

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity, HC 46

Monday 31 October 2022

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Members present: Olivia Blake; Dan Carden; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Mr Jonathan Djanogly; Mr Mark Francois; Mr Louie French; Anne Marie Morris; Nick Smith.

In the absence of the Chair, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown took the Chair.

Questions 1 - 65

Witnesses

I: Sarah Healey, Permanent Secretary, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Ben Dean, Director of Sport, Gambling and Platinum Jubilee, DCMS; Tim Hollingsworth OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Sport England; Nick Pontefract, Chief Strategy Officer, Sport England.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller & Auditor General, National Audit Office, Adrian Jenner, Director of Parliamentary Relations, NAO, and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.



Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity (HC 72)

Examination of Witnesses

Sarah Healey, Ben Dean, Tim Hollingsworth and Nick Pontefract.

Q1 Chair: Could I say a special good afternoon to our witnesses? I apologise on behalf of the Chair, who is in court giving evidence, not on her own behalf but on behalf of a constituent. That is why she is not here and I am chairing the session.

Welcome to this session of the Public Accounts Committee for Monday 31 October 2022. Today, we have officials from DCMS and Sport England to discuss why levels of adult participation in sport and physical activity have declined in recent years. We also want to discuss whether they are applying lessons from the previous big sporting events, such as the Olympics, which cost £8.8 billion, and the Commonwealth games, which cost £778 million; how they plan to tackle inequalities in access to sport and activity; and how their approach might have changed after the Covid-19 pandemic.

We send a warm welcome to our witnesses. We have Ben Dean, director of sport, gambling and platinum jubilee at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We have, of course, the Permanent Secretary of DCMS, Sarah Healey, who is well known to the Committee. Next to her is Tim Hollingsworth, chief executive officer of Sport England. Next to him is Nick Pontefract, chief strategy officer for Sport England. Welcome to you all.

Before I start, we have one declaration of interest, please, Nick.

Nick Smith: I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Parkrun.

Chair: Are there any other declarations of interest? If not, we will move swiftly on to items at the top of the session. Nick Smith, you have an item on broadband roll-out.

Q2

Nick Smith: Yes, in Wales. In July, our Committee heard from Ms Healey and comrades about gigabit roll-out across the country. After that, one of her colleagues, Paul Norris, from Building Digital UK, brilliantly came to Blaenau Gwent to hear about young people and the importance of broadband improvements for getting them into jobs, so it was a really good visit. I am glad he came. Thanks ever so much for that.

I was hoping for further information on gigabit broadband roll-out in Wales in the late summer, and then anticipated it again. I was told it was put off slightly until October, but the paper still has not come, so I wonder if I could chivvy you along, please, Ms Healey. Where is it and how is Blaenau Gwent going to do on this important subject for my constituents?



Sarah Healey: You can definitely chivvy me along on that. I know that the public review has completed and we have done some presentations to local stakeholders. I am not sure if that is the report that you were looking for, but I would be very happy to make sure that you get that as soon as possible.

Q3 **Chair:** You very kindly sent us an update just very recently, on 27 October, of various items. Could I ask you to give us a latest update on the shared rural network programme, the so-called not-spots and areas where we cannot get mobile phone signals?

Sarah Healey: I do not think that I have anything further from that letter. It is just four days ago.

Q4 **Chair:** You might be able to add a little further to something that is relevant to the whole of this hearing, which is the lottery. Could you just clear up for us where exactly we are with the lottery? Has the whole legal case been withdrawn and will there, therefore, be a continuum from Camelot to Allwyn without any disruption to funding to Sport England?

Sarah Healey: Helpfully, Ben also looks after gambling and lottery, so he will correct if I am wrong. Go on, Ben; you can take this.

Ben Dean: The contracts with Allwyn have now all been signed, so it is now the fourth licence holder. That is now guaranteed. The legal case with Camelot continues, so Camelot is still continuing to pursue its overall claim against the Gambling Commission, which is due to be heard in January. Whatever the outcome of that case, that cannot change the outcome of Allwyn taking over the fourth licence.

Q5 **Chair:** As a subsidiary to that, Allwyn has pledged to give more money to beneficiaries, so does that mean that Sport England could expect to get more money from Allwyn?

Ben Dean: Yes. It is all done on a percentage basis. If the overall pot is more, which is what Allwyn has said in its business case it will achieve, all the distributors will receive more.

Q6 **Chair:** Can I ask you, Ms Healey, a slightly less commodious question? You wrote to the Chair on 11 July about the Unboxed project. You told us in the letter to the Chair that, as far as you were concerned, as the accounting officer for DCMS, the regulatory, proprietary, value for money and feasibility were all in order. Could you just tell us a little bit about the aims of this project and how it is getting on today?

Sarah Healey: I am absolutely happy to. You will know that the NAO is currently conducting a study into Unboxed, so I am sure I will be discussing the outcome of that with you at some point in the future. Unboxed was intended to be a festival of creativity, bringing together different partners that would not normally work together on projects, which combined creativity, especially with STEM activities, and issues that raised science, technology and innovation.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Its specific purpose was to present free, large-scale events across the country. There was a specific request to try to reach communities that did not normally engage with arts activities or have arts activities based in them, so not to follow the model of a traditional festival or single activity like a Millennium Dome, or the creation of a capital project that might be based in one location, but to have activities in locations across the country.

A whole range of proposals were put to the Unboxed team and 10 were selected as the best examples in order to showcase British creativity, innovation and talent. We continue to monitor engagement with all of those and the progress of those activities. You will almost certainly be aware that, indeed, one of them is being featured this evening on television, but also that SEE MONSTER, probably one of the most anticipated ones of these commissions, has recently opened in Westonsuper-Mare. It is the use of an old, disused oilrig for a creative installation.

The project went through all the appropriate clearances and stages in DCMS approvals, and we have monitored the spend throughout, as we would normally. It is being delivered at arm's length from the Department through a subsidiary of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games, led by the chief creative officer of the Commonwealth games, who has also led Unboxed.

We do not have any final confirmed visitor or engagement numbers, but we are very happy to update the Committee with all of those when we do have them, and I am sure that they will form part of the NAO study on Unboxed.

Q7 Chair: Why, if you are assuring this Committee that everything is going so well, did the DCMS Select Committee, in recommendation 4 of its recent report, say, "Since the event's inception in 2018, the aims for Festival UK* 2022/Unboxed: Creativity in the UK have been vague and ripe for misinterpretation by the press and public at large"? And this is even more damning: "We see no evidence to refute such scepticism now. The desire for it to seemingly cater to everyone, everywhere, is a recipe for failure and investing £120 million in something when the Government, by their own admission, 'did not know what it was' is an irresponsible use of public money". Those are quite strong words from the Select Committee. How come there is such a dichotomy of view between the letter that you wrote to us on 11 July and what the DCMS Select Committee is telling Parliament?

Sarah Healey: Our assessment of Unboxed is that it has pursued a set of objectives that were set out for it, which were particularly about creativity reaching local communities. I am sure that there will be some lessons learned that we have from the events overall, but I am not, at this stage, going to sit in front of you and say that all the processes we went through in the Department were not appropriate in clearing this as a project through its various business cases and stages. Indeed, many of the activities have taken place in areas that do not normally have access to these kinds of examples of culture. As a set of activities, they have also brought together



groups that would not normally work together to do something unusual and different, and there has been a lot of value in that.

Chair: We will leave it there. As you say, the NAO is looking at this and hopes to report by the end of the year, and we will look at that fairly carefully. May I now move on to the main session and ask Louie French to come in, please?

Q8 Mr French: The London 2012 games were a brilliant success, in many ways, for our country, with a clear physical legacy in many parts of London and the country, but sports participation has largely flatlined since then, if you look at the official statistics. Why did the Department not deliver on the promised legacy of increased sports participation following the 2012 games?

Sarah Healey: Thanks for starting off with acknowledging the broader legacy of the 2012 games, which is quite extensive, both in the communities in which it took place and more broadly across the country. For instance, perceptions of disability were fundamentally changed particularly by the Paralympic games in 2012. We certainly have great evidence of the economic benefits, regeneration and community benefits, and infrastructure benefits, of London 2012.

As the NAO Report sets out, there was a reduction in participation activity in the immediate years following the games. There was a rise between the point where London secured the Olympic games in 2005, and 10 years after that. Nick can probably say more about this, because he was head of sport in the Department at the time, but, partly reflecting on the situation with levels of participation, we had a new sport strategy post 2015, which set out a different approach to trying to produce an increase in activity levels. Indeed, that happened quite successfully over the course of 2016 to 2019, with a substantial number of extra people participating in physical activity.

Unfortunately, we saw a very severe Covid effect on levels of participation. That is of significant concern to Ministers and is the reason we are currently preparing a new sport strategy to try to achieve the reinvigoration in sports participation that we saw from 2015 onwards.

Q9 Mr French: Do you believe that there was a missed opportunity to spread the Olympic legacy much further afield? If you look at the statistics in the NAO Report and compare Sport England grant funding for central and east London, where there is that clear physical legacy, which I do not think many people would dispute, with my constituency just across river in Bexley and others further afield, the funding levels are four to five times higher. Was there a missed opportunity to spread that legacy further afield?

Sarah Healey: I will let Tim come in on the numbers and Sport England funding.

Tim Hollingsworth: Good afternoon, Sir Geoffrey and the Committee. I can absolutely see that one of the results of the physical legacy of London 2012 was a demonstrable benefit to the area around the games and the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

other locations. Indeed, if we fast forward to this year, you can see the same in and around Birmingham and the west midlands relative to other parts of the country.

What has been really different in the period since is that, as the Permanent Secretary has acknowledged, we recognised, as Sport England, but also generally across sport, that the very huge benefit that can come from hosting a games, a lot of which has been outlined, can take you only so far in sustaining activity levels if you are not engaging people in the communities in which they live.

