt with by local government, in particular in relation to active schools and community sport hubs, we expect all 32 local authorities to set targets and make reports each year. We hold them all to account.

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I have personal experience through my son, who is involved in a sport—I will not name it—that is being targeted because it is not reaching its targets, so I take Mr Harris's point.

I turn to the club self-improvement tool. In my experience in local government, most clubs did not know where to go or who to apply to for money; they might continually speak to the same person. Clubs are trying to grow because they have a desire to improve what local kids are doing. I know from experience that regional sports associations, sports clubs and all the things right up to sportscotland are working. Perhaps they are not working to the same degree that the convener suggested we require, but I know that you are miles ahead of where you were 20 years ago or, indeed, five years ago.

On the self-improvement tool, the minister has said:

"For many clubs the issue of course is not an unwillingness to grow and develop their capacity; rather it is a lack of awareness of what support is out there to assist them as they navigate their way through what can be a cluttered landscape of development and funding advice."

I know that the toolkit will go online, that there will basically be six priority areas and that clubs will get a clear picture, but what more will you do to involve people and make them know what they can and cannot get?

Shona Robison: I will let Stewart Harris deal with some of the details of that. The toolkit was developed in consultation with governing bodies and clubs to identify where some of the weaknesses are. You are absolutely right. The landscape is quite difficult, particularly for smaller clubs. There are many different funding streams and many different requirements on clubs. The toolkit was developed with them as a way of helping them to recognise where their gaps are and, more important, how to go about addressing those gaps and weaknesses, and to navigate and find the right fund for them or the right support to develop their coaches or recruit volunteers.

Stewart Harris: There is the key principle of sustainability. In the past, we have probably had a wee bit of a moaning culture, which is understandable, as people have felt frustrated that they have been doing a service in the community and have had no help. We are saying, "Let's work together as a partnership, but the first thing you need to do is understand your own capacity, what

resources you have and what your ambitions are." The staff whom I talked about are tasked with doing that. They are tasked with ensuring that there is a sustainable plan for the next three, four or five years so that the club can try to achieve its ambitions progressively, however modest or ambitious they are.

That is a step change. As I said before, our staff are very hands-on. Our partnership manager is very close to the local authority teams and the governing bodies at a national level. We facilitate the conversation regionally and lead it, and we try to eradicate as much of the clutter as we can.

This year will see the first tranche of 50 directly supported clubs as well as the capacity builders we are putting into governing bodies. I am excited about the results that we will see.

Accountability has been a theme. The deal is that we will have to make those clubs accountable for their own future. If the club is to be sustainable, people have to make it work. We can only help, and we will do everything that we can to make that help as positive as possible. Let me use a difficult example. If a club is going to expand in indoor sports—basketball, volleyball, netball or badminton, for example—the programming of facilities is still an issue. We are working with all 32 authorities to deal with that. A club needs more space to expand. First, we have to secure that and then secure the staffing to go with it. That will almost guarantee an increase in participation in the club.

Richard Lyle: I want to come on to the direct club investment programme. I notice that £500,000 is being allocated for that initiative, which could mean up to £10,000 a club, although the figure may not reach that. The jam could be spread more, and 70 clubs rather than 50 could be involved. Will you give us a wee bit more insight into what you intend to do through that fund?

Stewart Harris: I hope that they are just the first of a number of clubs. Fifty clubs is a starter for 10. I hope that a lot more clubs than that will be involved by next year.

The programme gives us an opportunity to work with each club, and the approach is innovative. We have not said that £10,000 will be available. There will be a discussion involving our staff and local staff about a needs-based analysis, based on the tool, which will take things forward. If a club needs £10,000 to employ a part-time coach, we will go there, or if it needs £6,000 to do something different, we will go there, as long as the outcomes are agreed and we ensure that they are custom made and tailored to the particular sport and club.

Richard Lyle: The last time that I was on this committee—I have only recently returned to it—we spoke about sport hubs. I am impressed by the

fantastic growth that has taken place in the past year. You said that you would like there to be a sport hub in every school. Do you still stand by that?

Shona Robison: I have told him that he has to deliver on that now that he has said it.

Richard Lyle: I have a particular interest with regard to a sport hub in my area. I have met your regional manager—a lady whose name I cannot remember at the moment—and was impressed by her enthusiasm. I know that another programme is being developed in the area for another sport hub. Will more money be made available?

Shona Robison: The idea of sport hubs being based around secondary schools is a good one. North Lanarkshire is going to make 50 per cent of its secondary schools community sport hubs. The other 50 per cent will link to a sport hub, which is fine—it might not make sense to have two sport hubs that are 50 yards apart. What is important is that everyone has access to a hub and the feeder primaries are able to be part of that as well. There is huge ambition there.

We want to begin to look beyond the horizon of where we are at the moment. The youth sport strategy, which we will talk about in the debate next week, gives us an opportunity to engage with this committee, clubs, governing bodies and so on to take a look over the horizon beyond the target of 150 community sport hubs and think about where we should be going after that and what our ambitions should be. Stewart Harris's ambition for every school either to be a sport hub or to be linked to a sport hub is a good one, and I think that we might be hearing more about that.

Richard Lyle: Excellent.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): There is a tension in asking you to demonstrate that we are getting more and more people involved, although, as you rightly say, we need to do that because public money is involved. However, is it fair to characterise this as a situation in which we are driving towards bigger clubs rather than more clubs? What are the tensions in that? People might be more likely to give their time volunteering in a club where they feel that their volunteering makes a big difference, which might be the kind of club that is more community focused and in which fewer people are involved than is the case in a larger setting, where they might feel that, if they do not go there, somebody else will do what needs to be done. How are you managing that tension?

Shona Robison: That is a good question. One of the discussions that we have with governing bodies—particularly those of sports that are not as fully developed as others—concerns the growth of clubs. In areas in which there are not many clubs for a particular sport, part of the discussion will be

about how to grow and develop more clubs. That is particularly the case in areas where there is a demand that is not being met.

There will have to be a mixture of approaches. Some successful clubs that are able to take advantage of what is available and are able to expand will grow. I can think of some clubs in my own patch that are already in discussions about taking on new premises and so on. There is nothing wrong with that—it is to be encouraged—but we also have to ensure that, where there is a dearth of clubs in a particular sport, the focus is on supporting embryonic clubs and helping them to gain members. That is quite difficult to do because trying to establish a new club from scratch in a new territory is not without its challenges. However, that is the balance that is to be struck.

Stewart Harris: You are right to identify the fact that there is a tension. Although new parts of those sport hubs have been generated—new sports and new activities—that has involved bringing together smaller entities. As I said earlier, the aim is sustainable participation. That is at the heart of everything that we do.

There is a mixed economy out there. Community sport hubs are one way in which growth can be delivered. They are also a way of raising standards and building capacity in some of the bigger clubs. We will do that through the workforce that we are putting in place. We take a customised approach based on what it is that we are trying to achieve.

It is good to bring together smaller units to make them more sustainable, and it is also good to develop the capacity of the bigger and more ambitious clubs.

10:30

Drew Smith: The minister referred to identifying the gap and then trying to respond to it. That goes to the heart of the convener's questions and the committee report's concern with gaps. When we use statistics to try to understand what is going on, I look for examples of how we have responded and changed because of an identified trend or gap. If we do not have such examples, we are just looking at statistics that say that lots of people in Scotland are engaged and active in sport, and we applaud that for being fantastic.

The Commonwealth games are quite a simple test. I do not want to be in a situation after 2014 in which people in my city are saying that the Commonwealth games were something that happened rather than something that they were part of. For example, I want them to be able to say immediately after an event or when events are going on that their kids have been able to take up a sport that they could not take up before. Unless

we have a planned programme at this stage for volunteering that identifies that we simply do not have enough people to coach a particular sport, how will we be able to respond to that lack? Where are the examples of where you have been able to say geographically, "That is the problem. What we were doing was good, but we're going to change it because we've identified this as being a bigger priority"? At what stage will we start to see that?

