

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Safety at major sporting events, HC 596

Tuesday 14 March 2023

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Members present: Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Dr Rupa Huq; Jane Stevenson.

In the absence of the Chair, Damian Green took the Chair.

Questions 247 - 307

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Minister for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society; and Adam Conant, Head of Sport, Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP and Adam Conant.

Chair: This is a meeting of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. It is our last session on safety at major sporting events, and we are delighted to welcome the sports Minister, Stuart Andrew, and Adam Conant, the relevant official from the Department. Welcome to you both. Our first question will come from Jane Stevenson.

Q247 Jane Stevenson: Welcome, good afternoon. As you know, we have been conducting quite a lot of research into safety. I want to start by looking at the cost of policing our football events. Is it fair that the cost of policing football is mostly met by the taxpayer?

Stuart Andrew: I suppose what I would say, in fairness, is that most fans are taxpayers themselves and deserve the benefit of policing. There are mechanisms by which the police can recoup some costs if there is policing within the stadium, but just as we would expect policing on our high streets or for concerts and things like that, the principle is long-standing. It is in law and I have not seen anything at the moment that looks like changing that.



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Q248 **Jane Stevenson:** The figures that we were given were that the total cost of policing football was £47 million, and the police recovered £7 million. This is Mark Roberts, who was giving evidence to us. He did note that football agents in the same year made £300 million. Do you think that for an industry that has such vast amounts of money that should change the burden on the taxpayer?

Stuart Andrew: I understand the point that Mark Roberts is making. The concern would be where we draw the line with other events. There are big events that are held up and down the country. At the moment, the balance is probably about right. If this was something that was going to be looked at, we would have to engage very extensively with all the stakeholders. It would, of course, ultimately be a Home Office lead, a Home Office decision, and I have certainly not seen anything that is indicating that that is something that is going to be looked at immediately.

Q249 **Jane Stevenson:** From a constituency MP point of view, when we see police budgets stretched and we see constituents writing to us with a lack of frontline policing, you can see why at a certain point when profit becomes healthy, let's say, that may perhaps need to be looked at.

Stuart Andrew: Obviously, there was the Ipswich case that brought case law under this decision and this process. If there were going to be changes, that would be something that we would have to look at in legislation.

Q250 **Jane Stevenson:** We have had witnesses who have suggested that safety advisory groups do not have balance to them and feel slightly secretive. How can fans have their voices heard and be included in the process? Do you think that the recent White Paper will make any difference to the attitude towards fans?

Stuart Andrew: I would say that the SAGs are a good way to bring together all the key players in the management of these events. Obviously, you would have the police there. You would have the organisers there. The local authority would be there. All these stakeholders have a key part to play in the safe management of those events. It is really up to those local authorities to ensure that these advisory groups have all the representatives they need there. I think the mechanisms are there for them to be run effectively, so to suggest that they do not have that is something that they need to address locally.

In terms of involvement with fans, we have put a very clear section in the White Paper about proper engagement with fans and I would certainly expect that to be part of the process. That can happen now anyway and it really should do. Listening to the voices of fans and their experiences of coming to and from an event I would imagine would be, for me, a key part of the advisory groups' considerations.

Q251 **Jane Stevenson:** I want to turn to the reported incidents of disorder at sporting events. We have seen evidence that for incidents of disorder in



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the first half of the 2021-22 football season we saw a 36% rise, but the pandemic may possibly have affected those figures. We have repeated reports from several of our witnesses. In cricket, there was a report that antisocial behaviour has risen and there was a connection with cocaine use in stadiums. The Football Safety Officers Association said that at Cambridge United the gents' toilets looked like a launderette, there was so much powder everywhere. How are we going to monitor drug use as well as alcohol consumption inside stadiums and what link do you feel there is there?

Stuart Andrew: You are right to raise the issue of the disorder that we have been seeing. The safety of fans, the good order if you like, is of high importance to the Government and certainly is very high up on my agenda. You are right that this is something where we have seen an increase post-pandemic. It is also something that we are seeing across Europe; it is not unique to us.

The issues around the use of drugs are exactly the reason why we have extended the banning orders. Anybody found in possession of or dealing with those drugs will be subject to those banning orders, which shows that we take this very seriously. I recently brought together all the key stakeholders—the police, the FA, the Premier League, EFL, the National League, the SGSA and so on—to talk about the issues that we have been seeing—it is not acceptable that we have seen that, particularly last season, which was very poor indeed—and to see what they are doing about it. I have given them the challenge that we need more co-operation between those stakeholders and a sharing of better data so that we can understand exactly what the picture is. The early indications at this stage, and I do accept that they are early, is that the situation is looking better this season but, of course, we are not at the end of the season yet, so we need to wait until then. This is something that I am keeping a very close eye on.