To answer your question, Mr French, in terms of the facilities base and also specifically in trying to engage people in sport and physical activity, the transformation of strategy in 2015, which was really geared towards engaging people in ways that made sense for them, rather than presuming that they would pick up on the back of a major games, was a fundamental shift that has enabled us, for one thing, to be more targeted in our approach, but also to see areas of the country that have previously been less well served receiving more funding as a result.

Q10 Mr French: I have friends who teach in the Stratford area. I appreciate some of the legacy schemes that are going on to encourage people from quite deprived backgrounds to use that, and that has been an excellent part of the legacy. It is just the other parts around the country where I do have concerns.

Ms Healey, you mentioned some of the legacy reporting and changes to approach in subsequent years. The Department stopped publishing legacy monitoring reports after 2016 and failed to complete its evaluation in 2020. Why was that? Can you also confirm who is now responsible for longerterm legacy?

Sarah Healey: In 2016, the decision was made with the new sport strategy that we would report on that, rather than specifically on legacy from the games. To your point on 2020, I have to say that the sport team was completely overwhelmed dealing with the response to the pandemic, and so writing a report on the update to the sport strategy, I

am afraid, was one of the things that they did not manage to do alongside all the other things that they did manage to do, in terms of Covid support and recovery, and engaging with sport on reopening major events. It was not because they were not interested in ensuring that people got to participate in sport. Indeed, they spent most of their time during the pandemic on ensuring that people could do so as early and as safely as possible, but they just did not publish that report.

As far as the overall legacy from 2012 is concerned, certainly in sporting terms, the Department and Sport England still feel that we are the owners of that and want to continue to build on that, both in other major events and in the way that we set out the sport strategy for the future.



Q11 **Mr French:** Just to be clear on that point, while we appreciate the Covid point, are you drawing a line under it or can we expect a report to be published?

Sarah Healey: When we have a new sport strategy, we will report on that rather than an old one.

Q12 **Mr French:** Will that include the legacy and the sports participation lessons from 2012?

Sarah Healey: It will continue with the same plan that we had from 2015, which is to report on that strategy rather than on a legacy from 2012, where those reports were merged into the sport strategy updates.

Q13

Mr French: You have mentioned the Commonwealth games already and, bringing it more to the present day, a number of brilliant sporting events are happening across the country, including the Rugby League World cup currently. What lessons were learned from 2012 and how were these included in planning major sporting events, including the women's football?

Sarah Healey: I will ask Ben to come in on what we have been doing post the women's Euros, but we certainly did take into account lessons from 2012 in the planning of the Birmingham Commonwealth games in a number of different ways. Some of the really positive lessons from 2012 on the economic legacy have formed a crucial part of what we have been doing when planning the Commonwealth games, creating new jobs and skills, putting a spotlight on Birmingham and the west midlands, encouraging visitor numbers to increase, infrastructure developments, like the Sandwell Aquatics Centre in a deprived area, and providing the only Olympic-sized facility for quite a significant geographical distance.

The redevelopment of the Alexander Stadium, as well as other community and housing developments, resulted from the situation of the Commonwealth games being in Birmingham. The volunteering programme had a big impact in the London 2012 games but has also carried on in Birmingham. If you were in Birmingham during the Commonwealth games, you could not fail to feel the huge sense of enthusiasm from the volunteers who were involved in it. Then there was the integrated parasport programme, which was the first of its kind.

In all aspects of how we planned the Commonwealth games, we tried to place legacy at the very heart of it. We did not do it in quite the same way as in 2012, because it was recognised that our planning of legacy had to be rooted in what we learned as we got into the detail of what communities wanted and what their priorities were, rather than set out at the start, and had to be embedded in every aspect of the games, rather than thought of as something separate.

Tim might want to say a bit more about that, because I know that he has been involved in thinking about how we really embed the sporting legacy



as part of Birmingham 2022, but do you want to come in on the women's Euros, Ben?

Ben Dean: One of the things that we learned from 2012 and now use is something that we have developed called the gold framework, which we published. An updated version will be published later this year, hopefully, when we publish our new sport strategy. It is to help guide sports that want to host big sporting events in the UK in terms of helping them, us and UK Sport to decide which ones we should back. We are ensuring that we have a transparent process with sports. Be it a European championship, a world championship or one of the huge mega events such as the women's Euros, or the men's Euros bid that we are doing for 2028, we can look at all the different criteria in terms of the economic benefit, the volunteering benefit and what the legacy will be, and ensure that we are thinking about that right from the beginning, even at the bid stage.

Tim Hollingsworth: It would be a really good moment, if I may, to also then reflect on your question around what we have learned from London. I had the privilege in London of being the chief exec of the British Paralympic Association. I am not the person who is going to stand here and not say that it was one of the greatest experiences, not only of my life, but also for this country in the last decade or so.

We did learn some lessons from things that we have done better in Birmingham. One of the key ones was to put the sport and physical activity legacy at the heart of the pre-games planning, and to recognise that, first and foremost, you need to be thinking about the local communities in and around the games benefiting from the obvious profile that the major games has given.

In London, I would argue that, from a sports participation point of view, we were too assumptive that national programmes would deliver local benefit. The other way around is the case in Birmingham and we have been very effective in concentrating investment—there was significant spend still with the national governing bodies of Commonwealth sports— but also thinking about the local communities in and around Birmingham. Within £35 million of investment of national lottery money from Sport England, we focused on the team. We invested, as Sarah has already mentioned, in key facilities, but, even there, we were very focused on the local community, whether it is the Sandwell Aquatics Centre or the Cannock Chase mountain biking park, both of which were built with legacy and the local community in mind.

We also invested very substantially in programmes to connect the local communities to sport and physical activity—the waterways and canals in Birmingham, the opportunity in local streets and parks, as well as significant cycle activity. We had a different approach in Birmingham of trying to meet the local people where they are at, in a way that would make the games relevant to them, rather than assuming that just hosting it in that city would work.



That has been, I think and hope, a very successful approach. Already, in terms of numbers, just one programme—a £3 million investment into connecting active communities in the four areas of Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull and the Black Country—has delivered nearly 75,000 people to activity, including some of the people who previously felt least well served. We are very confident that we are creating connections with local communities and local trusted partners, who can then make sure that the people of Birmingham and the west midlands feel the benefit well beyond the games.

Q14 **Mr French:** That is very helpful, and I completely share your sentiments regarding the Paralympic games and the benefits of the Commonwealth games to the people of the west midlands. Just touching on the legacy from here going forward, you mentioned a couple of bodies that are involved there, but who will be responsible for delivering the legacy of the Commonwealth games going forward?

Sarah Healey: We will be working closely, as we did in the delivery of the games, with a whole set of partners. I do not think we can exclude the fact that we need to work with community partners as well as have a view ourselves. DCMS is the overseeing Department for the Commonwealth games and will see itself as the central Government Department responsible for delivering the legacy, but we will continue to work very closely with the West Midlands Combined Authority, with Birmingham City Council, with the other local authorities that were involved in the delivery of the games, because, as Tim set out, the communities are the places where a lot of these things really happen, and with Sport England on the overall national impact.

Q15 **Mr French:** In terms of working with other Departments, if we just move away from the Commonwealth games to the women's Euros success, which was a source of huge pride for the whole country and, hopefully, inspires another generation of girls to get involved in women's football, how much work will you be doing with the Department for Education to make sure that that sports participation is picked up, particularly among girls in schools?

Ben Dean: We will do a huge amount. They are a key partner and we work daily with them. When we publish the sport strategy, we hope to publish alongside that a school activity plan, which is all about how we are ensuring that the benefits of sport are utilised and seen through the school facilities, both in the school day and using those sports facilities outside the school day. We work incredibly closely with them.



Q16 **Mr French:** Will there be an opportunity for local sports clubs to engage with that work?

Ben Dean: The Department for Education has already announced that it has a £30 million fund, which is all about making sure that the local community can get access to those schools facilities, so that, when the school day finishes, they are not just locked up and made inaccessible. We know that a lot of areas are already doing this, but how do we expand that to ensure that the caretaker or other people who are needed can open up those facilities, where the school is happy and where the local community would like to use them, so that they are seeing much more utilisation?

Anne Marie Morris: Can I ask a supplementary just on that?

Chair: Yes, I was going to bring Mr Djanogly in, but I will allow you to come in first—ladies first, of course—for your maiden appearance on reappearance in this Committee.

Q17 **Anne Marie Morris:** I was interested in the way you answered that question, Mr Dean, because access is very important. It does sound like you have worked well with the Department for Education to get schools to recognise the need to share their facilities, but I wonder what you are doing and what there might be in your future strategy to motivate. It is no good having facilities, or a programme or strategy, unless you can motivate that engagement. That is partly how you can use the school, I would have thought, and the kids as ambassadors, as well as what you can do within the community and, dare I say, the doctors and local GP surgeries, because the community is quite broad, to bring motivation. The question is how you bring motivation to the party.

Ben Dean: I absolutely agree with you. We are looking to work with Ofsted as well as the Department for Education, because this is about motivation. It is also about accountability and transparency. We know that a lot of schools are doing this already off their own back, but we want to make sure, with Ofsted, that there is more accountability so that those facilities are being looked at and schools are explaining where they are using them and, if they are not, why not. Ultimately, these will be decisions for individual schools, depending on what the community around them needs, but we would expect schools to be working with their local community on that, absolutely.

Q18 **Mr Djanogly:** If I can head back to the Olympics and the legacy, from what our witnesses have said, there is a legacy and there are benefits. What I am still not quite sure of is whether, 10 years later, we can look back and say whether there are £8 billion-worth of benefits, which would buy a lot of social housing or could be a lot of money to go into disability sport in itself. We have not yet had any quantification. I do not know how easy it is to do, whether there are reports that have already done that or whether reports are going to be coming out to do that, but I would be interested to hear a little bit more as to how we can quantify the value related to the £8 billion cost.



