

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Sport

12 March 2021

Minutes

Welcome from Liz Smith MSP

Alison Johnstone MSP, Brian Whittle MSP and Gavin Newlands MP in attendance

Attendance

Alison Johnstone, MSP	Jim Conn, Aberdeenshire ClubSport
Alan McMillan, Bowls Scotland	Joan O'Sullivan, Swimtime UK Ltd
Ali Dreyer, SAPOE	John Beaton-Hawryluk, Scottish Touch
Andy Gould, Scottish Football Association	Jonathan Mackie, Office of Gavin Newlands MP
Anthony Drew, horsescotland	Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association
Barry Matthews, Scottish Government Active Scotland Division	Ken Hughes, Scottish Sports Association
Brian Whittle, MSP	Ken Muir, Scottish Rugby
Cammy Watt, Scottish Football Association	Marcin Zdrojewski, Scottish Sports Association
David Ferguson, Observatory for Sport in Scotland	Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating
David Laing	Mark Woods, Britball Media
Des Tinney, Scottish Government Rural & Islands Communities	Matt Phillip, Shepherd and Wedderburn
Gary Grieve, Scottish ClubSport	Richard Haynes, University of Stirling
Gavin Newlands, MP	Rick Kenney, Scottish ClubSport
George Baber, Association of British Riding Schools	Ron Sutherland
Gregor Muir, Scottish Sports Association	Siobhan Hogg, CSSC Sports and Leisure
Ian Campbell, Civil Service Sports Council	Stew Fowlie, Scottish Student Sport
Jane Harvey, Scottish Council of Taekwondo	Susie Benson, CIMPSA
	Walter Macadam, GMB Scotland

Apologies

Allan Murray, horsescotland

Ben Smith, BS&P Consulting Ltd

Duncan Sinclair, Aberdeen Sports Village

Dr Fiona Reid, UK Sports Volunteering
Research Network

Gary Fraser, Scottish Disability Sport

Gavin Macleod, Scottish Disability Sport

Graham Law, Scottish Rugby

Graham Wark, VoCAL

Ian Campbell, Civil Service Sports Council -
Scotland

Jane Campbell Morrison, Scottish
Adventure Activities Forum

Jeremy Balfour, MSP

Kirsty Cumming, Community Leisure UK

Liza Linton, RYA (Scotland)

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, **sport**scotland

Maureen McGonigle, Scottish Women in
Sport

Paul Carlyle, Shepherd and Wedderburn

Roddy MacKenzie, SportsAid Scotland

Stuart Brown, Chest Heart & Stroke
Scotland

Tom Bishop, Scottish Cycling

Matters arising

- Congratulations were made on behalf of the Group to Mairi Gougeon MSP, who has been appointed as the new Minister for Public Health and Sport since the Group last met.
- Condolences were made on behalf of the Group to the family, friends and colleagues of Paths for All chief officer Ian Findlay CBE, following his sudden passing. Ian made hugely significant contributions to getting the nation more active, including as a member of this Group, and will be very much missed by all in the physical activity and voluntary sectors. A standing minute's silence was held at the end of the meeting in recognition of Ian's passing. Paths for All have opened an online book of condolence should any colleagues and friends wish to contribute. The link to this is available via the Paths for All website.
- The minutes of the meeting of 19th February 2020 were proposed by David Ferguson and seconded by Margarita Sweeney-Baird.

Meeting note

This meeting was held in roundtable format, with attendees providing five minute updates on their sport or organisation in terms of the impacts of COVID-19 and opportunities for the coming months.

Jane Harvey, Scottish Council of Taekwondo, reflected on the challenges of a contact indoor sport under the restrictions of the pandemic. The focus has been on the 'patterns' element of the sport, which leads up to sparring and can be done without contact, and includes benefits of discipline and mindfulness. People have been inventive to allow most clubs and members to be able to have some form of participation over the last year, be it outdoors or over video conferencing platforms. This has included online competitions for gradings, competing in patterns and judged by video submission with e-certificates awarded, allowing people to not just train or practice, but to compete as well.

