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RESPONSE TO REPORT ON INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY SPORT

I am writing to you regarding the Committee's inquiry into support for Community Sport and specifically regarding Recommendation 8 on the evidence taken on the CashBack for Communities Programme.

I understand that the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport, Shona Robison MSP, will write to you separately with a substantive response on the Committee's other recommendations.

I am rightly proud that since the inception of the highly successful CashBack Programme in 2007, over £50 million recovered from the proceeds of crime has now been invested or committed throughout Scotland, directly benefitting over 600,000 young people and generating over 11,000 young person volunteers who are now putting something back into their communities.

Over £24 million of that investment has provided young people with facilities and positive opportunities to take part in sporting activities in communities across the length and breadth of country. This investment provides a lasting legacy for grass-roots development of Scottish sporting ability in Scotland's young people. Young people going through the CashBack Scottish Football Association and Scottish Rugby Union Programmes, are now going on to become full-time football and rugby development officers and coaches in communities across Scotland. In addition to that, the facilities investment has allowed the expansion of the CashBack Schools of Football and Rugby schemes that sees S1 and S2 pupils offered coaching sessions during the school day and has been proven to help the young people involved improve their attendance and academic performance.

The Committee, in its report, wished to learn more about the correlation between where the money is recovered from and where resources are deployed.

You will know that this Government's strongly held view is that while rightly focussing in on those communities hard hit by crime and deprivation, CashBack should also provide positive opportunities for young people in every community across the length and breadth of the country. It is not just the more deprived communities that lack facilities and opportunities, which is why we are ensuring that all young people, boys and girls, in the countryside and in the towns and cities can benefit. We are due to publish, on the Scottish Government website, the breakdown of CashBack spending across all 32 Local Authority areas which will demonstrate how communities across Scotland have benefitted year on year from CashBack for Communities investment.

In responding to the Committee's interest in the report of Inspiring Scotland's evaluation of the CashBack Programme, it is worth noting that following a number of larger recoveries in 2010 and 2011 through the Proceeds of Crime legislation, the CashBack Programme evolved significantly beyond the original focus of recreational sporting and cultural diversionary activities.

The CashBack Programme now has a much broader base beyond diversionary activity and projects are working more closely together to deliver outcomes for young people and their communities. In order to support that development, it has necessarily required time and investment to strengthen the programme management and infrastructure and to develop an evaluation plan through our delivery team partners in Inspiring Scotland to measure the impact being delivered for young people and their communities.

That investment in programme capacity is essential to underpin delivering this Government's commitment to continuing to expand the hugely successful CashBack for Communities Programme. Individual CashBack projects and the overall programme are now being subjected to evaluation by Inspiring Scotland for the impact and diverse range of outcomes that are being delivered for young people. That work has involved putting arrangements in place to allow a qualitative approach of measuring short- medium- and longer-term outcomes over time. The CashBack evaluation plan will be published shortly and the Scottish Government will then regularly publish the outputs from that as the evaluation work begins to bear fruit.

I trust this is helpful and I would be happy to keep the Committee informed of the outputs on the evaluation work of the CashBack for Communities Programme as that work progresses.

KENNY MACASKILL