Shona Robison: The initiatives that we have talked about for specific support for clubs to identify their needs and be able to respond were responses to the situation that you described. It was identified that we could not just wait for clubs to respond in a way that was going to achieve what was needed to meet the capacity but that we had to give them a way of doing that through incentives and a bit of a push. The toolkit that Stewart Harris described earlier is the clubs' way of doing what is needed and the funding is the incentive, because if they identify gaps, there are then resources to help them to tackle the gaps. Again, the direct investment in clubs is another incentive for clubs that have identified that they will see growth, which of course many will, and it will enable them to put all the mechanisms in place.

A good example is Glasgow Life, which has already seen a particular uplift because of all the attention in Glasgow to the Commonwealth games. A lot of work has gone on in Glasgow Life to ensure that it has sufficient capacity to cope. We are ensuring that similar discussion and preparation is happening in the other 31 local authorities, which are not quite as hands-on with the Commonwealth games but will nevertheless see a similar uplift.

All of that is a structured way of not leaving it to chance and ensuring that the right conversations happen, that the right strategies, action plans and resources are put in place and that the clubs with the capacity to grow are supported. For example, there will inevitably be a big interest in minor sports that are going to be showcased but which perhaps do not have much of a club structure at the moment, so there has been a focus on helping new clubs to develop. If a kid wants to play a sport that they have just seen showcased but there is no club to help them do so, that will obviously be very frustrating for them.

It is a big task to identify such gaps and deal with them, but a lot of work on that has been going on for quite some time. Local authorities are key in that, and it is fair to say that Stewart Harris has been working closely with local authorities to deal with the gaps.

Stewart Harris: Shona Robison is talking about a particular conversation. We put together a regional working practice that is not an entity as

such but is about bringing together sports governing bodies and the various local authorities. The east region is a case in point, because we had people from the Scottish Borders, the Lothians, and Edinburgh sitting around a table and talking with sportscotland about gaps, modelling, capacity and workforce, then making decisions about priorities that they then recommended to us. That is where the conversation happened. That is the only place where we can make that conversation happen; as it is not effective or efficient to have it 32 times, we have tried to bring things together on a regional basis and make that conversation bite.

The decisions were not all universally popular—some of the sports want everything tomorrow—but we have had to take a very pragmatic approach based on what people are saying can be achieved. They have said, "This is what we think we can do with some help," and we have gone with that. As we learn lessons, we will put in place more and more of that resource, particularly directly into the clubs. After all, I think that sustainability in communities is key to all of this.

I can reassure the committee that in every site we work with, whether it be through direct club investment or whether it be a community sport hub, we will expect an annual report back about participation, volunteers and workforce. We will then aggregate those figures.

Shona Robison: Donnie Jack might say something more about this, but a set of databases has been established as a baseline for measuring and monitoring legacy across the whole of Scotland and the legacy team has carried out a lot of statistical work to pull everything into one place so that we can tell the story—not just the narrative, but the hard figures that lie behind it—of what we started off with and what we will end up with post-games. That will be very important, because folk quite rightly want to know what the impact has been. We have the baseline and post-games we will be able to use all the databases and all the statistics and figures, whether it be from the community sport hubs, the participation numbers from the governing bodies or the survey, to see and measure how we got from where we were to where we will be.

Donnie Jack (Scottish Government): We are happy to send the committee details of what is a fairly comprehensive legacy monitoring and evaluation programme. I should say that we recently made a presentation to the Commonwealth Games Federation co-ordination commission—or co-com—which oversees the delivery of the games and it was very impressed by the evaluation programme's robustness.

Drew Smith: I agree that we want to tell a story and, indeed, I have described what failure would

look like to me in Glasgow. Obviously, however, we also want to think about what success looks like. In that case, there are advantages to telling the story not only because we want to find out whether we have delivered on the massive public expenditure that has been put into all of this, but because of the huge opportunity to find out whether we can do better in the future and what we need to do next. If by the end of 2014 we are in a position to show what we set out to do, the difference that we made and whether we got really close to or just over what we hoped to get, we can be more ambitious next time round.

With regard to volunteering, you said that there are targets associated with whatever money goes out the door. What does that add up to regionally or, ideally, at national level? I realise that there will always be gaps in particular sports in particular areas—for example, swimming might not be the thing in an area because of an issue with facilities—but do we know at national level that X more volunteers in Scotland are participating regularly in sporting activities for our children? If that is not the case, something has gone wrong.

Shona Robison: Something that we have learned from the Olympics and that we think was a bit of a missed opportunity was that, despite the huge volunteering ethos around those games, there was no measurement to find out whether any of the people who were involved continued to volunteer afterwards. As a result, we decided that, when someone registered to be a volunteer at the Commonwealth games, they would be asked for permission for their data to be shared post games with other volunteering bodies. Through Volunteer Development Scotland, those people will have opportunities to be volunteers not just at major events, but in clubs in their area.

We will want to see the success of that. There will be a lot of promotion and proactive work with the volunteers to encourage them to take up those opportunities. Our expectation is that we will see good results from that. People will have been enthused—they might be volunteering for the first time and will want to do more—but if we do not seize the moment post Commonwealth games, that enthusiasm will inevitably wane. Therefore, we took that action with the intention of gathering that enthusiasm.

The only other thing to say—again, this was a lesson learned from the Olympics—is that although the focus will rightly be on the fantastic job that the volunteers will do for the Commonwealth games and to harness that resource post games, we should not forget all those others who volunteer day in, day out in their local clubs. We are looking at how to recognise that. There was a wee bit of feeling that all the focus was on folk who were volunteering for a

short period, whereas there was not the same focus on the volunteer workforce who have been giving their time for years. By also focusing on them, we can highlight the great volunteering opportunities in local communities.

I am confident that all that will add up to an uplift in volunteering effort, although it is hard to put a figure on that. The challenge will be to sustain the uplift and keep people involved, which is why we have gone about that in the way that we have, having learned lessons from elsewhere.

Drew Smith: The test will be whether people do more, not whether we get an uplift simply because we take more measurements and count more people.

Shona Robison: The test will be what the approach delivers. The on-going work to expand and develop new clubs boils down to the fact that we want more people participating. That is the win; that is the success. As the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport, I will be happy if we see more people participating in sport and being active. Volunteers are a crucial part of that—without them and the volunteer coaches, none of that will be possible. If you are asking me what success will look like, I would say that it will be that more people participate regularly in sport and physical activity.

Stewart Harris: Wherever we have invested money, we have tried to understand the position prior to that investment. I hope that, even before the games begin, we have a story to tell about the capacity that we have built through the investment of resource and effort not only from agencies such as sportscotland and its partners, but from local people and communities, which will be needed if this is to be sustainable. In the athletics example that I gave, over a nine-month period and for a small amount of resource involving part-time positions in and around clubs, the growth by almost 600 in the number of coaches and volunteers in those athletics communities is phenomenal.

That is the result of investment in the right place and people being focused on achieving the outcomes. You are absolutely right to draw attention to that. In the distant past, sport was not great at that, but we are now much better at making anyone who gets investment accountable and at getting them to report on what they have done with the resource and the differences that that has made to a club or a community.

The Convener: Mr Jack, is the baseline figure 195,000 active volunteers?

Donnie Jack: Yes.

The Convener: The baseline is 13,000 clubs, but the intention is to increase those numbers.

Donnie Jack: Yes, I think that that is right.

The Convener: Are we all agreed on that?

Stewart Harris: Thirteen thousand is a lot of clubs. It will depend on how the figure is counted. For example, I know of one community sport hub that has nearly 30 smaller clubs as part of its bigger entity, which makes it much more sustainable. It is all about capacity. Those figures reflect a moment in time. We will, I think, balance the bigger national figures with clear progress reports on individual sites, which will help to give a picture across the country.

The Convener: You seemed to hesitate. We want to pinpoint the baseline figure. If we were to be presented with the figures now, would 4.5 per cent of the population be the baseline? Is the 195,000 figure the baseline? Is it 13,000 clubs? Are we looking for growth in all those areas?

10:45

Donnie Jack: Yes. I am not hesitating, convener. You are absolutely right. We need a baseline by which we can measure success and, as far as I am concerned, it would be the 195,000 figure.

