

Johann Lamont
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

3 November, 2020

PETITION PE1319: IMPROVING YOUTH FOOTBALL IN SCOTLAND

Further to the report on the above petition published on 22 June 2020, I thank the Public Petitions Committee for its detailed consideration of this issue and advanced sight of the report.

We have engaged extensively on the issues raised by the petition over many years and it is important to emphasise that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of the rights of the child being observed at all times.

Like you, we recognise progress has been made to help protect children and young people within the youth football system – in particular the opportunity for Club Academy Scotland players to now play recreational football and the establishment of a young player wellbeing panel. We welcome the other encouraging action taken by the football authorities.

However, we recognise concerns remain. Responding to your key recommendations for the Scottish Government:

- We agree with the Committee that ensuring children who play football are able to “*participate safely in a safe environment*” should be “*an absolute and overriding duty*” for the Scottish FA. The Scottish FA board recognises and shares that view, and the Scottish Government and **sportscotland** will continue to ensure this commitment is met.
- We agree enough time has passed to consider whether changes made to date have been effective, and we will consider how best to assess the system and the potential impact of any recommendations proposed by the Committee.
- Having considered this issue in depth over a period of time – including requests for external regulation – we will continue to consider how to introduce greater external, independent oversight into the existing system.

I apologise for the delay in responding, and I am sure you will recognise the unprecedented pressure we are under. As your report noted, the pandemic “*may have a bearing on how work can be taken forward,*” but we remain committed to ensuring the rights of the child are observed at all times in football.

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We are liaising with the office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland to have a meeting with the Scottish FA and petitioners on this issue as soon as restrictions allow.

I would, of course, be happy to update you following our further dialogue with stakeholders and consideration of this important issue.

Joe FitzPatrick MSP
Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing

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