Q252 **Jane Stevenson:** On the use of cocaine, we know that ONS figures say it has quadrupled since the 1990s, with an estimated 873,000 people occasionally using cocaine. Obviously, if society has a certain number of users, they may choose to do that in sports stadia. Are police expected to do too much? There are a limited number of sniffer dogs. There are a limited number of police officers. How can we ensure that this does not become a cultural norm to take drugs into stadia?

Stuart Andrew: That is exactly right and it is why we have made the possession of these drugs subject to those banning orders. Again, it is something that we constantly review. What other things are working well? We will learn from one another. That is why I say that sharing of data is important because we can learn from areas that perhaps are doing this well and tackling it well. We know that people who are taking drugs bring a different element of disruption, if you like, to those events and we need to stop that. Hence the reason that these new orders have been brought in.



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Q253 **Jane Stevenson:** On women in sport, I have been a woman going to football stadia since I was very little and Molineux has improved a lot since I first started going, but I know Molineux has a lot to do to make itself family friendly. Do you think we need to help our football clubs adapt to creating a more family-friendly environment?

Stuart Andrew: Yes, a lot of work is being done in this area. I have done a couple of matches at Wembley recently and it is noticeable how things have changed as a result of learning from previous experiences. It was very good to see at the Carabao Cup final, for example, lots of Newcastle fans there, lots of families there, enjoying the occasion. Of course, we should do everything we can to make sure that it is a family environment because the vast majority of fans who are there are going for the enjoyment of the club and we should not let some who want to partake in antisocial behaviour spoil it for them. We recognise that these events are great family occasions and we need to do everything we can to ensure that families feel safe and secure when they are there. That is why much of our focus is on the safety to give that confidence to families when they are attending.

Q254 **Kevin Brennan:** Welcome to you both. Apologies, Adam, if you do not get a big speaking role in the session, but I am sure if you have something to chip in you will.

Stuart Andrew: He can do if he wants.

Kevin Brennan: We like to ask the Minister, for obvious reasons. Did you catch "Match of the Day" this weekend?

Stuart Andrew: I didn't, actually.

Kevin Brennan: Do you watch it sometimes?

Stuart Andrew: Not very often, if I am honest.

Kevin Brennan: I must say that you learn a lot, don't you, in this game? I was very surprised to know that John Redwood was such an avid viewer of "Match of the Day" when he tweeted how much he preferred this current dispensation without commentators and pundits to the normal fare on a Saturday. But you did not manage to see it this weekend?

Stuart Andrew: Not this weekend.

Q255 **Kevin Brennan:** Seriously, as sports Minister, what have you made of this whole episode involving Gary Lineker being suspended from "Match of the Day" by the BBC and this whole row?

Stuart Andrew: I think that my colleague has just answered the urgent question in the Chamber. It is clear that the BBC is independent; that is absolutely right. I am glad that it has taken the time to try to resolve this situation. I hope that it will now do some further work, as it suggested, looking at reviewing its various guidelines and policies and I will wait to see what it comes out with.



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Q256 **Kevin Brennan:** Okay. They think it is all over, one might say. Can I move on to some of what we are talking about? I am going to come at it from a slightly different angle in terms of safety at sports grounds. Do you have any concerns at all about ticket touting and the impact potentially on safety at major sporting events?

Stuart Andrew: It is already illegal and there are fines available for those who are doing that sort of thing. There are wider areas in my portfolio, I suppose, where this has come to light in recent weeks. I know that you raised a question at our last departmental questions and it is something that I do want to take a further interest in.

Q257 **Kevin Brennan:** Sharon Hodgson, our colleague who chairs the all-party group on ticket touting, has written to the Committee quite recently. She has pointed out that there is a rising problem in football with touts controlling season tickets, memberships, hospitality tickets in the thousands, and that according to Reg Walker, who gave evidence to the APPG, this number could, in certain grounds, be between 8,000 and 12,000 tickets that are controlled, effectively, by touts. It may well be an underestimate and the black market in this might be worth £50 million a year.

It is interesting that you mentioned Newcastle United earlier on and families being able to attend the match at Wembley. Its membership subscriptions are on pause to genuine fans at the moment because of the demand, yet it may be the case that there are thousands of memberships owned specifically by touts who effectively can use the technology to queue-jump the genuine fans. Of course, this can have safety implications in relation to people accessing the ground, multiple tickets being issued and so on. Arsenal, Brighton and Leeds have highlighted this. In January, Brighton turned away from the ground 150 away-fans who had bought tickets in the home section through the secondary ticketing market. Arsenal has talked about apparently having to prevent 100,000 suspected bots from buying tickets recently. Is this something that you as sports Minister would be interested in taking a look at again, in relation to safety but also fairness to fans, not least in the wake of the fan-led review?

Stuart Andrew: Exactly. The No. 1 perspective here has to be about safety. As I said at the beginning, the safety of our fans is of the highest priority for Government and we need to look at all aspects that may endanger that in any way. If ticket touting is going to be one of those things that could cause us real problems, it does need to be looked at and I will seek to do that. It may need further work across Government, but it is something that I will have to take away and look at.