The question about the number of clubs is more problematic, because clubs form and then dissolve on a continuing basis, depending on the uptake of their activities, so I would not set much store in saying, for example, "By X, we will have 15,000 clubs." However, we would absolutely use the 195,000 figure for the volunteering workforce.

The Convener: We would include the wider family in the numbers of those who are not actively participating. The 195,000 figure relates to people who actively volunteer in sport.

Donnie Jack: Yes.

The Convener: If we started to count the families, that would boost the number—we could probably do a paper exercise on that tomorrow.

Donnie Jack: As Stewart Harris and the minister have alluded to, the way to do it is to get more robust data on which we will build the baseline. At the moment, it is not there.

The Convener: It would be interesting to see the baseline.

Donnie Jack: Yes.

The Convener: When will those figures be available?

Shona Robison: The legacy baseline information already exists. I remember Richard Simpson pursuing us heavily on that previously to ensure that we would have the baseline measurements. There are a number of them, and

they cut across a number of areas. The best approach is probably for us to send that information to the committee.

The Convener: That would be fine.

Shona Robison: All that information is available on the website, but it would probably be helpful if we put it into a format for the committee and sent it on.

The Convener: The 150 sport hubs were mentioned earlier. Does the rise in that number link to an increase in the number of local authority sports strategies? We heard in evidence that there were 14 of those, but does the fact that we have 150 sport hubs mean that we now have 32 sports strategies in place across Scotland, or do the two not link to each other?

Shona Robison: The sports strategies should refer to the community sport hub developments. Each sports strategy in the 32 local authorities—I think that we are almost there with them, although perhaps one or two local authorities have not quite got there yet—

The Convener: So there has been progress since it was reported to the committee that there were 14 strategies.

Shona Robison: Yes. They will refer not just to community sport hubs, but to how the local authorities will use their asset bases and facilities, what new facilities they need and how they will better utilise what they have, as well as their ambitions for the community sport hubs in their area.

The Convener: So they have made some progress. Some information on that would be useful.

Stewart Harris: Yes. Additional work has been done in Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Shetland. We have been helping the authorities in a hands-on way to deliver their strategies.

The Convener: Are the strategies all in progress or are they nailed down?

Stewart Harris: They are at different stages, but our ambition is to get them all nailed down.

The Convener: Good. Thanks.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am interested in what the minister says in her letter to the committee about working with the National Union of Students to try to involve more students in volunteering. Will you elaborate on that?

Shona Robison: The NUS approached us with a desire to look at what it could do, having learned a few lessons from the Olympics, I suppose. There was a campaign to get students involved as

volunteers and with things that were happening on campuses around the Olympics, and to get people more interested in participation in sport. We met the NUS and agreed that we should do some work with it that focuses on encouraging campuses to do things such as host events, get students more involved in sport and perhaps link with higher education institutes in other Commonwealth countries. The same applies to colleges; it is not just about universities.

We will also consider how we can encourage students to volunteer more regularly. Many students currently volunteer. For example, many students on sports courses do a lot of work with local clubs, which works well, but there is a wide audience of students who are not on sports courses but could become involved in volunteering in sport or, indeed, other walks of life.

That was the essence of the conversation with the NUS. Work is going on to consider how that can happen and how it can best be supported. We are considering how we can generate enthusiasm in colleges and universities around the Commonwealth games, and I hope that the outcome will be a sustainable uplift in student volunteering.

Nanette Milne: It strikes me that that is probably a good thing for the future. Is there a possibility of student volunteers working with school pupils, too? If a culture of volunteering is embedded, I hope that the students will continue to volunteer after moving on from college or university to whatever they do afterwards.

Shona Robison: That is a good point. Volunteering in schools already happens. In particular, students on sports courses are a huge resource for schools and local clubs. I think that more can be done. Stewart Harris will talk about Scottish Student Sport.

Stewart Harris: We have done quite a bit of work with Scottish Student Sport and we support it financially. We have good relationships with all the universities and most of the colleges—although that landscape is changing a little.

An enormous amount has been done in relation to secondary schools. The young sports leaders approach is part of the education system, and I very much appreciate it, because it is a good thing. We have expanded the number of young ambassadors from 64 to 672, with two in every secondary school. The young ambassadors work with their peers to enthuse them about not just participating but giving something back to their school and community. We are so proud of those young people. The jump from 64 to 672 was a big one. We manage and support the network by helping to train and inform the young ambassadors. I spent a bit of time in Fife listening

to young people, who told me that they would never have been able to stand up in public and talk to an audience if they had not had that experience. The results really enthuse me and I hope that we will see a lot more of that.

Nanette Milne: Yes, it is exciting.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): We have not talked about the skills legacy of the games and the lessons that we can learn about how volunteers can use their experience as a pathway to training, learning and employment. In your letter to the committee, minister, you mentioned legacy 2014 Scotland's best, which is an employability programme, as well as the games volunteer qualification. Will you say more about those initiatives?

Shona Robison: I am happy to do so. We felt strongly that there was the potential to create opportunities for people who might not otherwise be touched by the Commonwealth games. A lot of young people have come forward to volunteer and I hope that many will be successful, but I know that the committee was interested in the young people who might not put themselves forward for whatever reason—they might lack confidence, or they might not see themselves in such a role.

Scotland's best is an attempt to do something about such people. Through the programme, 1,000 young people aged between 16 and 19 will get experience at the Commonwealth games and other major events. They will get accredited training through volunteering opportunities. A lot of the work that is done with them will be to do with building their confidence and developing their skills.

That is important. Drew Smith asked how we measure success, and of course the big issue is participation, but for me it is also about life-changing experiences for folk who would not otherwise have had such experiences. We have to help to create such experiences; they will not necessarily happen of their own accord. For the young people who are furthest from the labour market, Scotland's best will offer a good opportunity. There are other programmes, particularly in Glasgow, with which Scotland's best is a good fit. I hope that through all those programmes we will be able to reach young people and offer them a good opportunity in life.

The games volunteers qualification will provide an opportunity for those who are successful in becoming one of the 15,000 games volunteers to take something away from that. A personalised Scottish Qualifications Authority-supported certificate will capture the skills that they have gained through the games, which will enhance their prospects of gaining either employment or access to further education. We felt strongly that

people who have had the chance to be a volunteer should get something from that which might open new doors for them.

Aileen McLeod: How is the Scotland's best employability programme being advertised?

Shona Robison: It was launched by the First Minister a couple of weeks ago and I think that the contract has now been awarded. The successful bidder will work with our partners across the 32 local authorities to identify, through those partnerships, young people who will benefit from the programme. It will work with the agencies on the ground in those communities to identify young people for whom the programme would be a really good opportunity.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): My questions are on workforce volunteering. The Scottish Government is encouraging its workforce to participate in volunteering, and local authorities are encouraging their workforces to do likewise. It looks as though the public sector is doing its best to engage in that. What steps is the Government taking to tap into the resource that the private sector has and encourage that sector to participate in volunteering?

Shona Robison: That is important, although, in the current financial climate and given the current economic backdrop, it is a tough ask. It is a tough ask of the public sector as well, because it is not cost free and the absences of people who volunteer must be covered. However, volunteering is a really important thing to do. That is why we have introduced a commitment to five days' paid leave for volunteering at the Commonwealth games, which is a way of showing leadership on the issue in the hope that others will follow suit.

There are good examples of private sector companies, including BT and John Lewis, that have continuing opportunities in volunteering and mentoring. Some good programmes involve a joining-up between business experts and people who run clubs, to transfer experience and skills. The Scottish Sports Association is keen to encourage more volunteering across all the sectors, and we are discussing with it how we can best achieve that. We want that to happen not just for the games, but beyond.

Perhaps there is more work to do to show employers the benefits of their staff volunteering. It is not just the individual employees who benefit. The organisation benefits, because those employees bring back a good ethos and a lot of skills that they have gathered while volunteering in the community, particularly in sport. That is a win for the organisation as well.

There are a lot of good examples, but more needs to be done. We are working with the SSA on how that work can be taken forward.