Sarah Healey: I should start by saying that most evaluations, whether of the whole or of part, suggest it far exceeded the £8 billion of benefits. Simply in trade and investment benefits, and games-time promotional activity, it was valued at £14.2 billion, delivered in two years rather than four, as well as the regeneration activities. We also carried out a meta evaluation of the games. I have to say that I am not hugely, deeply familiar with it, because it was published before I was in DCMS, but there has been a full evaluation of London 2012.

In fact, we also published an Olympic games impact study in 2015, so there has been quite a lot of material published that has assessed the value. I have quoted the economic benefits on the trade and investment side, but we would certainly anticipate the regeneration benefits to be significantly greater. We also know that quite a lot of work that Sport England has done suggests that, for every pound you spend specifically on sport and physical activity, you get a £4 return. The London Olympics were not cheap to put on, but certainly our experience is that that major event, run and planned well with legacy alongside, will have significant benefit.

Mr Djanogly: That is a very important clarification—the fact that we got our money’s worth, apart from the sporting issues.

Q19 Chair: I have a couple of questions that go back to the last questions that Mr French and Anne Marie Morris were raising, probably for you, Mr Hollingsworth. Why do we not capitalise on these big events and use our sporting champions, quickly and at the time, in order to encourage disadvantaged groups that they could also do it?

Tim Hollingsworth: To a degree, we do. For example, our colleagues at UK Sport, who fund our Olympic and Paralympic athletes, require athletes, as a result of that funding, to spend a number of days each year in schools and in communities giving back of their time and acting as inspiration.

I would argue with you that that is not necessarily the best driver particularly for inactive people. There is quite a lot of evidence that came out of London 2012 and other major events that they are immensely inspiring in terms of people’s sense of engagement, enjoyment and national pride, but it is not necessarily inspiring of activity because it does not look like something that they could do.

Inactive people, under the definition of the Chief Medical Officer, are doing less than 30 minutes of activity every week, so saying to them, “Look, there is Chris Hoy; you should go out and ride your bike for a kilometre in four minutes,” is probably not going to be the thing that inspires them.

We have learned a great deal over the last decade about what role our great sportsmen and women can play, which is genuinely inspirational to young people, going and telling their story, and showing them what is possible. Again, if I think about so many of the Paralympic athletes I know, their ability to show what is possible and how you can overcome the barriers that you might perceive to be there is really important.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We need to use them for that, though, recognising that the real barrier to entry in terms of activity is more people having the opportunity, the motivation and the capability combined. We are focused very much on opportunity. It is very much structural challenges that are in the way of inactive people getting active, not just inspirational challenges. There is huge value to our Olympic and Paralympic success, but it is not necessarily inspirational of activity in that way.

Q20 Chair: I am sure that others will want to come back on how we get that spark of people who are inactive. We will come back to that, I am sure. Ms Healey, paragraph 1.9 on page 19 says, “In 2021, it commissioned an independent review of existing research, which concluded that little strong evidence exists to show that sporting events can enhance mass sport participation”—in other words, give you a legacy in sporting terms. Is that why you did not ringfence any legacy for the Birmingham Commonwealth games?

Sarah Healey: No.

Chair: That has been a criticism.

Sarah Healey: I answered this earlier in saying that we could have set out a legacy budget quite separate from the budget for the rest of the games, but one of the lessons from 2012 was that you need to build legacy into every single aspect of what you do in spending money on major sporting events, and that is what we did for Birmingham. Subsequently, we have identified some funding that will continue to be spent in Birmingham and the west midlands in particular, in order to cement some of the legacy there, but that is not the reason. It is that we had learned a lesson that setting out a separate legacy budget early on in the process, before you have really understood how to make a difference in local communities, is not an effective way of securing legacy.

Q21 Chair: What can the west midlands expect in terms of legacy spending? We know that one or two high-profile venues like the aquatics centre have been built.

Sarah Healey: That is being worked through at the moment—the use of that particular funding, which was contingency money from the games that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

has not been used, because the games were brought in on budget. I do not have any specific details to give you right now, but we have done quite a lot of work on planning legacy into that and thinking about how we maintain that enthusiasm within local communities as we spend that funding.

We will want to set some of that out in our evaluation of the Commonwealth games, which we are going to do at the right point. We have already set out a framework for how we will evaluate the Commonwealth games, but we learned from 2012 as well what the right kind of time period is to take a proper, really holistic view of what the impact of the games has been. Q22 **Chair:** I hear that answer, but if I were Mayor of the West Midlands I would be saying to myself, "What is the likely spend from the legacy?" When can we expect the results of that evaluation?

Sarah Healey: We announced spending of the contingency money, and that is currently going through a process with local partners in terms of how that will be spent. I should just emphasise that that is not the only money that is legacy money. It is important to recognise that the whole £178 million was spent with an eye to legacy throughout, and so we should not think that the separate identified budget for legacy is the amount being spent on legacy. That is not the right way to think about this funding and the way in which the games have an impact.

Tim Hollingsworth: If I can come in on that point, it is the same lens also for the £35 million that Sport England invested directly in the sport and activity legacy. We embedded in advance the programmes that we were looking to deliver, but they are funds and programmes that we are running post-games. We have a very good opportunity still, for example, for local communities to access the places and spaces fund, which is the facilities fund that is still available for clubs and local community groups wanting to upgrade their local facility.

I will mention the Commonwealth active communities funding, which has built partnerships embedded in four of the regions of the West Midlands, which we are looking to sustain now going forward. Even though the magnificent games came to an end and the circus moved on, we have been very clear that the legacy of the games, locally and regionally particularly, should be felt for years to come.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q23 **Chair:** That is really good news. Ms Healey, I have a key question on something that you mentioned. You have this new plan going forward that was supposed to be released in the summer of 2022. Can you tell us why it has not been released, what the problems out there are and when we are likely to see it?

Sarah Healey: Do you mean the sport strategy?

Chair: Yes.

Sarah Healey: We have had some changes of Ministers in recent times, but we have continued to work on getting a sport strategy ready to go as quickly as possible. I do not know if you want to expand on that, Ben.

Ben Dean: The aim of the sport strategy is exactly the same. As my colleagues have said, part of the key focus there is how we really focus on the inactive as well as how we improve our data monitoring and make sure that what we are doing is very place specific. In terms of the timing, because we have had new Ministers, they, understandably, want to meet stakeholders for themselves and do that level of engagement before we publish it. We apologise for the delay.

Q24 **Chair:** The second half of that question is when we can expect to see it.

Ben Dean: We do not have a confirmed time yet, but we are very keen to publish it as soon as we can.

Chair: We usually get the standard answer: "in the autumn", "in the winter", "Christmas" or "before Christmas".

Sarah Healey: It is in the next period of time.

Chair: Does that mean this year or next year?

Sarah Healey: We would hope this year, but as ever it is subject to a set of political clearance processes, which we are not wholly in charge of.

Q25

Chair: The report hints that there are discussions going on between you and Sport England as to exactly what the objectives should be in this new plan. Has that all been resolved? Are the two of you clear in your own mind what your sport strategy should be going forward?

Sarah Healey: Whenever you have an expert arm's-length body like Sport England, it would be completely remiss of the Department not to engage that arm's-length body and ensure that we are working hand in glove.



Q26

Chair: Are the two of you ad idem?

Sarah Healey: Our sports school strategy, of course, covers slightly more than just the activity that Sport England does, and it has its own strategy for how it implements its own funding and money, but, yes, we work completely hand in glove with Sport England on development of those objectives.

Chair: That is not quite the answer to the question. I know a political answer when I see it. Are your two strategies now aligned?

Sarah Healey: Yes.

Q27

Chair: It is just waiting for ministerial sign-off.

Sarah Healey: We are working through with new Ministers, who have not been in post for a very long time and want to engage with stakeholders themselves, to make sure that they have had an opportunity to understand the process that we have gone through in developing the strategy, that they are absolutely sure that the strategy is doing the things that they want and has the priorities in it that they want to see, and indeed that they are engaging with their colleagues across Government, who are also responsible for elements of delivery, to ensure that the strategy is covering all of that. That is what we are working on.

Ben Dean: As the Permanent Secretary has said, a key element goes back to previous questions. We need to work with Department for Education, and we want to work with Department of Health and DLUHC. There are lots of partners here who we want to make sure are fully on board, but clearly Sport England has been a major partner in this. One of the key things that we are very aligned on is the need to tackle the inactive—those who are not doing any activity—and we are 100% aligned on that.

Sarah Healey: Nick, you wanted to say something.

Nick Pontefract: Yes. If it is helpful for the Committee, I can say a little bit about the strategic framework that exists now.



Q28 Chair: We know about the strategic framework that exists now. What we are much keener to know about is what the strategic framework going forward is going to be. How do we spark these people who are not even doing 30 minutes a week that Tim Hollingsworth is talking about? That is the key question. Let us get at it. How do we spark them?

Nick Pontefract: The answer to that is a combination of three different characteristics. In order to get somebody to change their behaviour and do something positive that we want them to do, they need to have the confidence to do it, the opportunity to do it, and the motivation to do it. We have found in the past that we have probably over-relied on the opportunity side, so we have focused on building facilities and opening up clubs, and assumed that people will then take up that provision, because sport is so clearly brilliant. Clearly, we feel that, but lots of people bring lots of different motivations to it and come from very different places.

Our strategy that we published a couple of years ago starts to look at how you build the confidence side and the motivation side, so that you can persuade and influence, show people the benefits and that people like them can do it, work with local communities, and have provision that they recognise from providers they trust, because not everybody will trust a top-down programme from a central Government body or from Sport England.

Coming back to the Olympic legacy point, we are starting to see that purely the provision of opportunity does not give people the spark, as you say, to get them into it. The real challenge is that, with a population of 50 million, there are 50 million answers, and so we need to offer a real breadth of opportunity and lots of different tactics and techniques for how we start to unlock that.

Back to the point about the DCMS strategy, we are in absolute lockstep. We developed our strategy with our colleagues in DCMS, but our strategy is flexible enough that, if new Ministers have new priorities, we can adjust how we deploy our resources.