Q258 **Kevin Brennan:** I would very much encourage you to take a look at that because it appears that it may be something that is becoming a prevalent problem again. There may be technological solutions as well for some of these issues.

One possible way of dealing with this problem is to do what they have



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done in Ireland, where they introduced in 2021 the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act, which was intended to promote fair access to tickets for cultural, entertainment, recreational and sporting events by prohibiting the sale or advertising for sale of tickets or ticket packages for a price exceeding their original sale price for events taking place in designated venues and for designated events. Obviously, that legislation is in its early days because it has only come into force in Ireland in 2021. Is that something that you have looked at or had a chance to look at yet in your role as sports Minister? If you have not, is it something that you might endeavour to take a look at and perhaps see whether or not you think it is making a difference?

Stuart Andrew: I have not looked at that specifically, but whenever we look at any of these areas it is important that we get as much evidence as possible. You have highlighted the evidence given to the all-party group as well as that legislation, so all of that I would consider best practice in trying to understand, first of all, what the scale of the problem is, what the dangers are that it may be causing, particularly as you mentioned fan safety and fan fairness, then looking at what other countries or bodies might be suggesting as ways to resolve that and speaking to colleagues across Government about whether this is action that we need to take. That is certainly something that I will take away from this session today.

Q259 **Dr Huq:** Minister, I know that there are some specific Qatar questions coming. My question is not one of those, but you got a lot of plaudits for standing up to a dodgy regime on human rights, homophobia, those kinds of things. However, isn't there a bit of an anomaly when over the weekend the Gary Lineker thing was a tweet, not on air, and BBC presenters were quite open in their condemnation? Do you see that there is a bit of slippage there?

Stuart Andrew: Not really. As I said in the answer I gave a moment ago, my colleague has just answered the UQ in the Chamber. The BBC is independent. We have to personally respect that. It has come to a resolution with this and we will wait to see what it comes out with in terms of further guidelines.

Q260 **Dr Huq:** It just felt like a ton of hot bricks came down on Gary Lineker for a tweet that was not on air for something that was anti our Government, whereas other presenters were anti someone else's Government and it suits our agenda, so the same impartiality did not seem to apply.

Stuart Andrew: Well, I don't work for the BBC and it is for it to answer those questions.

Q261 **Dr Huq:** Okay, very diplomatic. I want to ask a bit about discrimination, in fact. Do you think that footballing authorities are doing enough to ensure that matches are a welcoming environment for all? I know that you said they should be more family friendly, but we have had Kick It



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Out, which has said that the fact that there is no standardised approach to monitoring and punishing discrimination—there are, I think, 90 different sets of rules—means that there is no guarantee that people do confident at the ground. What can you do as Government to do more on this?

Stuart Andrew: The fact that I have the dual role as an equalities Minister means that I can bring two elements to this. I came to this position feeling very strongly that equality in sport is something that I care about and I am passionate about. It is one of the reasons why I ended up deciding to go to Qatar to make sure that commitments that were given to me and to authorities here were being enacted and our fans were seeing that on the ground in Qatar. For me, sport has to be inclusive. I want everybody to be able to enjoy it and I don't want anybody feeling that they are going to be subject to discrimination or abuse, whether they are players or fans or staff. They all need to feel that it is a safe environment.

I have regular engagement with football authorities, and this is an area that I have raised with them and will continue to raise. We are developing the sport strategy. Inclusivity is very important to me in that, but if people get the perception that it is a hostile environment for them because of who they are, then that is going to make the implementation of the strategy even harder. I see them as very interlinked and I can assure you that it will be something I am not going to shy away from and will challenge all the authorities to do everything they can.

I also think we have to look at whether or not the communications and the campaigns are effective. Are they too disparate? Is there something we need to do that brings it all together? These are challenges that I am certainly giving to those football authorities and, as I say, I will continue to do that.

Q262 **Dr Huq:** On some of the evidence we have taken, men's clubs that ban people from taking young kids into games means that it is impossible for women to attend. There are nothing like crèches there. Could there be some guidance on that because that is sexism and misogyny? If we are trying to make it more family friendly, it should also be inclusive of all—

Stuart Andrew: I think that the games and the stadiums benefit from being far more inclusive. If you look at women's football championship, for example, the atmosphere was phenomenal. Why? Because you did see more families there. You saw more women there. You saw more children there. That is something that we need to see happening across the sporting world.

Q263 **Dr Rupa Huq:** On disability, we have had evidence about the buying of the tickets, access to the grounds, and all that stuff. What can be done to help disabled fans and visitors feel safe? We have seen in Paris and Wembley these horrific incidents.