Gil Paterson: The private sector responds to and is used to recognition. In business, recognition and awards schemes for the workforce are an everyday occurrence. They do not cost an arm and a leg; they tend to be very cheap. I wonder whether an awards scheme for volunteers across the sectors and across the organisations, as a tiny participating sport in itself, might have a place. Would you consider an award in the public sector or for volunteering in a particular sport as a way of encouraging businesses to participate?

I take the point that things are tight, but nevertheless there is money available. Companies advertise in different ways, including by sometimes clipping themselves on to causes. It might seem offensive that business should get something out of volunteering, but that is the reality. Could that suggestion be considered?

11:00

Shona Robison: Certainly, I am happy to consider that. We are looking at ways of highlighting and recognising more fully the work of volunteers in sport. We could look at your suggestion in that work, so I would be happy to take that forward.

The Convener: Do members have any other questions? I have questions on the governance of the cashback for communities programme. Our report highlighted the lack of information on how such money is spent. In your response to our report, you identified that

"more than £24 million has gone to providing young people with facilities and positive opportunities to take part in sporting activities".

However, information is not and has not been publicly available about where that money is going, whether participation rates are improving and whether we are getting long-term benefit from that. Some witnesses suggested, understandably, that the funding is less than strategic, because they had found that the money for athletics, racquetball and squash had run out. There are genuine issues about transparency over how those significant amounts of money are spent and how many young people benefit. Can you help on that?

Shona Robison: As you will be aware, work on an evaluation plan is on-going. I understand—I checked the timeframe before coming here today—that the plan will be published shortly. I know that Kenny MacAskill confirmed that point in his letter to the committee. I understand that the evaluation plan should contain some of the information that you are looking for.

The Convener: Given that £24 million of the cashback money goes into activities that come within your remit, is there capability in sportscotland or elsewhere to take an overall strategic view of where that money has gone and how many people have participated? There are all sorts of claims, such as the claim that 600,000 young people have benefited—I presume that that relates to the £50 million pot—or that, as I think you said, 100,000 young people have benefited from a sporting relationship. How do we know whether that is the case?

Shona Robison: I can say that participation in cashback programmes is heavily monitored and recorded. That will form part of the evaluation information that is due out shortly.

On where cashback sits in relation to other funds, over the past two or three years we have taken a more strategic approach to ensure that funds do not work in isolation from one another. Stewart Harris and his team have pulled together around one table all the funders, including cashback, to look at what is the best way to fund initiatives and why. Instead of individual projects approaching possibly 10 different funding organisations, if something is deemed worth funding by the funders collectively, a more strategic approach will be taken on what is the best way of funding such projects. Taking that more strategic view should also identify where gaps exist, what we want to achieve and what the priorities are.

We cannot fund everything, but we would not want to do that and spread the jam so thinly. We must decide what the funding priorities are and how we deploy the different funds, whether they are lottery money, mainstream funds through sportscotland, resources from third sector organisations or cashback, which has operated for about a year and a half.

Stewart Harris: When any cashback money comes to us for capital projects such as pitches, particularly 3G pitches, our needs analysis will tell us where the likely gaps are and where the pitches could go. The capacity of 3G pitches is way beyond that of grass pitches.

Cashback money has allowed us to accelerate our strategic ambitions locally. A comment was made about one or two sports not being strategic. We expect sports to use strategically any resource that they get—it is important that they do that. Whether it is our money, Government money, lottery money or cashback money, we expect sports to look at the resources that are available, be clear about what is possible and not go down the track of doing things that are unsustainable. It has sometimes been hinted to sports that money is available for two years—that is a big hint—so they should ensure that they plan properly and do

not get caught out on any claims of what they can support.

The Convener: As we understand it, the ethos of cashback for communities is that its resources will reach kids in deprived communities. I do not know how that fits into the strategy of slicing up pots of money. The minister has given evidence previously in which she lauded football in schools for doing such a good job in involving young people in football to divert them from bad behaviour. However, we had a report subsequently that stated that that work was not reaching the young people that it should.

The point is about being responsive to need. A big issue for me as a member of the Scottish Parliament and a committee convener is that there is a complete lack of transparency about such projects. I cannot get any of the information through freedom of information requests because it is not covered by the FOI legislation or Scottish Government officials advise that it is not possible to provide it.

Participants in some projects have told me that they are surprised that I cannot get the information and that they are happy to share it with me, even though it might be out of date. However, others have refused to give me information. I would welcome being able to get information and I hope that it will provide the detail that we seek on participation rates and outcomes. I have been defeated for over a year in trying to get such information.

Donnie Jack: I understand your point. When I previously appeared before the committee, I mentioned the cashback strategic delivery group and specific work by Inspiring Scotland, to which Mr MacAskill referred in his letter to the committee. The Inspiring Scotland work is an ongoing longitudinal study, on which there will be regular reports. The starting point will be the publication of the evaluation plan, then there will be subsequent reports.

The convener is right that we need to understand what is being delivered through cashback. Inspiring Scotland is not just looking at projects that are under way; it is doing a retrospective analysis of where investment was made and what outcomes that delivered. I am a member of the strategic group, and our view is that we need a broader understanding before we make recommendations in the future to ministers on which projects we should support.

We are being far more forensic in our assessment and analysis of projects that come to us, and we are being quite challenging. Previously, projects thought that their historical funding would automatically continue, but that is not the case now. We go through business cases

with a fine-toothed comb, challenge people and get them in to present evidence to us about why we should invest taxpayers' money in a project.

The Convener: I suppose that the problem is that £50 million has been allocated.

Shona Robison: The retrospective work that Donnie Jack spoke about will look into that.

The Convener: Why now, minister? Why were we not doing such work already?

Shona Robison: Data was always gathered on who participated in cashback programmes. The evaluation is a much deeper look at what they have delivered, in order—not least, as Donnie Jack just said—to inform future investment decisions.

I think that we all appreciate that one challenge with cashback moneys is that, because they depend on the proceeds of crime, the flow is intermittent; we do not know how much cashback will come from one year to the next. That makes the resource difficult to apply to revenue funding, so it lends itself better to capital expenditure. We need to ensure that, when that capital spend happens, we can gather information on who benefits and what is delivered.

I take your point about the schools of rugby and schools of football programmes. However, I, too, have met some of the young people involved. It is fair to say that their attendance at school would not be what it is if they were not involved in those programmes. For a variety of reasons, some of them were at risk of not being in a school environment.

You are right that it is important that we can demonstrate what we are doing. I hope that the evaluation plan will give you what you are looking for; it will certainly help us to ensure that we are deploying cashback in the right way, compared with some of the other funds. It might be that other funds could be used for such programmes and that cashback could be used in other ways. We must get the right money into the right place.

Drew Smith: I am sure that the minister will appreciate people's interest in the subject; I have no doubt that there is interest in her area. Where cashback money originates from is complicated, which has complications for the benefits of spending money in such a way. However, as an overall principle, the resource should be cash back and not cash diverted.

We need a lot more detail before we can understand that we are not creating a situation of regressive redistribution in which cash that comes from the communities that face the biggest challenges ends up going to the most eager people, who most easily fill in application forms for projects that suit them. How do we get round that?

Should we be operating a grant process in which we give money out per year? Should we establish a longer-term fund?

Shona Robison: Donnie Jack was making that point. The strategic group is looking at the very issue of how we deploy cashback in a more strategic way and how that money sits with our other resources.

You are right. If we take the funding of a pitch, for example, we could argue that the issue is not just about locating that pitch in a community that suffers from crime but about who uses the pitch and how we ensure that the young people who benefit from it are those who are least likely to turn up without encouragement.

I have seen some great work going on in my patch in which cashback-funded projects have linked into the youth work infrastructure. Young people come to football sessions who might otherwise be hanging about the streets, to be frank—some of them were previously doing so and were involved in criminal activity. There has been a sizeable impact on those young people; they have benefited hugely. That is an example of cashback working and doing what it is meant to do. I hope that the evaluation will give you more detail on that and on where the balance lies.