Despite the efforts to have activity, membership numbers have decreased with adult participation dropping most significantly. There has also been a reduction in the number of member clubs, with some already saying that their clubs will not set up again. Moving forward, a major issue for clubs will be the use of leisure trust facilities, school estate and church halls etc. With no firm dates for return of indoor contact sport, it is unclear when access to those facilities might be feasible.

Council continues to develop 'Club Hubs', sharing best practice, and introducing a series of workshops on finance and fundraising, raising club profile, governance and safeguarding, to help support the club network.

Alan McMillan, Bowls Scotland, outlined the impacts for the 845 clubs and 55,000 active bowlers throughout Scotland. Bowls Scotland has looked at the pandemic as an opportunity, working to support clubs to secure funding while also looking at how the game is played and administered. £6.5m of support and other grants has gone to clubs throughout Scotland, mainly to clubs with rateable values, but rates relief and other support gave clubs a lot of security and confidence to not have to worry about having competitions or membership fees, so they could survive. Some have been able to develop facilities. Over and above that, Bowls Scotland introduced a crisis fund so those clubs without a rateable value could be secured. Membership renewals are currently ongoing, but estimate to have lost five clubs – a very strong effort for so many to have survived. Looking ahead, this year will focus on 'stay local, play local', and encourage individuals to put something back into their local community. A lot of people in local communities will be nervous about returning to more activity, and there is a role for clubs across sports to encourage people to get out the door, to get active, and there are a lot of people now who have been walking or cycling and might convert that into other local activity. Bowls Scotland see their role as part of a bigger picture of helping the nation recover. This year can be used to survive and return to activity, then next year is the Commonwealth Games and the opportunity to celebrate being back fully. There is an opportunity for us and other sports to play our part in getting folk active again and showing how sport can play a role in trying to heal Scotland.

David Ferguson, Observatory for Sport in Scotland, noted the progress that OSS has made in pulling together stakeholders to direct research priorities and help inform policy development. Have built engagement with Scotland's universities and continue to build the research base and those relationships. Now more organisations are engaging with OSS on research requests and funding. Previously mentioned disability research continues to progress, with a new project on barriers into sport in Scotland coming over the next year, along with current research on Scottish women leadership in sport in Scotland, sustainable community sport delivery models at Local Authority level and ongoing Covid-19 impact on sport surveys.

The OSS will shortly launch its manifesto ahead of the Holyrood elections, containing three asks of the new government; to launch the first National Conversation on the role of sport in society, across the spectrum of health and social care, environment, education, business etc; to appoint a new Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to lead a multi-stakeholder strategic forum to properly map a strategic approach for Scotland and help to bring together sectors to understand roles and delivery areas; to build on the research and evidence base on sport in Scotland and embed this approach in the same way as taken by Government in education, justice etc. and use existing research to develop wider policy areas.

LS noted the coverage and support of International Women's Day on March 8th by sports and organisations across the sector.

Alison Johnstone had to leave to attend a briefing and LS put on record her thanks to AJ as co-convenor of the Cross Party Group on Sport throughout the Parliamentary session.

Ali Dreyer, SAPOE, cited the encouragement within the organisation by the inclusion of outdoor education in ongoing recovery guidance and consistent mentions across the country of the value being placed on outdoor space. SAPOE has worked with partners across the third sector and outdoor sector, with additional thanks to Liz Smith and Alison Johnstone, on getting recovery support for residential centres launched. Recent work has included provision of online courses for outdoor learning, building outdoor learning into work for education providers in the current circumstances, and the publication of the Outdoor Education Centres Fit for the Future report on the impact of residential and how to build these into the educational pathway. There are concerns that despite the Curriculum for Excellence on outdoor learning having been around for 10 years it is still heavily reliant on local drivers and individuals in different Local Authorities (LAs). It remains too easy to shut down services without a plan for alternative provision. Residential experiences are highly valuable, but there is also a need for the pathway from early years provision too. A position statement has been launched with the ask to embed an outdoor education lead officer in every education service in LAs. It has been a positive year by virtue of the value being put on outdoor learning, but there is a need to keep working together with partners and government to support the full pathway.