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Stuart Andrew: Absolutely, and that is why we have been very careful to learn a lot of the lessons from those incidents from all perspectives, from fans' experiences but also the experiences of those fans who are disabled. We saw that getting in through some of the disabled entrances is not acceptable. Those lessons are being learned. Engaging with groups that represent fans with disability is something that we do, and we will continue to listen to many of the suggestions that they may have. We constantly review what we can be doing and making sure that we learn those lessons and hold the various leagues' and clubs' feet to the fire.

Q264 **Dr Huq:** Is there an argument for minimum standards? In other evidence we have had, people want quiet spaces for neurodivergent fans, prayer rooms, all sorts of things. If there was some agreed standard, the fact that there are all these different regimes—

Stuart Andrew: Yes. These are things that we certainly should be exploring. Some clubs do this extremely well and we probably need to learn from them, but it is a challenge that I constantly give to the authorities I meet with regularly.

Q265 **Dr Huq:** Stewarding is another issue. There is a recommended level-4 spectator safety qualification, but the fact is that it is expensive to train people up to do that. Given all the recent incidents at matches, would the Government consider introducing statutory minimum standards for stewarding, because a lot of corners seem to be being cut?

Stuart Andrew: At DCMS, we asked the SGSA to do some research into the sustainability of the stewarding environment. It has gone through all that and is refining its new guidance. Those fact sheets will go out and we will make sure that they are spread throughout the sporting world. Yes, you are right, we do need the quality of the stewarding to be as good as it can be. It is an area that we are currently reviewing. We are due to publish our own gold framework later this year, and it will highlight the importance of addressing stewarding considerations, particularly in early stages of bids for major events.

Q266 **Dr Huq:** Yes, because again the evidence of the case review at Wembley a couple of years ago, and also just last year at Brixton Academy, is untrained stewards, private companies and unqualified people. Do you think that there is an argument for some of the fat-cat wealthier clubs contributing to the training-up of stewards?

Stuart Andrew: We very much welcomed Baroness Casey's report. She gave a number of recommendations, one of which was on stewarding. The Government have done that. That is the report I was just talking about that we asked SGSA to commission. Work is ongoing in this area. We will obviously continue to monitor it and see how that is being implemented.

Q267 **Dr Huq:** How can you make it attractive to a potential steward? It is not very well paid. You have to go through a training course. It takes time. There are other things. It is also unpleasant. I think that a lot of BAME



people end up doing it and they have discrimination against them.

Stuart Andrew: In the round, these are very much the considerations we are constantly looking at. You are right, and it is abhorrent to me that anybody acting as a steward should face that abuse. That is just not acceptable. The issues around what makes it attractive to be a steward we need to address because they are instrumental in helping us to make sure that each of these events is run safely.

Q268 **Dr Huq:** Lastly, do you know if there is any research being done into the phenomenon of the boxpark?

Stuart Andrew: I don't.

Dr Rupa Huq: They are really big now, aren't they? There is one in Wembley. It is an alternative space to watch a football match near the actual thing going on.

Stuart Andrew: You mean the fan zones and what have you?

Dr Rupa Huq: Yes.

Stuart Andrew: Again, one of the things that was very clear that has happened at Wembley is that as you approach the stadium there are constant announcements about which side of the stadium each team's fan zones are so that you can go and enjoy the match from those areas. It was one thing that I really noticed and has been quite a change there. Of course, that does make for a safer environment. People know exactly where they need to go.

Q269 **Chair:** Do you think that the events at Wembley have hindered our chances of getting big international events to the UK in the next 10 years or so?

Stuart Andrew: No, I don't. Obviously, what happened was totally unacceptable, but the fact that we have all these frameworks in place meant that quite rapidly each of those responsible bodies kicked in, as it were, to review what had gone wrong, to learn those lessons and to put measures in place. It is vastly different going to Wembley now than it was with the experience that we saw there. The scenes that I saw when I went were vastly different from the scenes we saw on the news footage from that occasion.

I also think it is important to remember that because the SGSA, for example, is world leading, we have an excellent reputation for holding major events—things like the Commonwealth Games last year, the rugby world cup, the rugby league world cup and so on. All that means that we have an excellent reputation for putting on events. The fact that where something may go wrong we will review that very quickly shows that we do not shy away from it. I hope that will give confidence that this is a great place to host events.

Q270 **Chair:** One of the problems, the street wisdom, was that stewards were



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accepting bribes. Have we done anything specific about that?

Stuart Andrew: The whole of the stewarding is a major part of the SGSA review. Obviously, that should never have happened.

Q271 **Chair:** So we are reviewing it still?

Stuart Andrew: There has been the review. SGSA has the evidence from all that. All those guidelines are going to go out to all the clubs for them to implement, and we expect them to do so.

Q272 **Chair:** Moving from international events to weekly games, what is your view about safe standing? Is that working?