Cashback is a really good resource, but it is not without its difficulties. We need to be very careful about how we deploy cashback and to ensure that we do not create an unsustainable reliance on it. We have learned lessons from funding decisions that were made for the best of reasons but which created a dependency on those resources that could not be sustained. The group that Donnie Jack is involved in was set up to address that. We recognise that, retrospectively, we need to give information about what has been spent and where.

The Convener: Will the evaluation give retrospective information on participation rates and the areas involved?

Donnie Jack: I understand that the evaluation will do that, but I will double check.

The Convener: Thank you.

Stewart Harris: The point that was made about applications is important. We have a strategic approach, particularly to the use of capital, no matter where the money comes from. We have regular conversations with people in all 32 local authority areas—mainly through local authorities, but we also drop down to communities—about need and where the priorities should lie. That is not a free-for-all. Our approach is very strategic, and much more so than it was before. I am happy to talk to the committee or to produce a case study about what we do in any local authority area.

The Convener: I thank the minister and her colleagues for being with us and for the evidence that has been provided.

11:16

Meeting suspended.

11:21

On resuming—

Scottish Strategy for Autism

The Convener: We continue with item 3 on the agenda, which is consideration of the Scottish strategy for autism. I welcome our second panel. Michael Matheson, the Minister for Public Health, is accompanied by—from the Scottish Government—Jean Maclellan, deputy director, adult care and support division, and Annette Pyle, policy manager, care and support, adult care and support division. Welcome to you all.

I invite the minister to make an opening statement before we proceed to questions.

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend today's meeting.

The autism strategy was launched just over a year and a half ago. It aims to ensure that people with autism and their families are supported by the widest possible range of services, including social care, education, housing and employment. We are beginning to make a real difference to the lives of people with autism by improving the support services that are available to those who need them. We are making good progress, but we are in the early stages of the development of the strategy's work and there is still much more to be done.

Alongside the strategy, I announced an investment of £13.4 million of funding over four years to build on improvements to autism services and access to them. As part of that funding, an autism development fund was made available to local and national organisations to deliver local services on the ground. In the first round of the fund, 23 organisations across Scotland received funding. Because local and national organisations showed a high level of interest in submitting bids for the fund, I decided to increase the level of funding to £1.5 million, as the original £1 million did not meet the demand from the large number of organisations that submitted bids. The second round of funding has enabled a further 30 organisations to deliver local projects throughout Scotland, which are tackling local needs for people with autism.

Funding is also being delivered for the roll-out of six new one-stop shops in addition to the two that already exist in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Fife, Lanarkshire and Highland one-stop shops have opened, and the two additional one-stop shops that are planned in Grampian and Ayrshire will open soon. The one-stop shop in Perth is being launched today. The one-stop shops are voluntary sector models that work in partnership with local

authorities, the NHS and local groups that represent parents and people with autistic spectrum disorder. Each one will be tailored to meet the needs of individuals. I have been out to see those services and I can see the real difference that they are beginning to make for individuals.

Given the Scottish Government's joint partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in delivering the strategy, we provided £1.12 million to local authorities to allow them to develop local autism strategies and the associated action plans.

We also made funding available to the Open University and the University of Strathclyde to enable professionals who are working in all areas of autism services and carers of people who are on the spectrum to study by distance learning and other methods delivery-specific autism courses. That initiative will enable approximately 1,000 people to study understanding of autism courses free of charge over a three-year period. That will help to ensure that people who are on the spectrum will have access to professionals in autism services who understand the specific needs of people who are on the spectrum.

Other projects that have been funded include the Scottish Autism project to analyse and apply narrow autism phenotype research, which investigates which early interventions work for people who have autism and their cost effectiveness in a Scottish context; a waiting list project to develop adult diagnostic service solutions and to drive down waiting times; and the revision of the autism toolbox, which is a practical classroom resource to help to ensure the successful inclusion of children who have autism and is available in schools across Scotland. The new toolbox will be web based and much more accessible.

Those initiatives will make an impact in delivering on the strategy's recommendations. They will help local authorities to develop strategies and action plans, and help organisations to deliver services locally when people need them, to improve waiting times, to improve interventions, and to share best practice. All that work will help us to realise our vision as part of the strategy.

Since the strategy's launch, much work has been done to improve services for people who have autism, their families and their carers. However, it is a 10-year strategy and more needs to be done. It is important that the work on autism continues to grow and develop in order to deliver improved access and services, and to enrich the lives of people who have autism and their families.

The Convener: Thank you, minister.

Bob Doris: When I read the briefing notes for this morning's evidence session, I noticed that we are coming to the end of an initial mapping exercise across Scotland's 32 local authorities to quantify accurately for the first time all the services and support for those who are involved in supporting people and families who are living with autism. That exercise is due to be completed by June 2013.

I also note that the one-stop shops in Glasgow and Edinburgh are up and running and, I hope, improving services for people who have autism in Glasgow, the area that I represent, and in the city of Edinburgh. Can we assume that the mapping exercise is complete in Glasgow and Edinburgh? How close are we to completing that exercise across the country? How will we use the results to direct funding to fill the gaps in provision?

Michael Matheson: An important part of developing the strategy was ensuring that the resource that we were providing was targeted at the areas that would have the biggest impact, and addressing areas in which there were gaps in services. That is why some of the funding for the strategy was targeted at mapping what was available in local authority and health board areas. We provided resource to a number of the national autism organisations so that they could engage mappers who were responsible for looking at local authority and health board provision and engaging with parents and those who have autism on their views of the services that were available and where the gaps were.

That work is more or less complete, and I am waiting for the report; I have been advised that it will be submitted to us by the end of the month. Once we have that report, we will be able to decide on our response and on how we can manage the work that will be necessary to address the issues that the mapping exercise has highlighted.

The mapping work will be shared with local authorities, health boards and other stakeholders in local areas to support them in their work on their local strategies and action plans. That will provide them with a wealth of information around not only what the professionals think is available in the area, but what patients, carers and those with autism have identified as the issues that need to be addressed. That will give us a much more comprehensive picture of what the provision is, what the gaps are and how any such gaps can be addressed. We have set aside part of the autism funding to enable us to address some of the issues that come from the mapping exercise.

11:30

You are right to note that the one-stop shops in Glasgow and Edinburgh are up and running. There will be six additional one-stop shops, three of which are also up and running. The one-stop shop in Perth opens today, and the other two will open shortly. Those facilities enable professionals, parents and carers for people with autism to access information about the services that are available and about training that can be provided to parents and carers, along with support for professionals.

I have referred some of my constituents to the one-stop shop in Dunfermline, which also conducts home visits and assessment work in individuals' homes. The one-stop shops help people, post-diagnosis, to get the support they might need to make choices about services. They provide parents and carers with information on what they should be doing and the support that is available regarding any issues that they might highlight.

Bob Doris: That gets the process quite clear in my head. The mapping exercise that is almost complete will identify the level of service that is available across the country and say where services could be improved or where there are gaps. That will feed directly into local strategies. Using the funding that is available, excluding the £1.8 million a year that is set aside, £8.9 million is left over in the four-year strategy. Will that £8.9 million feed directly into the results of that mapping exercise, to identify where the gaps are?

Michael Matheson: Not all the funding is being held back for the mapping exercise; we have funded certain areas as part of the strategy already.

I can give you a breakdown of the £13.4 million that we set aside. In 2011-12, there was a total spend of £2.5 million; in 2012-13, there was a spend of £3.6 million; and, between 2013 and 2015, we have committed £4.97 million to a range of initiatives that are being taken forward now and will be taken forward over the next two years. That means that £2.2 million from the fund is available between now and 2015. A large part of that will go towards the work that is going on with the mapping exercise and will help to address some of the issues that it has identified.

Bob Doris: That provides us with important clarity. Money has not been put on hold awaiting the result of the mapping exercise. Initially, I thought that £1.5 million had been set aside each year, with everything else being held over until the mapping exercise was complete. However, more than that has been spent on an annual basis. It is helpful to know that.

