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Dear Lewis,

### **Impact of COVID-19 on sports clubs and other local recreational facilities**

Thank you for your letter of 17 February 2021 where you highlighted the main concerns raised during the Health and Sport Committee's enquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on sports clubs and other local recreational facilities. To be helpful, I have answered the questions in the order in which they were put in your letter.

#### **Finance**

Q1. Can you confirm whether any ring fencing of the £30m of revenue funding is being applied or whether recipients are free to deploy as they see fit.

Q2. In regard to the allocation intended for rugby, the Committee would welcome further information on what the government has agreed to fund. Can you provide assurances to the Committee that there is robust interrogation on what the SRU, and the other sporting bodies who received money, are actually spending their allocations on.

The recipients are all aware that the purpose of the emergency funding is to protect jobs and infrastructure to mitigate the financial losses incurred due to lack of spectators as a result of the COVID pandemic. Written grant conditions have been agreed between the Scottish Government and grant recipients that this funding is for that purpose only. Periodic reporting will be provided to the Scottish Government by all recipients on how the funding has been utilised as part of those grant conditions.

Q3. While the Committee recognises the positive impact the (Horseracing) sector adds to the real economy and jobs, could you elaborate further on the rationale for support, breakdown how the money is to be applied with the sector, as well as indicating how all other available funding streams e.g. the furlough scheme were taken into account.

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In terms of the funding allocated for horse racing, we have worked closely with Scottish Racing and **sportscotland** to understand and capture the financial impact of COVID across the five racecourses in Scotland, which has also considered any financial mitigation action taken including access to wider government support schemes. As with the emergency COVID funding provided to other sports during the pandemic, appropriate funding has been allocated to each racecourse to help protect jobs and infrastructure

Breakdown of the funding as follows:

- Perth Racecourse – up to £391,780
- Musselburgh Racecourse – up to £387,626
- Hamilton Racecourse – up to £348,623
- Kelso Racecourse – up to £327,215
- Ayr Racecourse – up to £544,756

Q4. Can you update the Committee on what funding has actually been delivered to Netball Scotland and all sporting organisation and whether this matches the proposed allocations. If it doesn't, what are the barriers to money being distributed as planned?

As the Committee will be aware, the funding package was for sports organisations who rely on the income of spectators. I can confirm that the full allocation was given to Netball Scotland in two separate payments, the first on 3 December 2020 and the second on 18 February 2021. These were paid following the application process carried out by **sportscotland**.

I have also detailed the progress of funding being provided to the other sports.

- **Netball:** The full £100,000 allocation has been distributed to Netball Scotland in relation to the Strathclyde Sirens netball team.
- **Basketball:** The full £300,000 allocated to basketball has been distributed to Basketball Scotland in relation to the Glasgow Rocks basketball team.
- **Ice Hockey:** **sportscotland** received applications from four clubs to access funding allocated to ice hockey. It took several weeks for clubs to provide the required financial information to allow these applications to be assessed. **sportscotland** is in the process of issuing offers of awards which once accepted will allow the full £200,000 allocation to be distributed.
- **Motorsport:** **sportscotland** received applications from five motorsports organisations, and have made an award of £300,000 to Knockhill Racing Circuit. Following collection of financial data, assessment has taken place on the other four applications and will communicate awards and distribute funding in the coming weeks.

## Re-engaging participation

Q5. As well as the practitioners of sport, the nation also needs an army of volunteers, as coaches, first aiders and general helpers to return to the numbers pre-pandemic. Sports organisations are already experiencing a drift in interest from those previously involved. A number of reasons have been cited including training now being less fun/interesting more complicated due to having to learn and follow COVID processes, their children no longer being involved. Across the spectrum of sport there is real concern volunteers – “the backbone of sport” are being lost. Providing incentives to entice coaches and volunteers was suggested

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to the Committee as one way to help address these concerns and hopefully mitigate impacts by increasing numbers

As well as hearing about the risks to amateur and hobby sports, the Committee also heard about the risks to future elite athletes who contribute to the country's global success and image. The lack of competition, lack of development in their fields will invariably have an impact to the pipeline of Scottish athletes of the future. The Committee would welcome Scottish Government proposals to address each of these issues.