Stuart Andrew: I took the opportunity while I was at Wembley to go and have a look at the safe standing area for myself. I have to say that it looked incredibly well thought-through. It is clear that there are 16 recommendations or points, if you like, that a stadium or a club has to pass to introduce safe standing, and only if they pass those will they be able to do so. From what I could see, it looked like a well-managed, safe space that did not impact other parts of the stadium.

The other thing is that a lot of this is in response to safety issues, because we were seeing people standing in parts of the stadium where they should have been sitting. Providing that, hopefully in a properly managed environment, will make sure that those safety issues that we were facing are being addressed as part of the introduction of safe standing.

Q273 **Chair:** It is interesting that you are broadly positive about it. Mark Roberts of the National Police Chiefs' Council said safe standing increases the likelihood of hate chanting, racism, cocaine use and sneaking in alcohol. Is there any evidence to support his assertion?

Stuart Andrew: I haven't seen any evidence for that, I have to say. Because someone is standing or sitting, I have not seen that evidence, frankly.

Q274 **Chair:** Presumably, I take it that without any evidence you will continue on the path of encouraging safe standing?

Stuart Andrew: Only because it addresses some of the safety issues. We do have people standing, and those 16 recommendations should be met. I think it is important that there are strict measures that have to be adhered to before safe standing can be introduced into a stadium.

Q275 **Chair:** The next phase of responding to fans' requests, because obviously a lot of the fan groups were asking for years for some form of safe standing, is consumption of alcohol within view of the pitch. As you know, we have had recommendations from the Tracey Crouch review that this should be allowed in some of the lower leagues. Where are you on that?

Stuart Andrew: I would say probably somewhere in the middle, if I am being completely honest. The reason why we were very keen that the



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White Paper was primarily focused on financial sustainability and governance of clubs is because if you do not get that right, then fans do not have a club or are in danger of losing the club that they love.

I recognise the points that were in the fan-led review in terms of those clubs that are allowed to sell alcohol and the potential financial impact on them if they were to get promoted. Equally, I think that it is something we need to give more consideration to. We have to think very carefully and take on board the concern that others have expressed, the police view and so on. This would be further work that would need to be done in consultation with all stakeholders. Of course, it will ultimately be a Home Office lead in this area because it would be its—

Q276 **Chair:** Yes, but presumably most of the expertise in the area lies within DCMS, not the Home Office.

Stuart Andrew: Absolutely. This is work across the two Departments in this area. That is happening and it is something we are still looking at, recognising the points that were made on both sides of the argument.

Q277 **Chair:** What timescale are we looking at?

Stuart Andrew: I am not quite sure at the moment. The main priority at the moment is developing issues around the legislation for the independent football regulator. We will be looking at this in parallel but I don't have a specific timescale at this stage.

Chair: It feels slightly as though it has been parked. I think that we have Tracey Crouch giving evidence in the near future so we may bring that up with her. I give you advance warning of what may happen to it after that.

Stuart Andrew: Yes, okay.

Q278 **Julie Elliott:** Good afternoon to both of you. I want to go back to something you said. I am very intrigued by your answer to the safe standing question where you have talked about it addressing safety issues. Those safety issues are caused by people not sticking to the rules in attending games; that is, not strong stewarding, clubs not taking action on people breaking the rules, yet the answer to that is just to say, "All right then, we will change the rules to make what you are doing okay". I find that a very strange way of approaching safety. Is that really what you are saying?

Stuart Andrew: What I am saying is that of course we want football authorities and clubs to do what they can to make sure that people are abiding by the rules that exist, but equally you are talking about a huge stadium with a lot of people. I don't think trying to get them all to sit down all the time is going to be feasible.

Q279 **Julie Elliott:** If stewards are responsible for an area, then the stewards' responsibility, if they are doing their job properly, is to make people sit. That happens in every other type of event that you go to, but somehow



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in football it does not happen. I am not a fan of safe standing and I have said it in this Committee before. I do find that logic slightly strange—people break the rules, but instead of making them stick to the rules they introduce safe standing.

Stuart Andrew: It is a management of this and, as I say, that is why we have been very careful. SGSA came up with these 16 recommendations to ensure that there are strict criteria for clubs to meet before they can introduce it. It is to manage that safety in a better way. I have to say—

Q280 **Julie Elliott:** I struggle to wonder how they manage that situation better than people sitting in a seat, but anyway, that is not what I am here to ask questions on. I just found it intriguing.

As you know, last year, the football men's world cup was in Qatar, a country that does not have equal rights for women and criminalises homosexuality, which put English and Welsh LGBT fans in a highly vulnerable situation in Qatar. What lessons do you think the Government have learned on fan safety as a result of that world cup?

Stuart Andrew: I would like to think that we did extensive engagement ahead of the hosting of that in Qatar.

Q281 **Julie Elliott:** But the rules changed pretty much as soon as the tournament started about whether people could drink or not drink, so whatever engagement you did before, the parameters moved very quickly.