On some of the aspirations of the autism strategy, we have been looking for an improvement in the removal of short-term barriers, such as delayed diagnosis and delayed intervention. We think that a plan should be put in place for the person with autism once the diagnosis has been made. Significant sums of money have been spent already—have some of those barriers been removed, or has progress been made on speeding up the process?

Michael Matheson: There are two aspects to that. Over the past year and a half, we have used some of the funding to identify the barriers to early diagnosis and the support that is needed after diagnosis.

We have funded the autism achieve alliance, which involves NHS Lothian, in partnership with the University of Edinburgh and Queen Margaret University. They have undertaken research to identify the barriers to diagnosis and what can be done to reduce the waiting times for individuals. The alliance has developed and is taking forward an action plan, and it is examining the issue across Scotland—in particular, it is looking at issues around process. People might be referred to one person and then referred to another person and so on before a diagnosis is eventually arrived at.

Another major inhibitor that has been identified is the number of staff who are qualified and able to make a diagnosis. This year, we are providing about £300,000 to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to increase capacity among staff who can make a diagnosis. That will allow for quicker diagnosis and reduce the waiting times for individuals to receive that service.

It is partly about process and partly about capacity. Some of the funding that we provide is to address those issues. That will help to increase the speed at which an individual receives a diagnosis and, as a result, will reduce waiting times.

Bob Doris: I note the two aspects. There is an unclear referral process, when an individual is referred between different clinicians or groups for diagnosis. The issue is one of having qualified staff who can reliably make an evidence-based diagnosis.

Are there any national targets? For example, a parent might go to their general practitioner and say that they are worried about their child and that they would like to have them tested with regard to their being on the autism spectrum. What are the expectations around that patient journey? Whether or not that relates to Glasgow, which I represent, are there national targets around that?

I understand that the national strategy is trying to fix process issues. I appreciate that there are issues around having a sufficient number of

qualified staff, which the national strategy is also trying to fix. What are the expectations regarding the patient journey?

Michael Matheson: When the autism strategy was being developed, the key area that was identified around diagnosis was the delay that adults can experience in receiving a diagnosis. That was much more problematic for adults than it was for children, for whom the process was quicker and appeared to be clearer.

The work that we have been undertaking through the strategy, and the work that the autism achieve alliance has been pursuing, has focused on how to improve the system and speed up the process, especially around adult diagnosis. There is no target as such—it is not that someone who has been referred should be diagnosed within a particular timeframe—but there is an expectation that the pathway will be significantly improved as a result of process improvements and increased capacity among qualified staff.

We are in the early stages of a 10-year strategy, so we can consider the issue as we go forward. At this stage, the priority has been addressing issues around the process to make it clearer, simpler and, where necessary, more comprehensive, while ensuring that we have the right staff in the right place with the necessary skills to make a diagnosis at an early stage. Most of the research has indicated that the real area of difficulty has been for those adults who have remained undiagnosed, considering the delay that they can experience.

Bob Doris: There is always a debate in our committee about whether there are enough targets or too many targets. If everything has a target, do targets become meaningless? However, I will not explore further the question whether there should be a target; I am more interested to know how you, as Minister for Public Health, seek to monitor the patient experience of adults with autism to see whether the care and treatment pathway is being improved. How can that be done as part of the 10-year strategy?

Michael Matheson: What should become evident is that the waiting times for individuals who are looking for a diagnosis should decrease significantly and we should have more specialist staff who are able to provide a diagnosis. Improvement in access and in timeframes should demonstrate that.

As you will appreciate, the autism strategy is not something that we have published and are not monitoring. We set up the reference group, which is made up of a range of stakeholders from Government and the third sector, and individuals with autism. The group is responsible for looking at our approach to the recommendations that are

set out in the strategy and the action that is necessary to take forward each of them. The reference group is monitoring the work that is being done on reducing waiting times and improving the availability of diagnostic staff and services. It reports to Government on the progress that is being made in those areas.

The reference group has created six sub-groups to focus on particular recommendations in the strategy, although they may be associated with one another. The sub-groups contain a range of people from different sectors. Some of them are chaired by folk from the third sector who have a specialism in a particular area, or whose services have specialist experience in supporting the delivery of the strategy recommendations. I would expect the sub-group that is looking at an area to advise the reference group if further improvements or changes are needed. The reference group would refer that to ministers to consider whether there is any action that we need to take.

The Convener: For clarification, was the investment for diagnostic capacity £185,000?

Michael Matheson: There was £45,000 for diagnostic training, which is stage 2 of the waiting list work that we are doing. There was the diagnostic support, which was £300,000—that was for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. There was the work to consider what had to be done on the waiting lists issue, and £250,000 was spent on identifying the issues and what needed to be done to address them.

The Convener: I was particularly interested in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde figure, from a constituency point of view.

What is the current waiting time?

Michael Matheson: I do not have the exact timeframe for each health board or even at a national level, because the alliance that has been doing that work has developed an action plan. Jean Maclellan might be able to say what the average waiting times are.

Jean Maclellan (Scottish Government): I could not give you an average waiting time. Phase 1 of that work has just been finished and we are moving into phase 2.

At the time of the previous autism strategy in 2002 to 2006, there were waiting lists throughout the country that were, on average, two to three years. Those were taken down to nothing and gradually built up again. My understanding is that the waiting lists are not of that scale this time round. However, when someone begins the journey from the point of referral, it can take quite a while for them to get to an outcome. That is a bigger issue than waiting to start, which is why the AAA is working to break down the bureaucracy.

The Convener: I am trying to get a sense of how precious resources are being invested. We are talking about investing money to address diagnostics, but we need to know exactly how long people are waiting. Are people waiting too long? Has it drifted back up to the 2002 to 2006 level or is it short of that?

Jean Maclellan: It is short of that. The AAA team has been round every health board and has clarified what their waiting times are. The team has had face-to-face meetings with every diagnostic team. We could give the committee that information separately from now—

The Convener: I am just looking for a baseline so that we can measure progress. What is the ambition? Is it to get back to the improvement that was made in 2006?

11:45

Michael Matheson: We can ask the alliance, which has been leading on that work for us, for some of that detail and share it with the committee, if that would be helpful. That will give you a sense of its view of the current situation and an understanding of where we are trying to get to.

The Convener: That is fine.

Richard Lyle: Do you agree with the suggestion that the diagnosis of children is improving?

Michael Matheson: Improvements have been made. When we consulted on the strategy's development, the issues that were flagged up with regard to diagnosis related to adults who were waiting much longer and were finding it difficult to access diagnostic services.

Richard Lyle: That was my next question. There is still a high number of adults with undiagnosed ASD, but do we have any clue about what that number actually is? How many children in Scotland do we believe have the condition?

Michael Matheson: It is probably not a case of this or that number of people diagnosed with X; there will be prevalence levels that, if it will help, we can provide to the committee. As for the increasing levels of autism, people often say to me that there appear to be more people with autism than there were 10 or 20 years ago, but I have to say that a big part of that is down to improvements in diagnosis and recognition. The better our understanding of autism, the more we can improve diagnosis. Historically, a lot of people who had autism would not have been diagnosed as such because it was not properly recognised or understood. There have been advances in that respect, and the understanding now is that on average about one in 100 individuals might have autism.

Richard Lyle: I agree with you that years ago people had never heard of autism and did not know about ASD but my next question is about the continuing poor public and professional perception and knowledge of ASD. We are all trying to bring up our children; when you become a parent, you are dealing with a child each and every day. The public simply do not realise what it is like for a child with ASD and how things can go off; indeed, a few weeks ago, I saw a very informative play about an autistic child. What steps are we taking to inform the public? Has there been any campaign or publicity to ensure that the public know about the condition and to enable people to recognise that their child might need to be tested?

Michael Matheson: There is a spectrum with autism, and individuals can be at different points on that spectrum and function at entirely different levels. It is also a very individualised condition in the way it manifests and presents itself in different circumstances.

One of the most important issues is to ensure that families whose child might have autism have as much information and support as possible in order to support their son or daughter. We made funding available through the carers information strategy to support carers and some of that money was used to provide training for parents and carers of children with autism. The fact is that funding for such work is allocated from areas other than the autism strategy, and that particular funding was used to provide training to increase parents' awareness of the trigger factors that might have an impact on their child's behaviour.