The Programme for Government commits Scottish Government to working with **sportscotland** and Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBs) to rebuild membership and participation levels following the negative impacts of COVID-19, as well as to build on the positive sport and physical activity behaviour changes we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased walking and cycling, and build wider community participation particularly within disadvantaged and under-represented communities.

Throughout the pandemic Scottish Government and **sportscotland** have worked closely with partners in the sport sector including SGBs, local authorities, leisure trusts, clubs and community sport organisations. This collaborative approach to working with the sector has supported the return of sporting activity in a manner that is safe and consistent with Scottish Government guidance. During what has been a difficult period, we recognise that the sport sector has worked hard to play its part in protecting public health and suppressing the virus. Continuing to work together will be vital to the recovery of the sector as we come out of the pandemic and are able to re-engage more people from across society in sport participation and volunteering opportunities.

A key element of re-engaging participants in sport is to ensure that a strong sport sector emerges out of the pandemic. In addition to the £55m package covered above, Scottish Government and **sportscotland** have provided additional financial support to the sector and accelerated funding of £32.4 million across the sporting system (£17.2 million Scottish Government and £15.2 million The National Lottery) to support SGBs and local partners. The funding has helped protect an estimated 1,600 jobs in the sector. These staff will be vital to supporting opportunities to participate in Active Schools, Community Sport Hubs and our sports clubs across the country.

To re-engage people in sport it is vital to convince them that their safety will be prioritised before, during and after their participation. This is why throughout the pandemic and going forward **sportscotland** has focussed on ensuring the sector has the detailed guidance, resources and training to operate as safely as possible, minimising risk, and communicating this to members, participants and the volunteer workforce. This has included guidance for sports organisations, facility operators, and coaches, while working with SGBs to support the development of up to date sport-specific guidance following each government announcement of changes to restrictions.

We recognise that more will need to be done to re-engage participants and volunteers as we emerge from the pandemic and this will continue to be a focus of both Scottish Government and **sportscotland**.

In the schools environment, the Active Schools programme will remain a central pillar in getting young people participating in sport. With over 400 Active Schools staff across all 32 local

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authorities, prior to the pandemic in a single academic year, over 300,000 young people made a combined 7.3million visits to Active Schools sport and physical activity sessions before school, at lunch time and after school, supported by 21,000 volunteers.

To get back to and surpass these levels it will be vital that we work with and listen to young people to rebuild the enthusiasm for sport. Through the Young Ambassador programme, there are 150 registered secondary schools. **sportscotland** will target these schools to support Young Ambassadors to promote participation in sport in their schools.

## **Women in sport**

*Women athletes have found the past 10 months particularly challenging. In Scotland, statistics show, women and girls are far less likely to be involved in physical activity than men and boys. The lack of organised sport and decreased exposure to female role models during the lock down period risks compounding this.*

*The ingrained perception that women's sport is less worthy than men's has also gained traction during the pandemic. This perception, more a reality, was exemplified in the way the Scottish Women's Football League had to shut down during lock down last year, while most of their male counterparts were able to continue. This only adds to the challenge of increasing women and girl's participation in sport generally as well as finding and developing future female elite athletes.*

*Q6. Can you indicate what proposals the Scottish Government have to address these specific concerns.*

The Scottish Government appreciates the importance of sport and physical activity for women and girls in Scotland and the positive impact that has on their physical and mental health. We want to provide every opportunity for participation in sport and physical activity for everyone in Scotland, no matter their background, and we recognise the key role sports clubs play in local communities.

The definition of professional football was agreed with the Scottish FA and includes the SWPL. We are aware of the impact which the restrictions had on football out with the Premiership and Championship, including the women's game. However, following extensive dialogue with stakeholders, on Tuesday 2 March, the First Minister announced the limited resumption of SPFL League One, League Two, SWPL1 and the Highland League teams competing in the Scottish Cup, all with testing and enhanced mitigations in place. Clubs have permission to return to training immediately. Testing was a condition of the resumption, and no other leagues – including SWPL2 – were willing to undertake it.