Stuart Andrew: I will be completely honest. I was umming and ahing about whether I should go as sports Minister for a number of reasons. I held a meeting with LGBT football fans ahead of the tournament. I wanted to listen to their views. It struck me that these avid fans of football felt that they could not go to the world cup, and that obviously upset me. I wanted to see for myself that the reassurances that I had had from the Qatari ambassador, the reassurances that colleagues across Government had had in engagements and the reassurances that the police had had were happening on the ground. I have to say that when I met with fans out there, their experience was a lot better than they had anticipated.

Q282 **Julie Elliott:** Do you think that it put people off going?

Stuart Andrew: Certainly, I can say that the fans I met from the LGBT community were specifically not going because they were worried about whether they would be safe. I suppose one of the lessons learned is that Government have to give advice as to what the laws of the land are where the tournament is being hosted. Yes, you can have reassurances but we have to give specific advice. That is the responsible thing to do. I did not refrain from taking the opportunity while I was out there to continue to raise the fact that there were a lot of people who did not go because they were worried about how they might be welcomed.

Q283 **Julie Elliott:** How did the Qataris respond to that?



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Stuart Andrew: They were very adamant to me that “everybody is welcome” was something that they meant. A lot of fans did their own fan embassies, which were fantastic, giving good advice to fans about what their experience had been on the ground. I think that it was better than perhaps had been anticipated, but I understand the nervousness that those fans would have had.

Q284 **Julie Elliott:** From the Department’s point of view, from a civil servant point of view, have you done any analysis on this area of what the real experience was and any problems that people came across? Has there been any work done on this in the Department?

Adam Conant: Since the event we have worked very closely with the Football Supporters Association and other groups to understand what it was like on the ground and to go back and look at whether the processes that were in place were the right ones. That is early engagement at a Government level, as the Minister has talked to, but also embedding police out there very early on. That is a lesson that we will continue to take forward because we saw in Qatar a real mix of different countries’ police forces coming together to provide the security.

We are going to see the next world cup in the US, Canada and Mexico, and it is going to be a similar environment with different policing styles maybe. There is a lesson in that as to how our police force went over and engaged and helped to translate what British fans do and how they act with that mixed environment. It is that sort of thing that we have been looking at carefully since and working closely with colleagues on the fan side and police and FCDO and others to make sure that we can take that forward.

Q285 **Julie Elliott:** Do you have any concerns about the potential for a men’s world cup in 2030 being hosted by Saudi Arabia, which has equally draconian laws as Qatar?

Stuart Andrew: Where sporting bodies decide to hold their tournaments is obviously up to them. My message while I was out there and continues to be that I think that sport is at its best, tournaments are at their best, when all fans, regardless of who they are, feel safe enough to be able to travel and enjoy them. That makes for a hugely successful tournament.

Q286 **Julie Elliott:** If we move on to a tournament that was nearer to home, the Champions League final in Paris in the Stade de France last year, which all subsequent inquiries and investigations into have seen it to have been an absolute disaster from a fan point of view, what conversations, Minister, have you had with French counterparts following the scenes in Paris last May?

Stuart Andrew: Immediately after that, my predecessor did have extensive engagement and the Department had regular engagement with all authorities and counterparts in France, recognising that this was an awful experience for those fans.



Q287 **Julie Elliott:** Have you had any meetings since you took over the brief?

Stuart Andrew: I haven't, but the Secretary of State is due to have one. That is why I haven't yet, because the report has just come out. The Secretary of State is due to meet her counterpart next Friday to go through this.

Q288 **Julie Elliott:** From a civil servant point of view, what meetings have taken place with counterparts in France?

Adam Conant: Straight after the events we went through our embassy out in Paris and there was very regular dialogue between them and French counterparts. We have then had extensive conversations since around how lessons are being learned for future events. Obviously, we have the rugby world cup there as well as the Olympics and Paralympics next year.

We have then talked to UEFA extensively. At the Minister's behest, we put a lot of effort into conversations there to ensure that there was an independent review and that the independent review did reflect the experiences of fans on the ground rather than from a control room perspective. We think that what we have seen in that review does do that, and there are some strong recommendations.

We have then continued to work with the club. We had regular conversations at the start with Liverpool. We continue to check in with it to make sure that it is able to feed into the processes; for example, facilitating conversations about evidence when the French police were looking at that. It is that sort of thing where we have tried to help the process following the events.

Q289 **Julie Elliott:** Moving forward, France and other European nations have concerning records on the treatment of UK fans. This was at the very bad end of it, but it is not the first situation where British fans have had problems attending sporting events abroad. Do the Government need to do more to protect fans travelling to Europe? Coming out of this, what are your initial thoughts? There are these sporting events that you have mentioned coming up very soon. What do you think the Government can put in place to ensure as far as possible the safety of any fans travelling from this country?