Last year, I attended an event at the Pollok carers centre, at which one of the parents told me the story of her own experience. Whenever she went to a shopping centre with her son, she had real difficulties because of the environment, but no one had ever told her that there are strategies that can be used to address, minimise and manage those problems. The training provided her with an insight into those strategies, and she said that it made a difference almost overnight. Some of the work that is being done by the one-stop shops involves providing that type of advice to support parents in their role as carers.

We do not have a national programme to raise awareness. As I am sure you will appreciate, public information campaigns are expensive and we must make decisions about where we feel we can get the best impact from the resources that we have for the strategy. At this stage, we have not launched a public information programme, but part of the strategy will involve increasing awareness among professionals, parents and carers, and individuals with autism, and we will try to achieve that in a number of different ways. It may be something that we can consider in future, but at

this stage we do not have a specific commitment to a public information programme as such.

Richard Lyle: People have come to me over the years with problems, and the issue has been raised more and more often. I know that we have the 10-year strategy, as well as all the health issues. The convener may draw me back when I ask my next question, but more people are coming to politicians and councillors saying that their child has autism and asking what steps are going to be taken at school. What steps is the minister's department taking, along with the education authorities, to ensure progress for people who are coping with ASD? I admire every one of them, and there are children who are excellent but who require a wee bit of help at school. Does the strategy cover progress at school?

Michael Matheson: There are a couple of different aspects to that question. First, as I mentioned, we are working with local authorities to develop their local strategies and action plans, a number of which will include education, although in most local authority areas it is social work that leads on ASD. We have provided them with resources to develop local strategies and we expect all those strategies to be submitted by November this year, so that we can see what action is being taken at the local level. Part of that will involve better co-ordination between schools and other support services, whether that is social work or other departments, to assist in supporting individual pupils.

Secondly, we are providing capacity for teachers who have an autistic child in their class to get training on working with children with autism. Scottish Autism is due to launch a training programme this autumn, drawing on its experience with New Struan school and the resources that have been developed online—the toolkit to which I referred in my opening comments—to support teachers who work with children with autism in their class.

We want to ensure that local authorities have plans in place to co-ordinate the support that they provide at the local level, and alongside that we want to support teachers with the training that they require in working with pupils who may have ASD. I would not like anyone to think that the situation is ideal, but some of the foundation work that we are doing in that area will allow us to build on what exists and to develop the strategy over the next eight years.

Nanette Milne: An issue that is often raised with me in relation to many conditions, not least autism, is the transition between children's services and adult life. Are measures in place to ensure a smooth transition in service provision for people with autism, particularly young people who are leaving full-time education?

Michael Matheson: For individuals with a range of conditions, transition tends to be an area in which difficulties can arise. As part of the strategy, we are working with the Scottish transitions forum, which I believe is based in Glasgow. We are looking at developing guidance for the better management of transition to support the transition of individuals with autism from one service to the next, whether in health or education. Given the nature of the condition, such changes can be quite unsettling and challenging. Part of the work behind the strategy is to improve transition, and that work is being progressed and developed. We are trying to improve the way that transition arrangements are made for individuals.

Nanette Milne: Will that look at the quality of life that people can expect, not just their medical or physiological situation?

Michael Matheson: We have to take a holistic approach, given the nature of autism. It is a condition that presents in a very individualised way, so the reality is that if arrangements are very prescribed, they will not work effectively. The work of the Scottish transitions forum will support that holistic approach and make sure that there is as much consistency as there can be, among 32 local authorities and 14 territorial health boards, on how they manage transition from one service to the next.

Nanette Milne: The other issue that was raised at the round-table discussion that we had in March was self-directed support. How will you incorporate the recommendations on considering the specific support needed for more able individuals with ASD and developing user and carer capacity to enable them to take part in the process of planning for the person with autism? Will people with autism be represented on the self-directed support strategy implementation group, for instance? Will they be actively involved in the SDS reference group?

Michael Matheson: SDS should be as accessible to people with autism as it is to anybody else. They should be able to make an informed choice about how they wish their social care provision to be managed—whether they want to take control of it, whether they want the local authority to control it, or whether they want a combination of both.

A specific event is taking place this month on SDS and autism, largely targeted at parents, carers and people with autism. It will feed into and support our work on regulations and guidance on SDS.

I see SDS as an opportunity for individuals with autism, as it is for any other person who might be subject to a social care assessment.

Nanette Milne: Thank you. That is helpful, because some people were afraid that, because of the nature of the condition, people with autism might fall off the radar.

Michael Matheson: The event that we will hold later this month will allow individuals with autism and their parents and carers to give their input directly to the work that is going on in support of the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013, which will come into force next year.

Nanette Milne: Thank you. I wanted to put that on record.

Bob Doris: I have a very brief supplementary. I want to get some clarity on self-directed support—the minister will understand why when I ask my question.

Can you confirm that there is no compulsion on anyone with autism who seeks SDS to take personalised budgets or go through the personalisation process, and that local authorities can continue to provide support following any assessment? The personalisation process is only one element of SDS, but in some parts of the country it has been pushed as SDS.

I would like to get clarity because some families that have a family member with autism might be going through that process.

Michael Matheson: I am conscious that there are those who are extremely enthusiastic about SDS, because they want more control over how their care is provided, and there are those who do not want to manage their care, who may be less vocal and who may have some anxieties about what SDS might mean.

12:00

SDS is about choice. An individual can take as much control as they wish over their care arrangements, or they can leave it to the local authority to manage in the way that many local authorities do at present. Self-directed support does not change the assessment process itself; all it means is that at the end of the process, the individual is presented with four options and can choose to have as much control or as little control as they want. There is nothing mandatory about it—there is nothing that people are compelled to do—and nobody with a particular disability is excluded from it. It is purely a matter of choice for each individual as to what they feel best suits their individual circumstances.

Bob Doris: That is helpful, thank you.

The Convener: Transition has been mentioned. The further education sector supports a lot of young people with autism and special needs. Certainly in my area, in the west of Scotland,

some members of that group have been attending college for five, 10 or 15 years. It is an important element of the transition from mainstream schooling.

Have you and ministerial colleagues had discussions about any unintended consequences from the change in direction with regard to employment outcomes, which that group of people will not fit into? Have there been any discussions between you and colleagues with responsibility for further education to ensure that there are no unintended outcomes, such as displacement of young people with special needs?

Michael Matheson: You raise two issues. One is the transition within education and the other is the move from the educational establishment, possibly into employment.

The Convener: I completely understand the focus on young people going to college. The problem is the Government's strong focus on young people moving into employment. As part of their management of that transition from mainstream education, many people from that group go into further education for two or three days a week. They sign up for different courses over the years—in some cases, over 20 years. That environment has supported them in one way or another outwith the home, offered inclusion to an extent and so on.

I am concerned that those people do not fit into the new focus of getting people into employment. I am not challenging that focus, but will it lead to an unintended consequence of squeezing that group of young people out of our colleges? If so, how will they be supported in the wider community? What is there to support them and provide an activity for two or three days a week, so that they are out of their home? It is no good for them just to be back in their home, and there will be an increased pressure on carers. That is my concern.

Michael Matheson: I understand where you are coming from as regards the changing nature of the student base within our colleges and as regards people with autism who may have been on courses for a long time. A key element is to improve the employability of individuals with autism. The "Count us in" report, which the National Autistic Society launched at the Parliament a few months ago, demonstrates well the desire to improve the opportunities for individuals with autism to be able to go into employment.

It may be that some individuals found themselves in colleges for extended periods because they had difficulty moving into the employment market. Employability is addressed in the strategy. The Government is reviewing and updating its national employability strategy,

which—if I recall correctly—was launched back in 2006. The reference group has set up a sub-group that specifically feeds into the national employability strategy, so there is a specific element around recognising some of the issues around autism that are for employers to address, to help to support individuals with autism to increase their opportunities to gain employment.

The Convener: Does that include the FE sector? Is it represented?