Q29 Mr Djanogly: With post-Covid participation rates the lowest on record, and with the cost of living crisis upon us, is that going to make it even worse? Have you prepared for that? Is there a strategy required to deal with that?

Nick Pontefract: As well as an annual survey of sports participation rates, we do what we call a quarterly check-in to see what the mood of participants is. We are starting to see an increase in levels of anxiety about how impacts on people's personal finances and disposable income might impact on their activity levels. It is not as binary as thinking, "My income has gone down by x; therefore I am going to cancel my gym membership", or whatever it happens to be.

Clearly, for some people that may well be the case, and we are starting to see the beginning of that for some people, but what is more common at the moment is people adapting their activity. Rather than have an expensive gym membership, they might be switching to a low-cost gym



HOUSE OF COMMONS

provider. They might be taking advantage of something much lower cost or even free, like a parkrun or an open outdoor gym in a local park, or just going for a jog with a friend or a kickabout in the park.

We are seeing changing of behaviour rather than an overall reduction, but we continue to monitor it for exactly that reason. We have seen gains post Covid, where the numbers have started to go back up again as opportunities have opened up and more things have been provided. If that starts to dip again, we know the levers to pull and the techniques that will help address it—for example, highlighting to people through our communications channels and the campaigns we run those things that are free and low cost, so that people can access those things as easily as possible.

Tim Hollingsworth: If I may add just one point to that, you are absolutely right. The pandemic was a unique circumstance, because everything was shut. Here, there is a different pressure that people are finding, but in terms of sports clubs, community groups and local authorities we are finding some of the cost pressures that they are facing. We have learned some good lessons in relation to our Covid response about how flexible we can be with our existing resources, as well as thinking about further resources. For example, in how we present the opportunity for local sports clubs to access small grants from Sport England, we can now be flexible. If they are really focusing on the cost of living or if they want to do something around their energy costs—perhaps they want to become more energy efficient and need some funding for that—that seems to us to be a very sensible approach, given the circumstances that they find.

We have some levers on the supply in terms of how we have learned from the pandemic what we can do with local clubs, but, as Nick says, with the big impact for us now being the cost of living, it is not, in the same way as Covid was, a blanket. Apart from the very welcome hour a day that, hopefully, everyone took advantage of during the lockdowns, it is not the same circumstance where everything is shut and, therefore, the limitation on people is so extreme.

Q30 Nick Smith: If I could, I would like to take us, every pun intended, back a few steps. It has been good to hear about the fantastic successes of the Olympic and Paralympic games and the Commonwealth games, the brilliant time that some of us had as spectators, and the regeneration impact of it and so on, but this is about grassroots participation in sport and physical activity, so we need to focus on that, if we can, please.

If you look at figure 3 in the Report on page 18, it says that adult participation in sport at least once a week through the period 2006 to 2016 pretty much flatlined. That is the truth. It hardly budged. Mr Hollingsworth, why did the £1.9 billion that Sport England spent since 2015 on your sporting future strategy lead only to a modest increase in participation pre-pandemic? That is a lot of money but not very many extra bucks.



Tim Hollingsworth: There are a couple of questions in that, Mr Smith. I can certainly answer the second one first. I do not think that what we recorded from 2016 to 2019, which was the last recorded date pre-pandemic, was a modest increase. In the report, our colleagues at the NAO described the 1.1 million extra people we were seeing being active every week as statistically significant.

It is not just 1.1 million people, but 28 million people every week being active on a regular basis, because we start from zero every week. We do not bank any of the activity levels that we have. It is an inconsistent, discretionary activity in our lives. Getting an increase like 1.1 million over that period is quite meaningful, because what it was doing was two things. It was focusing on inactivity, so not only how we can increase the number of people who are described as active and doing the 150 minutes a week, but where we can put our time, our energy and that, as you say, very sizable sum into the challenges faced by people who are doing less than 30 minutes.

On top of that, we have learned a huge amount from the change in the Government strategy in 2015 to why this matters as well for our economy and our society. To Sarah's point earlier, that £1.9 billion, according to a report done by Sheffield Hallam University—I think the Member for Sheffield has just left the room—returns £3.91 for every pound spent. The model is there. It is pretty robust. There is a value to society in that investment, as well as the participation rates being as they were.

Chair: Just before we go on, I may have misheard what you said, Mr Smith, but the figure is, as in paragraph 2.19, £1.7 billion over six years from 2015 to 2021, just to put it on the record.

Q31 **Nick Smith:** You do a great job, and it is really important stuff. All power to your elbow, but what we are interested in is your effectiveness, and we really want you to be a success. That is absolutely where we are coming from here. Mr Hollingsworth, how much credit can you take for the increases in activity between 2016 and 2019, when the activity with the biggest increase was walking, brilliant though that is? There are other things you are talking about supporting and doing, but it is walking that is making the biggest increase.

Tim Hollingsworth: Walking has, indeed, become a very significant part of what we measure. That is very important. Walking, as recorded in our active life survey and, therefore, in the numbers you have in front of you, Mr Smith, has to be registered as being done over a sustained period of time against the CMO's guidelines. It was attaching it to that that made it relevant. Walking is really important for engaging inactive people and is, ultimately, an Olympic sport. You can make the link in that way. More than anything else, walking is a way, generally, of making sure that we are recognising that, for a lot of people, moving from inactivity to activity is a huge challenge, and this is a place to go.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Your question is about our ability to influence that. I completely accept that by no means are we solely investing in and then achieving that number of walking people. We do invest substantially in partnerships to assist people to do so. We have great partnerships, for example, with people like the Forestry Commission, the National Trust and the Canal and River Trust. There are significant areas for people to go out and enjoy walking.

We have also been very clear, where we can work with, for example, Age UK and other organisations working with older people, about how beneficial that can be. We do have some outputs that could have made a difference, although I am not going to say that it was our investment that drove that, but nor are we suggesting that the overall active lives number is something that we solely are investing in. We have a lot of public money every year, but we do not have enough to get the whole nation active by any stretch of the imagination. We need to be focused very clearly on where we can make the biggest difference with our investment to help inactive people become active and to help people who are active sustain that.

Q32 Nick Smith: Mr Pontefract, could you talk a little more about promoting walking, please? It is an important area for our country.

Nick Pontefract: Yes, I would be delighted to. It is an incredibly important part of the mixture that we offer, for the reasons that my colleague set out. Just to emphasise this, the threshold that we use is the one set out by the Chief Medical Officer, so when we measure people's participation rates across the year, for them to score in the walking category, it is not going for a slow jaunt to the corner shop. You have to have done it for 150 minutes across the week. You have to have done it at moderate intensity. We ask through our survey, "Did it raise your heart rate? Did you break a sweat doing it? Were you out of breath in doing it?" It is having a genuine benefit to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

It is the gateway through into different types of activity, and is part of a really useful mixture within some of the partnerships. Hopefully, we will have the chance to talk a little bit more about our local delivery pilots, where we are working in 12 specific areas, with lots of different partners in an ecosystem in a particular area, to understand what the totality of the barriers are to people getting active.

For some people, that will be something like, "I cannot book a tennis court" or "I cannot afford a tennis racket," but for some people, it genuinely feels like, "Doing physical activity of any form is just something that I do not feel like I can achieve." To Tim's point earlier, if you say to them, "Here is a carbon fibre racing bike; why do you not go and cycle as quickly as you possibly can around this velodrome?" it is completely unattainable.

What we see is that the mixture you need to offer for different people can helpfully include walking. As a sports council, simply achieving lots of people walking does not achieve the totality of our mission, but it is a really important part of the blend that can help get more people active.



Nick Smith: Chair, I should also say that Parkrun is now rebranding itself as Parkwalk to encourage more people to participate.

Tim Hollingsworth: I am glad you make that point.

Q33 **Nick Smith:** That point is worth making. Mr Dean, I mentioned that I chair the APPG on Parkrun. It says here that, since 2004, over 3 million people participate in a parkrun every year globally. How good are the Department's relationships with Parkrun UK, given that it has been such a global success? How hand in glove do you work with them?

Ben Dean: I am a huge fan of Parkrun. It does an absolutely fantastic job. It goes back to the point about having a really good ecosystem across the board, where we have lots of organisations that are not just waiting for Government to lead the way but doing initiatives off their own back. Clearly, with Parkrun, it is not just engaging with us, although my team do engage with it, but also engaging with DLUHC, because of the community aspect there, and making sure they are getting access to the parks that they need to get access to. With the lockdown of facilities during Covid, running was such a key part of things, but maintaining that is absolutely critical to what we want to see. Parkrun is a major partner in that.

Q34

Nick Smith: Parkrun gets about a million people to run every year. It has about 150,000 volunteers every year. Do you take notice of the methods that it uses to draw people in to participate, and the way the organisation works, which could be a good model for other sports and communities?

Ben Dean: There is a great deal that Parkrun does that we love and want to see replicated. I know that Sport England engages closely with them as well to see where we can learn lessons from that and where it can be rolled out.

Q35 **Nick Smith:** I want to widen it out, if I could, because there have been references to working with other public organisations too. Mr Dean, on a broader note around physical activity and public health, how well do you engage with local authorities to emphasise the mental and physical benefits of participation? How well do you work with other Whitehall Departments? Is it a proper partnership?

Ben Dean: We work very closely with other Departments, particularly the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Transport and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Those are major Departments that all have an important role to play here. Clearly, DLUHC leads on local facilities and leisure centres. The Department for Transport includes a new organisation called Active Travel England, chaired by Chris Boardman, who is also the chair of Sport England, which plays a major part. As we have already talked about, the Department for Education works in schools, and the Department of Health, precisely to your point, plays a role in things like GP prescription and the benefits that we know sport can have for mental health as well as physical health. I know that our new Minister is meeting his colleagues—



Q36

Nick Smith: I will come back to GPs and prescribing later. I want to just take up this point about working with the Department for Education. I understand that there is no statutory requirement for PE lessons in schools in England. There are only Government recommendations for a mere 90 minutes per week. Do you think that PE should be mandatory and measurable in English schools?