Stuart Andrew: The first thing I would say is that I think it was reassuring—not reassuring, that is the wrong word. I am glad to see that the Liverpool fans were exonerated of any blame and, in fact, it was only because of how they behaved that there were no fatalities. They should be praised for that. As Adam has just said, this constant engagement that we have with our counterparts is fundamental to ensuring that the fans' experience is—

Q290 **Julie Elliott:** But I am assuming you had those relationships before and this still happened, so what is happening differently now?



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Stuart Andrew: That is why we are carefully going through the recommendations of that report and having those conversations with UEFA and with French counterparts. You are right: we need to make sure that this never happens again. I spoke to a constituent of mine who was there and was also at Hillsborough. You could see that he was visibly shaken by the fact that it felt like something as awful as that could happen again.

Julie Elliott: My staff member was there. He follows Liverpool, as Liverpool fans do, to the ends of wherever and would not go abroad again with the way he feels at the moment.

Stuart Andrew: That is concerning. We know how dedicated all football fans are. They need to feel that when they go to support their teams abroad they are going to be safe. That is why I say we will never stop learning and we will never stop engaging. All events are different by their very nature and sometimes things will go wrong. Sometimes that is the fault, as in this case clearly, of bad organisation and we must learn from that. We have the framework in place, but it is not set in stone that that is it. We will always learn from it and that is a key thing that is ensured. We as a country have some of the best standards in the world in this area and we will work with colleagues not just across Europe but around the globe to ensure the safety of fans wherever they may go.

Q291 **Steve Brine:** Hello Stuart, it is nice to see you. Following on from the point that the Chair raised with you about abuse, I am sure you saw that Kyle Walker-Peters received some pretty horrendous abuse when Southampton played Manchester United. He called for more work to be done to prevent abuse. I want to get your reaction to today's news that Ivan Toney's abuser has been given, as it has been reported, a landmark sentence. I want to get your response as sports Minister to that on the record.

Stuart Andrew: I absolutely welcome the ruling today. I hope that it shows categorically that there is no place for this abuse and that action will be taken. We have to stamp it out. It is totally unacceptable. I don't understand it, this is the problem. I personally cannot understand why anybody would want to even indulge in that behaviour. However, we recognise that that has been a problem with some fans and that is why this action has been taken. I am glad that this decision has been made today.

Steve Brine: It is described as landmark because he has been banned from every football ground in the United Kingdom for three years. It is the first such order under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which I know lots of people had lots of comments about. It seems to me that that was a positive that came out of it.

Stuart Andrew: And international as well, so that is good.

Q292 **Steve Brine:** Indeed. On another subject, concussion in sport—as you



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know this Select Committee has done a lot of work on that in this Parliament—just over two years ago, the International Football Association board introduced some trial protocols around additional permanent concussion substitutes. The head injury charity Headway, which I am sure you know, the world footballers' union and the PFA have asked for the temporary substitutions to form part of the trial. In a meeting two months ago in January—so two years on—the IFAB said that it is unable to reach a consensus, so that is not going to happen. The Premier League said that it was disappointed but remains convinced that it should go ahead at the earliest possible opportunity in the interests of player welfare. We saw concussion protocols at the world cup, in England's first game, actually, didn't we? With growing calls from football organisations and head injury charities, do the Government share the opposition to temporary concussion substitutions? What is your view?

Stuart Andrew: We published a Command Paper on concussion in sport. We are not far off being able to publish guidance in this area. Of course, that will be primarily for grassroots sport, but I hope that it may lead to a better conversation in this area. It does need to have some serious consideration. We have had expert advice to develop that report, but I have to say that it is ultimately for these governing bodies. They are responsible for the management of their sport. It is for them to come up with their policies. I hope that the publication of these guidelines will perhaps move the conversation on a bit.

Q293 **Steve Brine:** The IFAB explained that there were several reasons why it did not take it forward: the length and complexity of head injury assessments, the risks of false negative assessments allowing a player with delayed symptoms to return to play, and the risk of injury to players who cool down during temporary substitutions if they then return to play. I have spent many Saturdays and Sundays watching my daughter and son respectively play football and they are subbed on and off all the time, but obviously that is not elite sport. The Premier League says that it is disappointed, but the Premier League could move on this. I wonder whether you would encourage it to move on this and be an exemplar.

Stuart Andrew: Absolutely. It has a role to play and it should exercise that role. I have encouraged it to exercise its roles in a number of other areas when it comes to football, but I would certainly encourage it in this area.

Steve Brine: That is excellent.

Q294 **Clive Efford:** Can I start by clarifying the situation regarding the regulator? Are we going to get a shadow regulator in place? There were leaks before the White Paper came out suggesting that the regulator would be in place for the 2024-25 season. Are we going to get an interim shadow?

Stuart Andrew: We are actively looking at that, recognising many of the suggestions that have been made. It is an opportunity for much of the



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groundwork to be done in preparation for the actual statutory regulator. I keep saying this, but we are working at pace on that area. I certainly can see a lot of the merits for having a shadow regulator.