As part of the overall funding provided to football, women's football have been allocated the following:

- Scottish Women's Football League 1 - £150,000
- Scottish Women's Football League 2 - £20,000
- Scottish Women's FA - £20,000

While there have been concerns raised about the priority given to women's football during the pandemic, for sports supported by the **sportscotland** Institute of Sport equal priority is given to athletes regardless of gender. As of 22 February **sportscotland** has approved Resumption of Performance Training Plans for 26 sports with athletes training for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2021, or the Beijing Winter Olympic Games or Birmingham

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Commonwealth Games both in 2022. Athletes named within the approved plans must meet the definition of a performance athlete, agreed with the Scottish Government and set out in legislation. Of the 26 plans approved 22 have named male and female performance athletes, 2 have named female performance athletes only (figure skating and netball), and 2 have named male performance athletes only (bocci and para table tennis).

## **Disability sport**

*Disability athletes have also faced particularly challenging times and similar concerns. Their complex needs, and affordability often make it a greater challenge during normal times, while some, do not comprehend why they are no longer able to participate in sport. For many resumption of activity and participation will be like starting from the beginning.*

*We have a proud record of elite Scottish women and disability athletes who have had great success in international events and the country should strive for this to continue.*

*Q7. Can you indicate what proposals are in place to assist in these areas and how these will be disseminated and accessed.*

For sports supported by the **sportscotland** Institute of Sport equal priority is given to athletes with disabilities. As of 22 February 2021 **sportscotland** has approved Resumption of Performance Training Plans for 11 sports with named athletes training for the Paralympic or Commonwealth Games in 2021 and 2022.

The **sportscotland** institute of sport medical team has been central to the planning, monitoring and support for all para athletes that have safely returned to performance training over the last 6 months. In addition, the institute of sport medical team continues to support and advise named athletes who, for a variety of different reasons, have not yet returned to performance training.

Para competition opportunities have been severely curtailed on the international stage due to the challenges of COVID-19, but access to performance training in Scotland has enabled some high profile para athletes to return to competition over the last 6 months. For example Gordon Reid recently won the Australian Open Wheelchair Tennis Doubles title in Melbourne.

**sportscotland** continues to work in partnership and invest in Scottish Disability Sport (SDS) to support as many people with disabilities as possible to participate in sport. During the pandemic SDS created an innovative online physical activity and mental wellbeing programmes to support the physical, social and psychological needs of those unable to undertake outdoor exercise as they were shielding. £16,000 was secured from the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund, which provided a lifeline for many participants through the Be Active Be Well programme. A further £19,950 funding was secured from the National Lottery Recovery Fund to allow more opportunities to expand the Programme, which continues to run. The programme is delivered in partnership with mental health charity SAMH and covers elements of both physical and mental wellbeing.

To cater for people with disabilities who were able to attend sports sessions as restrictions eased, SDS produced detailed return to sport guidance for branches, squads, clubs and individuals in line with Scottish Government and sportscotland. SDS also produced a "Principle for Participants with a Disability Returning to Sport" paper to support Scottish Governing

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Bodies of sport, local authorities and leisure trusts to ensure they were catering for participants with disabilities within their planning. This work ensures that partners across the sector are well placed to support people with disabilities to return to or take up sport as restrictions ease.

## **Mental Health**

Q8. We would welcome the Scottish Government's proposals to address the mental health concerns we have heard about, particularly the ways in which support can be provided to sporting organisations and clubs to assist.

In April 2020, the Scottish Government launched the 'Clear your Head' campaign to help people look after their own mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with partner organisations, the TV, radio and digital campaign and its website provide practical advice and tips on coping with the restrictions and signposts people to further sources of information and support ([www.clearyourhead.scot](http://www.clearyourhead.scot)).

We know the positive impact that physical activity through sport or recreation can have on mental health and wellbeing. Sporting communities have a role to play in using the collective power of physical activity and sport to create positive lasting change in mental health and wellbeing. The Scottish Government, Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) and partners are working closely together to urge sport and physical activity communities to sign up to Scotland's Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity & Sport to break down the barriers that can prevent people engaging, participating and achieving in physical activity and sport.

**sportscotland** and the SAMH have formed a strategic partnership that aims to build capacity across the sport and physical activity sector to better support mental health and wellbeing. The two organisations have worked together to create a route map of support which will build capacity within the professional workforce, supporting their own wellbeing and embedding the mental health narrative into their work. The partnership has initially focused on professional officers across the sporting system and will provide support and guidance to volunteers in communities. Local authority and leisure trust sport and leisure staff within all 32 local authorities have been offered the support. Planning is underway for a similar provision to be made to staff of Scottish Governing Bodies of sport (SGBs).