Sarah Healey: I am not sure if that is for Ben to say.

Nick Smith: The Department for Education is one of your partners and you are promoting physical activity across our country.

Sarah Healey: I know but, ultimately, changing the policy about what is in school curricula and what we ask schools to do is not a matter for us. It is a matter for our Ministers to decide on.

Chair: That is a fair point.

Nick Smith: It may be a fair point, but the good people of Blaenau Gwent might think that that is a bit odd, I must admit.

Ben Dean: What I would say is that we do work incredibly closely with the Department for Education. We recognise how important activity is. We know that childhood inactivity is about 30% and, clearly, if you are an inactive child, you are more likely to be an inactive adult, so we know that that journey is incredibly important. We work very closely with Sport England on understanding where people drop out of the system as well. We know that teenage girls often lose contact with sports that they like, which is why the This Girl Can campaign has been so successful.

One of the things that we do with the Department for Transport and the Department for Education is to think about the journey to and from school. We know that active mile is really important and, if you can make it a safe journey so that kids can cycle and walk to school, that is great.

Q37

Nick Smith: Chair, I will leave that point about PE being mandatory to one side. I will ask other questions about other bits of the state.

One of the brilliant things about the NHS is the Couch to 5K app. Lots of people have done it. It has been an encouragement for people to go on and run or do other physical activity. Are you engaging with the NHS about supporting that app and seeing if you could operationalise it better? Tell me more about the work that you are doing with the NHS, please.

Ben Dean: We work with the Department of Health, which, in turn, does the close engagement with the NHS. Certainly, our colleagues at the Department of Health are very engaged in this and fully see the benefits of sport. They know the statistics in terms of the mental benefits of being physically healthy, reducing reliance on GPs, the likelihood of having diabetes and all sorts of other things. We have no problem engaging the Department of Health. It fully sees the benefits of this. It is about making sure that we have a clear, joined-up action plan, which is exactly what we are trying to do through our sport strategy.



Q38 **Nick Smith:** My sense is that, in the round and in principle, you are in favour of it, but you do not have anything specific to say about operationalising Couch to 5K.

Tim Hollingsworth: I could come up specifically with an example for you in relation to how something like Couch to 5K could be prescribed, for example. You mentioned, briefly, social prescription as something that you are interested in. We have worked previously with Public Health England and now with OHID—the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities—specifically on a programme called Moving Healthcare Professionals, which we are investing in primarily, with some support from the Department of Health, to engage GPs and primary healthcare professionals in better understanding the opportunities for non-clinical prescription. Social prescribing is at the heart of it—the idea that there is an opportunity for GPs to give people an option that does not involve drugs.

To your question about Couch to 5K, it is a classically good example of asking, “Have you thought about this as an opportunity?” We have been right in acknowledging, with Public Health England first and then with OHID, that GPs and primary healthcare professionals do not have confidence in what they are prescribing. The Moving Healthcare Professionals programme is very much geared to giving them the tools to do that and the awareness of what is possible. Couch to 5K is part of a suite of things that we would be considering there.

Ben Dean: Another small example is school games organisers. I do not know if you have come across them, but they are 450 people who are funded with £4 million from DCMS and £7 million from the Department of Health. Their role is to work at least three days a week in schools to help school provision around sport, and particularly to help facilitate activity and school games, essentially. They particularly focus on areas of higher social deprivation and lower activity levels. Again, this is a really good example of where we and the Department of Health have worked jointly on an initiative.

Q39 **Nick Smith:** On Saturday, Sir Geoffrey, I was in Barry Island doing the Barry Island parkrun with the Parkrun Cymru outfit—a great set of people. Part of the day was engaging local health professionals to get involved in social prescribing. It is a phrase that has been used a lot in recent years, but I am just not sure how much of it there is. It is a brilliant initiative and I am trying to encourage GP practices locally in Blaenau Gwent to get involved in our two local parkruns in Aberbeeg and in Parc Bryn Bach in Tredegar. There is lots of political support for this. It was not a partisan thing. The local Conservative MP was there and, previously, Members from all parties have been involved too.

I suppose the point for me is how likely it is to take off. How much oomph are you, as a central Department, putting into it for it to take off? How many people are socially prescribed to, say, walk or take physical activity



HOUSE OF COMMONS

in a year? Do you have any data on that that you could share with us, please?

Nick Pontefract: I am afraid I do not have the latest statistics on social prescribing numbers for exactly the reason you are highlighting. The whole concept of social prescribing, whether it is sport or in arts and culture, is still pretty nascent at the moment.

One of the things we are learning through our partnerships is how to do that most effectively: how to reduce the anxieties that you sometimes see from the healthcare sector about what to prescribe, what level of intensity and for what condition people happen to be experiencing. We are testing some of those things. That is the point we have got to.

We are not yet at a national roll-out of social prescribing as a core part of the healthcare ecosystem. We are trying to build the evidence base to demonstrate that unequivocally, so a GP can take one look at it and go, "Well, this is clearly as effective as prescribing this pill here for the particular condition." We are not there yet, but we have taken some really brilliant steps on the journey.

Tim Hollingsworth: Can I add one more quick point for you? This is a fantastic place to be thinking about how we can transform activity in this country as a whole and the health and wellbeing of the nation.

As Nick says, this is a responsibility for the healthcare sector. Our job primarily is to make sure they understand the opportunity that sport and activity can provide and then to make sure that service provision, whether it is the local club, the local facility or the local parkrun in many cases, offers up something that feel safe, welcoming and attractive to people when they go.

We are very aware that this is a great area for partnership. Nick mentioned the local delivery pilots that we have been running in the last five years, which were about doing things differently and understanding how to embed a lot of what we do much more in local communities. I think particularly of Exeter and Essex, which are two of the 12 pilots. There are others. Greater Manchester is a third.

We have been very well placed, because of the partnerships we are building with the local authority, the local active partnerships and the local sports clubs, to engage with GPs and the health sector in place and make the modelling of social prescribing something that we are much more focused on. The evidence base coming out of our local delivery pilots will then help those making national decisions to understand further the benefit you saw last week.

Q40 **Nick Smith:** There was fantastic enthusiasm from the health professionals at "Barrybados", as we think about it in south Wales. Thanks for answering that set of questions.



I have a related point about community engagement and support for community infrastructure. When I talk to the coaches of local junior clubs in south Wales—I know we are talking about England, but this is my local experience—they ask, “Could we have many more all-weather pitches?” Certainly at weekends, lots of young people I know get their activity stymied because heavy rain and poor pitches mean they cannot see through their league’s activities.

What conversations have you had with local government and with property developers building big estates and infrastructure to ask, “Could you fund more all-weather pitches so the local community could benefit from all-weather playing through tricky winters?” What is going on there, please?

Ben Dean: I totally accept that point. We fully recognise, particularly as we get into winter, that the number of games that get cancelled because of the pitches is really sad to see. The Government announced a couple of years ago the sports pitches fund. We have £230 million that we are rolling out between now and 2025. Up to 8,000 pitches will be built or redeveloped.

We work closely with local partners to understand what they already have in place and what their needs are. The constant balance is that clearly it is fantastic to have a 4G or 5G pitch, but they are very expensive. It can cost up to £500,000 to build a new 4G or 5G pitch. It can cost £10,000 to build a new grass pitch. It is all about getting the right balance so we have enough facilities where we need them, where there is demand and where it is ideally self-sustaining. If there is enough commercial opportunity for things like Powerleague, which often use these facilities, that is where we will look to invest, if we can.

Q41 **Nick Smith:** I am just trying to do the maths in my head. Did you say £230 million until 2030.

Ben Dean: We have £230 million in this spending review. The commitment is to build or redevelop up to 8,000 pitches by 2025.

Nick Smith: Smashing, that is very good news and very cheering.

Q42

Anne Marie Morris: I still get a sense that we are talking about doing things to people and people doing it in their spare time, as opposed to the motivation piece, which Mr Pontefract and I violently agree is the critical missing piece. It seems to me that we have not transposed the thinking we have at school age, where we say, “You integrate sport into the school curriculum.” We know that is now common. After that, when you are in the world of work or you are out of work, going through the benefits system and trying to get into work, it seems to me there is no thinking to try to involve BEIS or to motivate businesses to get involved in this agenda. They will have healthier and more productive employees if they are engaged. We know the large organisations, PricewaterhouseCoopers etc. have all sorts of schemes like that. Why should it be limited to that sector? They



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are in a very different position to the medium and very small-sized businesses. Surely there must be some incentives that would help local businesses become much more engaged in this agenda to have more sport and more physical activity.

Maybe it is about tax relief on gym memberships or, frankly, even just having an exercise bike somewhere on the premises. Equally, dare I suggest, when you are going for a discussion about benefits, is there any reason why it should be a centre where you are only going to discuss benefits? Why should there not be somebody from the Ramblers, an exercise bike or something, so it becomes integrated in the world of work in the same way as you integrate it in school?

It seems to me that might get us a little further along the line of motivation. I can see that Mr Pontefract is absolutely keen to give us an answer.

Nick Pontefract: Yes, very much so. Over probably the last five to 10 years, we have come to the realisation around the provision of our sports facilities that a single-use facility is of value, but it is not as valuable as when you co-locate a number of services together.

Working on the business side is an area that is probably a bit underdeveloped for us in terms of how we prioritise, although I know there are plenty of schemes out there, like the cycle to work scheme, to do some of that incentivisation. Lots of employers give a healthy living allowance to their employees.

We have absolutely learned, through the provision of sports facilities, that you are much likely to increase both footfall and people's confidence to use those facilities if a facility is shared with a doctor's surgery, a library or a benefits office. It could be anything. We have experimented with lots of different permutations, but one thing we have absolutely learned is that those multi-use type facilities, both sport and non-sport, make a facility feel much more rooted in a community and make people feel like it is not so big a deal to walk over the threshold.

