



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Mairi Gougeon MSP
Minister for Public Health, Sport
and Wellbeing

Via email only

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22 December 2020

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Health and Sport Committee let me welcome you to your role of Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing. The Committee and I look forward to working with you.

Your predecessor attended our Committee meeting on 15 December and provided further information to assist our inquiry into the impact of COVID 19 on sports.

The Committee welcome the £55m package that the Scottish Government has put in place to provide support to football, rugby and other sports during this difficult period, although we would appreciate further information and detail around this.

Mr FitzPatrick stated the government had found additional money to support sport far in excess of the Barnett consequential which amounted to only £4.5m. Can you indicate from which budgets the additional £50.5m of funding has come from? The Committee are keen to understand what actions and activities are not taking place to make this support available.

The funding the government is providing to lower league football is particularly valuable and, as agreed with Mr FitzPatrick during the session, could be the difference between survival or failure. The Committee are interested in the totality of other funding packages that are available to support clubs and businesses and the extent other sources will be considered when deciding on the levels of funding to be awarded from this package.

During the session Mr FitzPatrick helpfully explained how the money would be made available as loans for SPFL clubs and grants to the rest of the football pyramid. Can you advise the duration of these loans, including those available to rugby? Can you now confirm the rates of interest would be based on the Bank of England's rate?

It was indicated that the approach to administration of the funding was the subject of ongoing discussions with the SFA and the Committee would welcome an update on this, including on specific funding for Women's football. As pointed out during the session, the Women's national team's attendance at the Women's World Cup has been a huge boost to the popularity of the game. It has helped to attract more girls to take up football and it would be unfortunate if this momentum was lost due to funding issues as a result of the Covid restrictions.

We discussed with Mr FitzPatrick the issue of fans returning to stadiums. We heard examples of those teams in Tier 1 who have been able to accommodate up to 300 fans for matches. This number differs markedly from the position in England where teams can have up to 4,000 fans in Tier 1 and up to 2,000 in Tier 2. It would be helpful for the Committee to understand how the available scientific evidence is being interpreted so differently and the rationale in Scotland to restrict numbers to 300, in Level 1 areas and no fans at all in Level 2 areas. We would also welcome detail of the proposals to facilitate the return of fans to stadia across Scotland as conditions improve. In particular, it was indicated that there would be consideration of increasing the numbers permitted to attend in Level 1 areas after Christmas, and it would be helpful to know what increased numbers are being considered and over what timescale.

The Committee was struck by the provision of £15m in resource funding to rugby, compared with £10m to football and £5m to all other sports combined. Officials confirmed that far more professional and semi-professional clubs and players are affected by the loss of income in lower-league football than in rugby. Can you explain why half of all resource funding in this package has gone to rugby, with so much less on a per capita basis made available to the 200 or so football clubs outwith the Premier League?

In a similar vein, the Committee would welcome an understanding of the evidence and rationale underlying support of £2m for Horse Racing.

Many sports and people involved in sports have had to endure hardships during COVID. It is why the government's support package is needed. Can you advise to what extent efforts to mitigate costs by reductions particularly in administration and salaries will be taken into account as a factor in the availability of funding under this support package.

The Committee is concerned how sport will be reintegrated into daily life when the time is right. There are particularly concerns whether there will still be sufficient coaches and volunteers to make this happen and about the impact of the pandemic on young people getting involved in sport. We will be exploring this area further during our evidence session in January and will follow this up with you in writing thereafter.

The Committee would welcome your response by 8 January to allow time for this further information to be incorporated in the next public session of our inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lewis Macdonald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink color.

Lewis Macdonald
Convener, Health and Sport Committee