The **sportscotland** and SAMH partnership has delivered a programme of public communications activity. The Feel Your Personal Best campaign is planned to raise awareness and understanding of the role of sport and physical activity to support mental health. The campaign will launch later in 2021 and will include a 21 Day Challenge encouraging people to commit to physical activity for 21 days.

**sportscotland** also developed and continue to lead the Walk & Talk initiative with support from SAMH, encouraging people to go for a walk while talking on the phone as one way to use physical activity to support mental health. The initiative was co-designed with the Young People's Sports Panel.

From May 2020 to January 2021 **sportscotland** also published more than 50 articles on Sport First about the benefits of sport and the positive impact of sport and physical activity on mental health.

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## Facilities

Q9. What initiatives, if any, have the Scottish Government in place to prevent such closures [facilities]? What measures are the government considering as we come out of the COVID-pandemic to encourage both young and old to access local facilities?

In the early stage of the pandemic, **sportscotland** produced a guidance note for sports facility owners and operators setting out a range of recommended actions to make their sports facility safe and to minimise the work to get the facilities fit for sport when it became safe to resume sporting activity.

As restrictions eased, a suite of Getting Your Facilities Fit for Sport guidance and resources were produced to support indoor and outdoor facilities operators to re-open facilities and resume activity safely. This included specialist advice for gyms, ice rinks, sports halls, sports courts and pitches, swimming pools, and changing rooms. This was accompanied by a series of webinars to bring the guidance to life for facility operators and allow them to ask questions. This guidance, resources and webinars was positively received by the sector.

With regards to the particular challenges facing ice rinks, Scottish Government announced £2million of financial support for ice rinks in December 2020 as part of the wider £55million support package for sport. This support is being administered by **sportscotland** and is available as a one-off grant from the Ice Rink support Fund, to help organisations that are experiencing genuine financial hardship and are considered to be at risk due to the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions put in place to combat the spread of the virus. 17 applications have been received to the Ice Rink Support Fund, with detailed supporting financial information are in the process of being assessed. The funding will be paid out to successful applicants by the end of March.

Looking ahead, **sportscotland** continues to work in partnership with local authorities to support various aspects of their planning, including facilitating the development of local sport and sport facilities strategies. This work includes how local authorities can widen access to school sport facilities and supporting operational planning at individual school level, including developing Community Sport Hubs within schools.

The [Learning Estate Strategy](#) and its guiding principles set out our strategic approach for managing Scotland's learning estate. One of the strategy's guiding principles is that the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised.

## National Strategy

We recommend the early provision of a long-term national strategy to increase the physical and mental health of the nation, through healthier living and for this to be available as we exit lockdown and other restrictions.

Q10. We would welcome comment on how this can be achieved and when it can be available on the ground.

The Scottish Government's Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, developed with partners across a wide range of sectors including health, sport, transport, education and the environment, sets out our long-term and shared vision of a Scotland where people are more active, more often. Our [Active Scotland Delivery Plan](#) demonstrates the breadth of the actions we are taking in partnership to achieve that vision.

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The World Health Organization has welcomed the plan's systems-based approach to working across sectors and has recognised Scotland as one of the forerunner countries in responding to its global action plan on physical activity.

That partnership working has been fundamental to the vital work described above to support physical activity and sport throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and to minimise the impacts on the sector and on people in Scotland as a whole during these uniquely challenging times.

I agree with the Committee's view that the sport and leisure community will be at the forefront of Scotland's recovery from the pandemic. The remarkable work that has taken place across the sector to support communities, develop the COVID-safe sport-specific guidance which has enabled a large number of sports to continue to operate within the restrictions in place at different stages, and to adapt supported physical activity programmes for home and online use, is a strong testament to the passion, commitment and ingenuity of all of those involved.

I am committed to ensuring that we make the most of the huge range of opportunities to ensure that physical activity and sport is central to Scotland's recovery from the pandemic and beyond. We are actively working with partners across sectors to develop and support those opportunities, and look forward to keeping the Committee informed as it progresses throughout the stages of recovery ahead of us.

I hope the Committee find this information helpful.

Regards,

**MAIRI GOUGEON**