Andy Gould, Scottish Football Association, agreed that sport can play a huge part in the recovery from the pandemic. The role of sport and physical activity will be critical, particularly for young people. The Scottish FA has done a lot of work with clubs on challenges and issues and has seen real mental health challenges and inactivity, particularly for young people. We know that facility access for football clubs, as with many other sports, will be a big challenge in the coming months. Question raised on how we can work collectively and collaboratively to make sure that as we come out of the pandemic we don't miss an opportunity where sport can use the summer in particular to provide hope, and create opportunities for lots of people to get out and re-engage with sport. There are 2,500 football clubs across Scotland and the majority are very reliant on the leisure trust or Local Authority estate – we know the challenges that are being faced there. We need to work collectively to try avoid a hiatus or lack of those facilities opening when sport has really got that opportunity to return. Plea would be that during the summer, when we have lots of play to use the power of sport and football to get as many people back as we can, especially noting the likelihood of people not travelling abroad, to push that forwards and play a part for parents and other people. Need to work together to make sure we don't miss this opportunity and to allow football and sport to play its part.

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating (IS), provided context on the work of Inclusive Skating, providing opportunities to people with disabilities and additional needs to access the sport of skating, both on-ice and in-line. There are very high levels of participation of disabled women in particular, as it is seen as a safe and protected environment. Ice rinks are also beneficial as many competitors have difficulty regulating temperature, so cooler temperatures allow them to exercise more vigorously than otherwise. The main issue for the organisation is access to facilities; most ice rinks across Scotland charge a commercial rate of £200 an hour, which enforces a huge limitation on where and how IS can provide facilities. Some areas are fantastic – North Lanarkshire council provides ice at the Time Capsule for dedicated sessions, and skaters only need to pay £5 to access an hour of ice.

The short term challenge is for travel restrictions for over 18s – as the costs mean IS don't have access to all ice rinks, there is a need for skaters to travel. There are very high safety protocols in place, so IS would request for exemptions to be introduced for disabled people to be able to travel for exercise where there are no other facilities available to them. This would make a huge difference to a very vulnerable community. Despite World Championships coming up and two skaters representing Scotland at the Special Olympics, competitors are not seen as taking part in performance sport so athletes have not been able to train unless they can travel.

Significant sums of money have been made available to support facilities and ice rinks; this funding should be contingent on providing access to people with disabilities, who should be able to access facilities at lower cost. Cost is important as for people with additional needs, additional support (e.g. volunteers and the connected training costs) is required.

Ken Hughes (KH), Scottish Sports Association, noted that if we can't be ambitious about the benefits of sport and physical activity now, coming out of the worst of Covid-19, when can we

be? There is a significant opportunity to collectively move sports and physical activity up the policy agenda. It is hard to change the health budget structure towards prevention rather than sickness intervention, but that is what people are now talking about and there is greater recognition for this approach now. SSA members are putting forward a manifesto on these lines, perhaps to place sports in more fertile ground with policy makers. While we can't demand whole system change, we can still be ambitious about what we'd like to see. As an encompassing vision, all people should have equal access and share of resources and facilities available.

KH outlined some of the key themes of the manifesto, including; onus on wellbeing employers, who give people the time and opportunity to be active during working week and to further release the huge potential of volunteers by providing the time and incentives to volunteer; sport as an investment in our future wellbeing, giving leaders the resources, flexibility and certainty to plan longer term in a strategic manner; community facilities to be accessible, affordable, available, inclusive and fit for purpose; pushing community clubs to be seen as part of local community fabric, including a new sports club governance model to aid that role and give them more incentives or benefits, similar to charities and voluntary organisations.

Ron Sutherland (RS), supported comments from Ken, Andy and Alan on maintaining a positive attitude to this. Clearly the pandemic has created all sorts of problems, financial, health and social, and Ron added his personal perspective of impacts. Definitely good to hope sport can be part of the solution, rather than a problem, but sport must be squeaky clean in how we address issues, RS noted. He wrote an academic paper 12 years ago about the positive impact of community sport in local communities, which is still true today. The impacts of Covid-19 have exposed issues and highlighted strengths, weaknesses, and areas of good practice and bad. In sport we should copy good practice while addressing the negatives. A lot of clubs have basically closed their doors and ceased to function during lockdowns; they're going to have a major issue when everything reopens, and preparations have to be made to ensure clubs can hit the ground running.