If it is a scary-looking elite gym where everyone in there does not look at all like you, that is a really big step for some people to take. If you are in there anyway because that is where you go to pick up your prescription or your library card, it feels a lot easier for people to then go, "Well, there is a try-out session for swimming with some people who also look like me, so I am going to give that a try."

It is not quite in the business space yet, although I hope some of our advocacy work will show to major employers the benefits they really can get. The co-location of services is absolutely at the heart of what we do with our facility delivery.



Q43 Anne Marie Morris: I am delighted to hear that. I would encourage you to do more, but co-location is only step one. You are still not getting to the motivation. You still have to go through that door, even if it is in the same building. There is something about engaging, as you and I probably agree, employers to make it in their interest to engage and make them understand that. That goes across all sizes of business, as part of their social responsibility, which increasingly they are beginning to recognise.

I am delighted that there is a concept of locating exercise facilities where you might go and see what benefits you are entitled to. I have yet to see it. I would love to see something like that in Newton Abbot. Can you give us an example of where this has happened, in such a way that it is easy and user friendly, so you do not have to go through a separate door, and there is an exercise bike or a chap from the Ramblers? Do you have any examples of having done this?

Nick Pontefract: I cannot speak for the Ramblers specifically, but quite a lot of our facility development in the last five years or so has had that at its heart. I am struggling to recall the name of the leisure centre that we featured in our strategy up in the north-west of England, but perhaps we can write to you with some examples and some guidance that we have and some of the other guidance that we provide to help employers start to understand this.

I know we have done some work to provide an active employer toolkit that helps the beginning of the journey about what you can offer and how best to offer it. If it is an area you are interested in, we would be delighted to share some really positive examples.

Q44 Nick Smith: I want to look at inequality in access. Mr Hollingworth, why has your work with lower socioeconomic groups and people with health conditions not translated into national change?

Tim Hollingsworth: Insofar as you can find the evidence that it has not, the reality is that it is hard and it takes time. That is particularly true when you are thinking about some of the most stubborn inequalities that we have within our society. We have recognised very openly with our strategy "Uniting the Movement", which was published a couple of years ago, that these stubborn inequalities are the biggest barriers to effecting the change you are quite right to seek.

We are confident, though, that we now understand more about what those barriers are and how to address them. I could point to a number of ways that we are working differently to try to get the opportunity for people who historically have felt excluded from sport and physical activity, or who have felt that it has not been for them, to recognise the opportunity.

One is definitely to be unashamed in our investment of public money on prioritising those groups. While we recognise that sport must be a universal thing within our society—we want everyone to have the opportunity to play—our money and time should be best spent on those communities who currently feel least well served. That can be socioeconomic, but it can certainly be in relation to disability and longterm health conditions.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There was mention, for example, of the partnership that we now have with the Richmond Group of Charities. That is a very unusual group of organisations for an organisation like Sport England to work with. They are charities representing members of our communities with long-term health conditions, but we work very closely with them now because we recognise that they are the people trusted to engage those communities.

The We Are Undefeatable campaign, which has been running since 2019, is a really good example of how we have translated what we know about what makes people want to be more active or engage in activity to a community who previously felt excluded from what we had to offer.

We are starting to see some change in the numbers. We did see, unfortunately, that the pandemic had quite a brutal impact on the inactivity of people from some of the most underrepresented groups. Strategically, we recognise that this must be our priority now.

Q45 Nick Smith: I am glad to hear that, but I have to push back. How can you say you are directing spending towards the least active when the share of local grants going to lower socioeconomic groups actually fell following your 2016 strategy? That is what the report says.

Tim Hollingsworth: Partly that is in relation to how we are looking at where those groups are in terms of local authorities and the way we can measure our spend. At the moment, 27% of our investment in the last year has gone into what we know as IMD1, the most deprived areas of the country. I would like to reassure you that we know the challenge is there.

I can give one further example. Very recently, through the pandemic, we recognised that our funding alone is unlikely to engage those groups because they have not seen Sport England as relevant.

Nick Smith: You have to put your money in first.

Tim Hollingsworth: We go in through our partners. We are working with 90 partners on the Together Fund. That is a £40 million fund. Between then, they have reached 6,000 local clubs and community groups in the most deprived areas of the country, 80% of which have never had public funding before. We are changing our way of working very strongly to meet that demand and that change.



Q46 **Chair:** Can you just describe that? You say that you recognise the damage that has been done and that you are changing your strategy. How are you changing your strategy?

Tim Hollingsworth: I would point to a couple of ways. One is the way that we have described variously in the course of this hearing: we have learned to do things differently by piloting in local areas a very specific focus on—

Chair: I mean specifically on Mr Smith's point about those local authorities in the bottom quartile receiving less money than some of the authorities higher up in the quartiles.

Tim Hollingsworth: Partly that is due to where the organisations are based. They might be distributing money nationally, but that is recorded as being where they are based. While they might be based in London and the south-east, a lot of the money is going out to other parts of the country. The Football Foundation would be a great example of that. It is based in London, but its funding is predominantly going around the whole of England, sadly, I am afraid.

The reality of the way we are working is much more about recognising the power of distributed funding through partners that we trust and that we work closely with. We have what we have called system partners— Parkrun is one—which are organisations we know we can trust with the delivery. We know them; we understand their governance and the way they work. They are also well placed to reach those communities and organisations in the most deprived parts of the country.

Q47 **Chair:** The report makes it clear that part of the problem is the difficulty and the complexity of making applications. You need to make those simpler so those local authorities are able to apply for those grants.

Tim Hollingsworth: It is not local authorities. It is a really welcome finding. We recognise that. One of the big challenges we have set out in "Uniting the Movement" is for us to make our funding more available, when it is open funding, to people who have found it previously harder. We learned a lot, again, during the pandemic. The huge amount of funding that we were able to distribute through the community emergency fund, for example, taught us something about our processes.

I will give you the best example I can. If we work with locally trusted organisations such as England Boxing, an active partnership in a region or Disability Rights UK, these organisations know where the groups are. StreetGames and Sported are two other excellent examples of organisations within our sector. They can reach those organisations much more easily than we can, and therefore those organisations can access the money much more easily.



Q48 Chair: Just to get slightly below the surface of this, during the pandemic the number of organisations you funded went up sixfold and there was an additional £271 million in the year of the pandemic. Yet the rate of activity has hardly gone up as a result of that. Are we going to see a great increase in activity in the coming year as a result of that activity? What does that teach you? You have reached all these different organisations, but the level of activity has not gone up.

Tim Hollingsworth: What we learned in the pandemic was how we can make our funding quick and easy to access. It was emergency funding. That was survival. In my view, that funding was an absolutely necessary intervention by Sport England, in support of all the Government funding, to enable our sector to survive the pandemic.

It was not about the progression of activity levels. A huge amount of what we did in that year was to enable the sector to survive and, alongside the Department, to help administrate significant investment from Government through the sport survival package. It is almost counterfactual. We cannot prove what benefit it has had, but we can demonstrate what harm would have been caused if we had not done it.

Having enabled the system and the sector to come through the pandemic, we have to build on what we learn from that to make our funding easier to access, to work through trusted partners and to work locally in place.

Q49 Nick Smith: Mr Hollingsworth, we hear what you say about funding national bodies that may redistribute funds across the country. On page 37, figure 12, it is quite clear that money has dropped as a percentage of local authority spending from 40% down to 34% in the fifth quintile, the most deprived 20% of local authorities. That is a bald fact. Your Department is failing people in local authorities in the most deprived areas.

Tim Hollingsworth: I do recognise that. That figure is in the report. It relates, as I said, to where some of the national organisations are based rather than where the funding then goes on to be received. We now have a greater ability to distribute at a local level and therefore to work in place to maximise the funding that goes into the most deprived areas.

Q50 Mr French: I want to follow up on a point the Chair just made. Figure 8 of the NAO Report highlights that, with the exception of walking, as we have heard already, participation in other sports and activity has declined up until November 2021. What is the view of the Department? Is this being written off largely as a Covid hangover? Are there any assurances that you can provide that the new strategies you are talking about will deliver an uptick in sporting activity and participation?

Sarah Healey: We would think that it is largely a Covid effect because it was not the trend pre-Covid. Clearly, as Tim just set out, during the course of the pandemic it was really important that we did not lose the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

infrastructure and ecosystem that supports activity. That is what our survival funding managed to do.

The pandemic in sport, as indeed in the arts, has led to a closer relationship between the Department and Sport England, local areas and the sports sector than we probably had previous to it. There is a lot to build on here, but the precise goal of the new strategy and of doing a new sport strategy is to say, "This dip in activity is something that we want to see reversed." That is what the strategy will be focused on achieving.

The story we have told about what happened post the 2015 strategy does show that it is possible, through targeted Government activity and through learning the lessons of the past, to make a statistically significant difference to activity levels. That is what we will be aiming to achieve through that work, collectively.

Nick Pontefract: Is it helpful if I add a bit more depth? You mentioned the different types of activity. In one sense you can look at the total activity levels for the nation, but hidden within those statistics are some big changes. We have referenced the increase in walking. The story for team sports, for example, through the pandemic is quite different.

For some obvious reasons, gathering 22 players on a football pitch or in a couple of changing rooms is not an advisable thing to do during Covid. We saw an enormous drop-off in team sports and have therefore had to work really hard on the recovery for that. Working with the Department we invested £30 million in what we called the return to play. That was something like 2,700 grants to lots of organisations, including teams, to put measures in place in order to get back and get active.

There are also some longer-term and almost systemic changes hidden within those numbers. The increased activity level for older people, not solely through walking, is a real positive. We have seen that older people were one of the first groups to return to pre-pandemic levels, which is a really welcome sign. There is a level of nuance within there as you unpick the different activities, not necessarily sport by sport. Clearly, individual things you can do by yourself returned more quickly than things like team sports.

We have a whole theme of work called "recover and reinvent", so we get back to where we were before, but we build something that looks better and is more able to satisfy people's changed demands for sport and physical activity in the future. That is right at the heart of what we both do.