Michael Matheson: Yes. The approach gives those who are currently in the FE sector but who would do better to move into employment the opportunity to get the necessary support to do that. The sub-group that was set up is looking at that issue to see what we can do to improve the opportunities for individuals with autism to move into employment.

The Convener: That would be terrific. However, colleges will now be measured on their success in getting people into employment and the concern—it may be misplaced concern—is that a college is not going to carry a group of people who are going to get it a lower place in the league table. I do not know whether the sub-groups that have been established will help to address that, but there is a significant population of young people with special needs in our colleges who have been there for some time, and I am concerned that there may be an unintended consequence for them. I am happy for you to get back to the committee to explain how the issue has been recognised and is being addressed. When we took evidence from the autism groups, they accepted that that was a concern.

Michael Matheson: There are issues. The first is about improving employment opportunities for individuals with autism and tackling some of the barriers. We have provided funding through the autism development fund for local programmes that help to improve the employability of individuals with autism. However, it is important that we show clear leadership at a national level, which is why we have already established a group that will focus on the current review of the national employability strategy. That group will ensure that helping to improve those opportunities is part of the national policy. I reassure you that the issue is on the agenda and is being addressed as part of the review that is taking place. That work is feeding into John Swinney's department, which is leading the review of the employability strategy.

The second part of your question was about the opportunities for individuals with autism to undertake complete courses in our FE sector—is that correct?

The Convener: That becomes the issue. We would all wish them a job, but if there is none—the

employment market is difficult just now—and no place at a college, whose budget is going to be hit? That is the issue.

Michael Matheson: The “Count us in” report that the National Autistic Society published is being considered by the national employability strategy's reference group, which is looking at what further measures need to be taken to improve employment opportunities for individuals with autism. The sub-group that has been set up to address that issue is feeding directly into the consideration of what has to be provided under the new employability strategy at a national level to tackle the issues that have been highlighted for individuals with autism.

A key aim is to improve the opportunities for individuals with autism to gain employment, whether through the FE sector or through direct employment, as there is an issue about individuals with autism not being able to secure the same employment opportunities as others, which we must address. Instead of having something completely stand-alone for autism—although we are doing some things through our funding of organisations to support those opportunities—part of the national employability strategy is about recognising some of the issues that individuals with autism face and considering what we can do to improve access to the employment market for that group of individuals.

Bob Doris: With your indulgence, convener, I will ask a supplementary question. I meet a number of people who have autism, but autism is not their main barrier to learning. They have a variety of learning disabilities and autism is only part of the mix. I must be careful about what I say, as I would never say never about anyone finding themselves employment. However, a small minority of people have such profound and complex learning difficulties that paid employment may not be realistic for them. Some of those people use, for example, further education colleges as socially enriching places that enhance the quality of their lives.

I am not necessarily looking for an answer today, minister, but I ask that we ensure that, as part of the general mix, a range of avenues remain open to those who have complex learning needs, some of which relate to autism. One of those could be further education colleges. When it comes to people for whom, with the best will in the world, the outcome of employment might be unrealistic, I want us to ensure that other enriching things are available to them as human beings and that society allows them to take advantage of those things.

I hope that that is helpful, convener. That is the thrust of where I am coming from.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Bob Doris has articulated what I was going to say, so I am happy to go with his question.

The Convener: You have two for the price of one, minister.

Michael Matheson: I appreciate where Bob Doris is coming from. I know individuals who dip into FE courses for particular purposes, such as for activities to do with daily living issues, and get benefits from such programmes. Jean Maclellan wants to say something about that.

Jean Maclellan: I concur with the point that Mr Doris made. One of the sub-groups that the minister mentioned consists of people on the autistic spectrum and another is made up of carers. In a recent discussion about employability, people on the spectrum made that very point. For many such people, full employment is an aspiration that might be fulfilled. Some of the funding that has been provided has been for people who are self-employed—miEnterprise Lothian is a recent example. It is for people who have ideas that they want to turn into careers but who do not feel able, or do not want, to be part of a bigger organisation. Advocacy around enabling self-employment has been useful and helpful for others.

I think of a young woman who is particularly able in many aspects of her personality and functioning, who says that she does not want full employment because it would lead to mental health issues. She is happy with “meaningful occupation”—that is how she would describe fulfilment of an aspiration in her life. That takes the form of having an allotment, where she grows her own vegetables. She is a bit of a foodie who enjoys making food and sharing it with others. That gives her the kind of fulfilment that other people might get through full employment.

The Convener: Drew Smith has a question.

Drew Smith: I want to return to the issue that Richard Lyle raised, which was about public information about and understanding of the spectrum and the conditions on it.

It seems to me that there is a bit of an injustice, if we accept that we have not served people with autistic spectrum disorder conditions particularly well in the past. We have made a lot of progress in improving diagnosis and the services and support that are available, but I was struck by a comment that was made when we discussed the employability of those people, which was that the employment barriers that many people with autistic conditions face will be broken only when the understanding of the population as a whole improves. We were told that work could be done to improve the employability of those people and encourage them to do all the things that we would

want them to do but that, realistically, unless there is a step change at population level in how people understand and appreciate autism that allows them to see beyond the condition, we will not achieve a major breakthrough as regards employability.

I appreciate that the minister said that a public campaign is not on the agenda at present. What would be the mechanics of such a process? Is it something that NHS Health Scotland should plan for? Would organisations in the sector and interested people think about what they might want to do and approach you? How would we get to the point at which it was possible to make that kind of change? I accept that that might not be for this year or next year, but we could have an aspiration for where we need to be once we have improved the services. Beyond that, how do we improve understanding?

12:15

Michael Matheson: I will pick up on the specific example of employability that you gave. The way in which to tackle the issue with employers is to have a targeted approach rather than a broad-based public information programme. That involves working with employers and employers organisations to help them to have a better understanding of autism, which can help to break down the barriers.

A broad-brush public information campaign might raise awareness of autism among employers without necessarily addressing their concerns or misconceptions about employing someone with autism. Therefore, part of the work around improving employment opportunities for individuals with autism involves organisations engaging directly with employers to break down their misconceptions.

We are providing funding in relation to a range of areas to do with employment. There is work with the National Autistic Society and we are supporting some councils with funding programmes in relation to employability. There is funding around training, too.

We have a range of public health and information programmes. In my experience, programmes often need to be targeted at the people to whom we want to get the message across. Broad information programmes that raise general awareness can be beneficial. A good example from the past 10 years or so is the see me campaign, which helped to address the stigma and break down some of the barriers associated with mental health issues. However, in the context of employability, any information programme should be targeted at the business sector and

employers and address any misconceptions that they might have.

Drew Smith: The big things that the see me campaign and other mental health awareness campaigns have been able to get across are that people can be affected by a range of conditions, which can change, and the prevalence of mental ill health. It seems to me that, in relation to autism, there is limited understanding on both counts. We talked about the perception that the incidence of autism is rising, although the issue is probably improved diagnosis. In general, we do not have a full understanding.

There is a danger in diagnosing and labelling a group of people with a condition and then treating them as other. I support everything that the minister is saying and doing about employability, but unless the issue is put in a broader context for people there will never be a breakthrough beyond the good employers who are interested in supporting people.

Michael Matheson: I am not saying that there should not be some form of public information programme in future. However, we must get the foundations of the strategy right so that we can build on it over the next eight and a half years. A public information programme might come at a later stage. Such programmes tend to be costly. If an individual came to my surgery because they were having difficulties getting into diagnostic services, it would be difficult for me to say that our funding priority was a public information programme.

The priority in the strategy is to get the basics right. Work will come out of that, and at a later stage we might consider whether a public information programme should play a part. The see me model might be useful and might lend itself to the field that we are discussing, although mental health issues are much more prevalent than autism. One of the national autism organisations might take forward a programme on behalf of Government. A variety of models could be used in taking the idea forward.

I am open to the idea, but I think that a public information programme would come a bit further down the line. We should ensure that we get the basics right and address the fundamental barriers that exist so that we can make improvements for individuals and families.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank the minister and his officials for their evidence.

12:19

Meeting continued in private until 13:19.

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