The approach has been different at different clubs. A small youth football club in the Aberdeen area has done wonderful work recently over six weeks in conjunction with Aberdeen FC Community Trust and sponsorship from a local transport company, where young players delivered over 6,200 food parcels to elderly, disadvantaged and lonely people in the community. There are major benefits in supporting these groups and families and Westdyke Community Club should be very proud of that. A rugby club in Glasgow worked to stay in touch with its membership by creating informative, motivational newsletters going to stakeholders, members and players, keeping them aware of what the club is about and how it is preparing to come out of lockdown.

On other side of the coin, an Edinburgh rugby club which RS has worked with and been a member of has basically closed its doors. RS has been urging the club to interact more with the community, to find good work to do and make an imprint and to portray themselves and the sport in a good sense. The foundation of sport is at grassroots level and grassroots clubs must

ensure and be encouraged, and indeed be supported, to promote themselves as a force for good in those communities.

George Baber, Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS), outlined some of the challenges faced by the approximately 175 riding and trekking businesses in Scotland, and the related supporting businesses such as feed merchants and farriers. Most activity in riding is delivered by businesses; over the past year we've seen 10-20% of these close. There are places in Scotland now where there is no riding school left because they've gone out of business. They're in a difficult position because they sit between leisure, sport and tourism – in Scotland they're in sport, in England they're leisure, and that has had an impact on access to funding.

Additional challenges include the ongoing high cost of horse care, with many businesses sitting on costs of £4,000-£5,000 a month, and the fact that they can't furlough staff because they're needed to look after the horses. In Scotland, these businesses have seen virtual ineligibility to funds, where none of the grants have been accessible to riding schools and there has been a great disparity at council level in discretionary funds, and differing interpretations between central Government and Local Authorities. In England, where they've been treated as leisure, they've been able to access leisure grants and most riding schools have got between £7,000-£15,000 grants in the latest shutdown since November, and English riding schools will also get further restart grants from the process starting in April, which we're not seeing in Scotland.

ABRS has seen massive financial pressure for riding schools in Scotland; while the opening of sports is really welcome, the five mile rule will remain an issue for many schools, and impact on trekking businesses which are predominantly reliant on tourism. The key issue going forward is to stop remaining business failures. Many are on that brink and measures are needed to stabilise those businesses, be it rate relief or a restart grants equivalent. Many are in a desperate position because at this time of year horses are in being fed, they need staff, so the plea from ABRS is not to lose any more schools than have been lost already. It would be very sad as they offer a lot to children and adults alike.

LS added that she has heard from constituents in similar positions, where ineligibility for grants has proved a significant issue for them.

Questions and discussion

Susie Benson (SB), CIMPSA, raised issues pertaining to the workforce. Over the last 12 months we have seen a blurring of the lines between health, sport, physical activity, leisure operations, exercise health and fitness. SB asked what steps can be taken at a strategic level to support organisations in the development of the workforce, linking to facilities, both to meet the needs of community support and to make facility provision accessible, affordable, and to meet the needs of leisure trusts so they can open and operate.

Cammy Watt (CW), Scottish Football Association, noted the significant amount of activity supported by the public estate, either leisure trust or Local Authority facilities, and raised concerns that trusts may have to be selective in opening facilities based on the need to income generate (over local service provision) – this may see the opening of larger facilities first that generate the payback of the monies that have been lost over Covid-19, but there are far more local level facilities than 'flagship' facilities. What do clubs do for provision? Whether it's a sports pitch, a hall, indoor or outdoor, there are real concerns about access.

The potential hiatus between council facilities reopening partially and reopening fully is a real worry and no doubt is for every sport. Football at least can use outdoor spaces, so will be one of the first sports back; CW only too aware that if you're an indoor contact sport you're at the end of the queue on the route map back to reality. How do we approach this; through CoSLA? With a debate in the chamber? It's a real issue that needs to be considered.