Q51 Mr French: On that exact point, targeting the inactive is going to be key to delivering the increase in participation rates. In terms of sharing positive examples, I was at a train station quite recently. They had set up an exercise bike to help you charge your phone. I thought that was a great idea to get people, particularly the younger generation, who spend far too



HOUSE OF COMMONS

much time on their phones—I am not one to speak, given my physical health at the moment—to engage in sport.

What work can you do to target that younger generation of people who maybe are not participating in sport as much and who may be spending more time online et cetera?

Nick Pontefract: It is one of the major strategic challenges that we have, between us and our colleagues in DCMS, and beyond. There are some obvious reasons for that. We are competing for everybody's discretionary time and energy. With more competition particularly for what young people and young adults can do with their time, trying to persuade people to play sport and be active is a harder sell than it used to be.

We know that the only way we will be successful is by adapting the offer of sport and physical activity. What does it look like in practice to go and play for your local football team or to go for a swim? If you market the product from 30 years ago to children and young adults now, you are not going to be successful.

This is why I mentioned reinvention. One of the things we are actively investing in with our partners is for them to trial new ways of playing those sports. That does not mean completely ripping up everything you have ever done as a sport, but we know that, like everything, you need to adapt or you will be in decline.

Sarah Healey: You need to talk about the nightclub swimming pools.

Nick Pontefract: Yes, or fluorescent badminton. This was something we invested in before the pandemic, in fact, on seeing the decline in levels of swimming. People just did not see it as such a fun activity as they might have done before or as some other things that competed for their time.

We invested in some experiments. What does a different experience of swimming start to look like? You chuck a load of inflatables in the pool and let people lark about a bit or you turn the lights down and put some music on. We did the same with badminton. I forget which university it was, but one university trialled Friday night neon badminton. You turn the lights down; you make everything glow in the dark; you put some music on; and you let people drink in moderation, very sensibly. They have a bit more fun than they maybe would do if they were presented with a very traditional offer of sport.

The coexistence of those things is where a healthy sporting ecosystem will go in the future. It does not mean leaving behind everything that you would do if you entered a competitive pathway for that sport, but there is no harm in people having some fun while they are doing it.

Chair: I hope, Mr Pontefract, you are increasing the number of patrols. If we are going to have this party in the pool, we need to make sure it is done safely.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nick Pontefract: Absolutely, yes.

Ben Dean: A lot of sports are leading the way and adapting their own sports, be it with tag varieties or, recognising that some people are short of time, things like T20 cricket. They are trying to create alternatives, recognising that not everybody has the same amount of time they used to.

Mr French: As you have mentioned cricket, it would be remiss of me not to mention that Bexley were crowned national club champions for the first time in their history this year.

Sarah Healey: You only just got in before we mentioned it.

Q52 **Mr French:** It is an example of what local sports clubs are doing to promote the work they do in the community. I represent a constituency that has a full range of sporting clubs and social clubs targeting all different age groups. The point made earlier about sharing the resource and the expertise between schools and sports clubs is vital.

It has been mentioned already. Particularly for football, the targeting of 3G and 4G provision is great, but we have to be mindful that it does impact other sports negatively. On the 3G and 4G, I am aware of one case locally of hockey clubs losing the number of facilities they have open to them because 3G and 4G facilities do not suit the sport. Any comments on how we adapt to those clubs going forward, alongside football clubs and others, would be appreciated.

Tim Hollingsworth: That is a really well-made point. In relation to your previous one, I should just say that I really agree. One of the things we miss in building what we describe as our young people's physical literacy, which is the thing we should be letting them learn when they are young, is that the best driver of young people being active is enjoyment and fun. That is what takes it into an active adult life.

The point made around the mix of sports that use facilities, particularly outdoor facilities, has been addressed very directly precisely for the reason that you raise. It is brilliant—because football is the most played team sport by some distance in this country—that we are focusing so much attention on improving the facility stock of both grass and artificial pitches, 4G pitches, for football and, indeed, more informal small-sided facilities, particularly within our more urban communities.

In 40% of the investments being made by the Government that Ben mentioned earlier, we are insisting that that money is put towards multisport facilities, not just football. That will drive exactly that sort of thinking about what pitch stock there is available in our local communities to make effective change. Even better, we can then work beyond that to allow the groundspeople looking after those pitches, whether they are grass or artificial, to know how to maintain them for multisport use.



Again, through the Football Foundation, which is the delivery vehicle, we have a partnership with the Grounds Management Association and an app they can use called PitchPower, which enables them to get quick and thoughtful expert advice on how to maintain or improve their pitch and how to do that, not just for football, but for the other sports as well. We at Sport England have put another £15 million of national lottery funding in to enable hockey, cricket and the rugby codes to benefit from that in terms of added investment.

Just being single sport, we have learned through the course of today, is not the best approach to take, particularly when it comes to our facilities base. We have to recognise the different needs of the different sports and do that accordingly.

Q53 Chair: On this theme, I have some schools and some academies that are very good at opening up their facilities to the community. Others say, "No, it is much too difficult," and they do not do it at all. What can we do about those schools and academies that do not open up their facilities to the community? How can we encourage them?

Ben Dean: That goes back to what we were saying earlier. We are working very closely with the Department for Education. Its school sport and activity plan will be published at the same time as the sport strategy.

Part of that is using the £30 million fund the Department for Education has set up. If there is a key reason or barrier that schools have, which can be as simple as needing a bit of extra funding to pay for that caretaker to lock the pitch up at the end of its use, that fund can help meet that gap. It is also working with Ofsted to make sure there is accountability and transparency about what schools are doing so that communities know how good their local schools are at opening up or not.

Q54 Mr Djanogly: There was some interesting evidence submitted by the LTA, which said that some 45% of public tennis courts are not fit to be played on. In this case, the LTA is proposing to put in a very significant amount of money, together with Government, to address that problem. That is very good to see, although 45% of courts not being fit is not a good figure, I would suggest.

When it comes to the use of public and multipurpose sports facilities,

which you have been advocating, in my experience a lot of clubs that would go in to use these facilities still cannot charge people enough to pay for the rent of the court for the afternoon or whatever it is. Is that an issue you are looking at as well—not just providing the facilities but helping people to use them?

Nick Pontefract: I am very happy to address that. There is a genuine challenge, in that the business model on which the provision of public sector leisure is built is relatively fragile. Back to your question before about the cost of living crisis, one particularly worrisome element of that is that lots of facilities providers have burned through their organisational reserves to stay afloat during Covid and therefore are in quite a precarious position.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There is a challenge in balancing the revenue generation those facilities will need in order to keep operating with not charging such high levels that it puts people off being active, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds. We see lots and lots of very thoughtful, sensible and positive local authorities and other partners doing their absolute utmost to do that, but I am sure there are plenty of places where the challenge is real.

Our resources cannot support that entire ecosystem—it is a multibillionpound sector—but we do everything we can to advocate for the most reasonable prices, where we see that price is an issue. There are lots of places where price is less of an issue and where revenue generation is a really important part of the ecosystem.

Q55 Mr Djanogly: I would suggest that for most local authorities in this day and age getting revenue from these multipurpose gyms is an important part of what they do. They cannot afford the subsidies that they perhaps once could. The point I am making is that, for people to be encouraged use these places, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas, somehow they have to be able to pay for use.

Tim Hollingsworth: Again, we talked about how we are always wanting our sector to think about not just recovery from the pandemic but the reinvention of the sector. Public leisure is a really good example where the model in 10 or 20 years' time probably will need to be different.

One thing that is successfully coming out from some of our local delivery pilots, working much more closely in a place and in quite a forensic way, is acknowledging that, when the link is made at local authority level particularly to the health and wellbeing benefits that are driven for the local population, that ability to affect the spend is often made easier at a political level.

Perhaps one of the ways we can see this evolve positively is for local authorities, rather than seeing leisure service support as being discretionary, to think that it is about the public health and wellbeing of their constituents. You can see that in Manchester, for example. Manchester is a very good example of where that is happening.

You are absolutely right in the context of the cost of living crisis, but also in the general context of a strategic ambition to enable people who previously felt less well served by sport, that the price point of activity within local clubs and community groups remains an issue.

Ben Dean: It is worth saying that one of the very reasons we have the pitches fund that I mentioned earlier of £230 million and the fund we run with the LTA on tennis, courts worth £30 million, is precisely that us putting in more money helps local authorities keep those costs as little as they can.

Q56 Mr French: I have a question linked to that. Given some of the current and future challenges, it would be really helpful to understand the



Government's thinking around the short-term and long-term sustainability of sports clubs. In the short term in particular, what are the thoughts from the Department as to how you are going to help sports clubs keep the lights on or help the likes of swimming pools stay heated this winter? Over the longer term, will you invest in renewable energy, sustainability and other schemes to encourage energy efficiency in the irrigation of sports pitches, etc?

Sarah Healey: I will start with the energy issue. We are not responsible for policy on energy specifically, but clearly the energy bill relief scheme will assist sports clubs in dealing with increased energy costs. That will be reviewed at the point the Government have said it will be reviewed. We will clearly need to look at what the impact would be on clubs in particular. We are very conscious of the impact particularly on, for example, swimming pool from the costs of heating. Ben might like to say more about what we are doing to monitor the impact in the sector.

Ben Dean: In the short-term, there are two things I would point to. Getting through Covid, both survival and recovery, was critical for us. As has been mentioned, we had the sport survival package, which has put over £260 million of loans and grants into 15 sports. Over 1,600 organisations benefited from that programme, and we are very proud of it.

No club that received funding went into administration during Covid, but we recognise that many clubs are coming out of a really difficult period and many clubs are struggling. We have seen a couple of high-profile rugby clubs recently going to administration, so we are fully aware that clubs are not out of the woods yet. We are wanting to support them there.

As Sarah said, on energy we know the current package can provide up to about 40% off bills, but clearly the Government will be looking at and reviewing that in the coming months. Going forward—again, this is part of our strategy—we know how important sport is, but we know it relies on an ecosystem that uses Government funding, lottery funding as well as commercial funding. That model will continue going forward and we will support it.