Ali Dreyer (AD), noted that in Fife efforts are made to get trust provision and LA provision around the table together. It is not perfect but efforts are made to get people on the same page. AD raised additional point on accountability; West Lothian had for many years fantastic outdoor education provision, but more recently lost a facility and some key members of staff, it was moved into the trust and now this year the trust effectively wants to offload it because it's not an income generator – outdoor education and activity is a great thing, but is never going to be a huge income generator. Now that team is set to be shifted again. If we agree it's a great thing, how do we make it accountable to a trust or LA to make that provision and those opportunities available to young people and adults?

David Fergusson, noted that the challenges for leisure trusts and LAs are not new, and it is an area that has been assessed by OSS. While CoSLA and others will share a lot of good practice across the network, ultimately LAs are having to make their own decisions. They're having to be made in the context of declining funding; research in 2017 showed leisure trust funding had reduced every year for the previous 12 years from its LA. They're under pressure to bring in funding, which is not a good position to be in when dealing with services and facilities that do not bring in money. The facilities that struggle tend to be in deprived areas, they're in real difficulties at the moment. OSS has put together a research project idea that would have government involvement, along with **sportscotland**, CoSLA, LAs and leisure trusts, to try and look at the landscape and get everyone together on the same page - until that happens, we'll keep having situations where councils try their best, leisure trusts try their best, but because it's financially driven they can't support the areas that don't create income. That's not a situation we want to be in for public service, particularly in sport.

SB added the necessity of everybody within the trust environment taking responsibility, both in terms of developing the internal workforce, but also with wider partners and organisations, be

it exercise referrals through Public Health Scotland or working with SGBs and regional managers. Role of leadership from the top, but also from the bottom up to drive change.

RS added a supplementary comment in relation to the £20m Scottish Government funding awarded to Scottish Rugby Union, £15m grant and £5m loan, and noted that hopefully given the content of previous discussions today, a reasonable proportion of that will be devoted to supporting the grassroots community game across the country, rather than the two professional clubs.

Kim Atkinson (SSA) noted that much of the first club-based support in the pandemic came from Scottish Rugby and that she understands that club support remains high on their agenda.

KH added that in public service there is a tendency to create working groups or discussion groups or strategic groups, the output of which is often less of the sum of its parts. We need to get things done, and the answers must be at least partly in our own hands. For community facilities, the vast majority of LA money comes from central government, therefore government guidelines must be incredibly powerful – what are they and how can we influence them? Local accountability is a key factor – how do we go about leveraging it? We do it by acting collectively, to press at various points, the SSA lobbies at national government and Parliament level to press cases - we need to do it collectively.

Rick Kenney (RK), Scottish ClubSport, agreed on the importance of working collectively for the greater good. RK raised a query on how we can continue to share challenges, solutions, good practice and innovation, in sport and recreation. This meeting is a great example of how various organisations can come together and make suggestions and learn from each other. How do we ensure we keep this going, sharing research and information, to the benefit of all?

Thanks were given to all speakers and attendees.

Kim Atkinson noted enormous thanks to both Liz Smith MSP and Alison Johnstone MSP on behalf of the Group for their work on behalf of the sector and as co-convenors of the Cross Party Group on Sport. She also extended this thanks to all MSPs who are vice convenors and group members for their ongoing support.

Liz noted it has been a pleasure, not only because of support of MSPs but work of all members of the Group to support sport in Scotland. If re-elected, she will undertake to hold a debate in Parliament about the power of sport and what we have to do on a cross-portfolio basis to re-energise the country. Nothing is more important.

Liz put on record not only condolences to Ian Findlay, but the importance of his work and contribution to the sector. Minute's standing silence was held.

Liz put on record thanks to all members, to SSA as secretariat, hopes to be back to continue to support sport sector in the new Parliament.

A reminder was given that, as with all Cross Party Groups, the CPG on Sport will be dissolved at the end of the Parliamentary session, and re-formed in the new Parliament. Details to register as a member of the Group for the new Parliament will be circulated in due course.

Next meeting date: TBC