Q57 **Mr French:** Will there be future working between you and BEIS on this?

Sarah Healey: We work closely with BEIS and have done since the beginning of issues with energy, as BEIS has done across Government.

Mr French: There are longer-term benefits in many ways. We recognise the short-term challenges, but there could be benefits from different schemes, particularly if the summers are going to be hotter. We have mentioned cricket already, but also for other sports clubs, if they invest now, where they can, via grants or whatever schemes are available, it could save money in the longer term. That should be looked at quite closely.



Q58 **Chair:** Can I take you, Mr Hollingsworth, to paragraph 10 on page 8? This is about some of the disadvantaged groups. I wanted to ask you specifically what action you are taking.

The middle of that paragraph says, "The number of people from lower socioeconomic groups increasing their activity levels through involvement in Sport England funding was on track at 83% of the target level. But among women aged 16 to 60 the rise was only 18% of the target". Can I ask you specifically what you are doing to help women in that age group?

Tim Hollingsworth: We are very conscious that these figures were the targets we had prior to the pandemic. There was still just over a year to go in relation to all three of those targets. You are right about the increase in activity for women aged 16 to 60. There was a challenge there that we identified.

We had a significant programme of activity lined up prior to the pandemic striking. We have a very effective campaigning mechanism called This Girl Can, which has been proven over many years to positively affect women's attitudes to sport and activity, particularly those, again, who have previously felt excluded.

We have had a significant burst of investment in that alongside some very clear work within targeted cities, where we knew there would be a huge opportunity to engage women and girls, as well as programmes like Studio You, which is a great online resource we have for younger girls to understand ways they can be active in a way that makes sense for their lives.

The point before the 18% was a significantly higher number. As I mentioned earlier, we start from zero every time these numbers are brought together. It would have been a challenge to meet that. However, we were confident that we had driven significant change in the activity of women as a whole. More than 500,000 more women were active during that period, and that was twice as much as the target of 250,000. That did not include those over the age of 60 primarily, and we acknowledge that that number was low.



Q59 Chair: I was coming on to that. The Report goes on: "Among less active groups that did not have targets, the over 75s and disabled people experienced statistically significant increases in activity levels before the pandemic, but there was no such increase in black or Asian ethnicity groups". What can you do about black and ethnic groups?

Tim Hollingsworth: There is a very significant factor here in relation to understanding what those barriers are, particularly of black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups.

We commissioned a report that the NAO mentions very explicitly in its report, which was published just over a year ago, called "Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport". There are reasons why particularly black and Asian people feel unwelcome within our sporting sector. Unfortunately, in Committees here we have seen very high-profile examples of that in certain sports.

It is partly a demographic factor, but it can also be about the circumstances of sport and physical activity. We need to work very hard with, again, organisations and community groups that understand how to engage those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups more effectively to make sure that, as we move forward with our current strategy, we are being much more inclusive.

Q60 Chair: Ms Healey, what is your plan to tackle inequalities in activity when the data shows that more deprived communities have worse access to facilities and green spaces?

Sarah Healey: Tim might be better placed to answer that one specifically.

Chair: I am very happy for Tim to answer.

Sarah Healey: Tim is the one in charge of the distribution of these funds and making sure they are targeted in the right way.

Tim Hollingsworth: It is by working more directly in place to engage those local communities. We have a significant ambition in the strategy now and in our investment over the coming period to work very much more substantially in places in the country, building on what we have learned through our local delivery pilots, to enable communities to engage in the facilities base they have. That can be both formal and informal.

There is a lot of good evidence to show that, just because a building exists, it is not necessarily welcoming, inclusive or accessible to the population around it. Rather, we should turn that telescope around and ask those communities, "What is it that you feel comfortable doing? What activities would work for you?" and then work to engage the local facilities base and the local spaces and places available to do that.

We need much more focus on partnerships with local authorities around parks and open spaces, and many more thoughts about waterways and other areas. I mentioned Birmingham. There is a huge focus for the local community in Birmingham in and around the canal network, for example. I can give you a really good example of an organisation called the Sähëli



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hub, which works with the Canal and River Trust to enable particularly inactive Asian women within the Birmingham area to be engaged in activity in a way that previously would not have made sense for them at all.

It is about being much more thoughtful about what a local community has. There is a good little acronym, ABCD, which is asset-based community development. You start with what you have in the community, and then you work from that to develop ways for people to be active in their lives.

Q61 Chair: Thank you, Mr Hollingsworth. Your answer is a very good segue to my next question to Ms Healey. What steps are you taking with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to tackle the challenge of ageing public facilities? I would like to particularly emphasise leisure centres here.

Sarah Healey: The primary responsibility for leisure provision sits with local government. We have worked very closely with DLUHC colleagues over the last couple of years, particularly during the pandemic, when clearly we closed leisure centres. We work closely with them to encourage local authorities, in as far as it is possible for them, to prioritise investment in leisure facilities within their local areas because of the importance of them being developed.

I could not point you directly to an actual strategy on development of leisure facilities. Clearly, these decisions for investment are ultimately for local authorities. It is their funding that they are using on these kinds of things. Nick, however, thinks he probably does it.

Chair: Let us see what Mr Pontefract has to say.

Nick Pontefract: There are a couple of things that we offer as Sport England. While we do not own the national policy for the infrastructure, from our unique position, we can provide insight and understanding of how facilities can get people active. We have a framework of contractors that work with local authorities. When a local authority recognises it has an issue with its facility stock—it might be old; it might be inefficient—we have some resource that we can deploy straight into those local authorities to help shortcut them to some of the answers. The chances are we have been there before multiple times. We can help facilityowning local authorities to get to the answer more quickly and then support them to do it.

What we will also do through our place-based investment in the future is integrate both the capital funding element and the programme support element of our investment so we can go into a place and see the totality of the challenge they are facing. It will almost always be a blend of some opportunity because there is not a programme on and a lack of opportunity because the facility stock is not necessarily right, so then we tailor our investment to do that. While we do not own the overall policy, we have some of the levers and investment opportunities within Sport England to start to answer those.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

To the point I made to Mr Djanogly earlier, we cannot answer that for everybody. We cannot invest our money to refurbish every facility in the country. That would cost tens of billions of pounds. What we can do is be really targeted as to where we know, from our insight, that will have the greatest impact on participation numbers, especially in the communities we know we want to reach. That goes back to the lower socioeconomic groups and the demographics we have not reached before. We can target that much more effectively. That is what is in our plan for the future.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Ben Dean: It is also worth mentioning that during Covid we set up a £100 million national leisure recovery fund, which was, again, specifically targeted at helping leisure facilities get through that period.

Through our new sport strategy, we are aiming to get a better national picture of where all the facilities are and, exactly to your point, Chair, the state and condition of those facilities, so that, to Nick's point, we know how to better target our funding over future years.

Q62 **Chair:** Mr Dean, am I right in saying that the fund was available only for directly local authority-managed facilities, not companies managing local authority facilities? I had certainly two or three leisure facilities close during Covid. I know the effect that has had on the communities.

Ms Healey, I make no apology for coming back to this question of you, as the Department responsible for overall sporting policy, liaising with DLUHC to make sure we do not lose too many more leisure facilities. One of the bits of evidence we have in here says that energy bills alone in the local authority sector are estimated to go up from £500,000 to £1.2 billion this year.

Sarah Healey: Indeed, I have discussed precisely the issue of leisure centres.

Chair: Before I finish, when you are having your discussions with DLUHC, could you also have discussions with the Treasury? I gather that, again, the position of VAT—we have had this evidence from ukactive—and business rates on sporting facilities is quite complex and difficult to navigate. If it keeps helping sports clubs and local facilities open, that is another real bonus.

Sarah Healey: I discussed the issue of leisure centres and leisure centre funding with my colleague the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities only a couple of weeks ago. We do remain in very close touch with them about those issues. Clearly, we also speak to the Treasury all the time.

Q63 **Nick Smith:** I have a question for Mr Pontefract about his 2021 strategy. How and by when will you fulfil your 2021 strategy commitment to develop



HOUSE OF COMMONS

key performance measures monitoring progress against your areas of action? How will we know you have done a good job in four years' time?

Nick Pontefract: First, we need to finalise the discussions with our departmental colleagues on the exact suite of measures that we are going to use. We are holding off on the basis that there is a new strategy in development. It does not make much sense for us to publish a set of indicators before a new Government strategy is published.

As part of the discussions we are having on the development of that strategy, one important element is the KPIs that we will both use to understand it. Once the strategy is published, we will agree a set of performance indicators. We will publish those very happily and be monitored accordingly.

It is an interesting position we have got into. We have talked about targets across some of the Committee work, and it has been highlighted in the Report. We are looking now at what the best indicators are of both overall population change and the conditions for success that sit beneath that, which we know we also need to meet if we are really going to fulfil our ambition to tackle inequalities.

A single number at the very top of a spreadsheet is not going to tell you about the richness of the environment we are all operating in and all the different levers we need to pull to bring about the success that is in the strategy.

Q64 **Nick Smith:** Will it be by next spring?

Nick Pontefract: I would be loth to comment on the timescale of a strategy I do not own. Once that is published, I would think quite quickly afterwards we will have the measures in place.

Q65 **Chair:** Ms Healey said we were going to get the strategy before the end of the year, and then you will be able to work on the KPIs. **Sarah Healey:** I did not quite say that.

Chair: Well, I misinterpreted it, then. Anyway, we hope it might be there by the end of the year. It is really important because people out there want to know what your strategy is. Hopefully this will be high up on the new Sports Minister's list or his in-tray.

Sarah Healey: Yes, like many things.

Chair: Thank you, Ms Healey, Mr Hollingsworth and both your teams for coming and speaking to us today. This is a really important subject that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of interest to huge numbers of our constituents. I am sure they will be looking at the report with interest. Thank you very much for your time.