Q295 **Clive Efford:** Is there a timescale on that at all?

Stuart Andrew: We are working at the moment on drafting the legislation for the creation of it. We have the consultation that is going on at the moment as a result of the publication of the White Paper. We want to see what that comes back with, so I hope that we will have something a few weeks or months after that.

Q296 **Clive Efford:** You have decided to only use the regulator as the last resort to fix the financial arrangements between particularly the Premier League and the EFL. They have failed to come to an agreement over a very long period of time, so why are the Government not stepping in and dealing with this situation? It does not seem to be able to resolve itself and we cannot wait for 2024-25. We could lose other clubs along the way.

Stuart Andrew: At the moment, we would not have the mechanisms to be able to enforce any agreement. That is why we are bringing in the independent regulator with that fallback position that if the leagues and so on cannot come up with an agreement themselves, there will be powers that the regulator will have to bring about that redistribution. We recognise that that is a major issue, and by putting it in the way that we have I hope that it will demonstrate to all parties concerned that we are serious about this. They still have time to resolve it themselves, but if they don't, then the regulator will have powers.

Q297 **Clive Efford:** Are you seriously saying that the Government have no muscle to flex to bring the two to the table and get the final agreement?

Stuart Andrew: We have done so extensively. At every meeting I have had with the Premier League, and with the EFL and others, I have tried to encourage them to get on with it. I hope that with the prospect of the independent regulator now becoming a reality that will force them to come up with a decision themselves, but if they don't, as I say, we have a fallback position that the regulator will have to bring that about.

Q298 **Clive Efford:** Will we have to wait for the regulator? There will not be any fallback position for the interim regulator to deal with this situation? We could lose other clubs, couldn't we? You must recognise that.

Stuart Andrew: I recognise that this has been going on for a long time. That is a challenge I put to those involved—let's get this resolved—but the problem at the moment is that giving the powers to the regulator has to have the backing of the legislation. Until we have that—

Q299 **Clive Efford:** I went to a breakfast meeting with the Premier League recently, which Richard Masters was at, and I pressed him on this issue. There just seems to be no coming-together between the EFL and the



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Premier League at all, and if you had been in the meeting you would have seen why. It seems to me that the Government are just abdicating their responsibility by saying that it will be sorted out some time in the future by the regulator, because they are just kicking it into the long grass for a very long period of time.

The regulator will not be able to make a decision on this on day one, will it? It will take time for it to review the situation, so we could be getting towards 2026, 2027, 2028, before we finally get any movement on this. There is no common ground between these two bodies on ending what is effectively the distortion of the finances within the championship in particular because of the parachute payments. Richard Masters was quite clear that there will be parachute payments when I asked him about it. I am not suggesting that there should not ever be any sort of parachute payment, but there was no willingness to consider that that should stop or stop on the scale that it is being done at the moment.

How can the Government just say, "We are going to wait for the regulator" in this situation? It is not resolvable at this moment in time and it is going to take a great deal of time if we wait for the regulator. In the meantime we could lose clubs.

Stuart Andrew: This is exactly why we are bringing in the regulator, recognising the points that you are addressing. However, some people are trying to indicate that the Government are interfering in football. We are not. That is why we are being careful to say that this regulator is independent, so it is not appropriate for Government to be interfering in the business deals, if you like, of the leagues and those involved, but we will make sure that the regulator has the statutory powers to be able to bring about an agreement that needs to be enforced.

Q300 Clive Efford: I will move on to the issue of the enhanced owners test. Do you foresee any circumstances where the regulator could stop, for instance, a Saudi or Qatari body that has links to the Governments in those countries taking over a Premier League club in this country?

Stuart Andrew: The owners and directors test is primarily about identifying the individual who owns the club and ensuring that they are a fit and proper person. In order to do that, that is one of the things that we are looking at: what the powers are that the regulator will need to access various bits of information, something like the National Crime Agency and so on, to ensure that we know who that person is and if they have any criminal record, if they are prone to constant bankruptcies, that sort of stuff. Where they come from is foreign policy, it is not for the regulator, but identifying who they are and ensuring that they pass the fit and proper persons test is certainly a primary consideration of the regulator.

Q301 Clive Efford: You have said that the regulator will be able to assess individuals who are looking to buy and run clubs, but on the state side you have said that that is a matter for the Foreign Office. Is it entirely? You as the sports Minister will have detailed knowledge of things that are



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happening in sport, perhaps wider than just football, which are germane to whether those bodies that are looking to take over a premiership club should do so. I am seeking assurance that you will be alive to that and you will be part of the discussion with the Foreign Office when it makes its recommendations, if that is going to go to it, as to whether a foreign body, like one that has an association with the Saudi Government or the Qatari Government, is allowed to take over a club in this country.

Stuart Andrew: Investment in this country and foreign policy are completely a matter for the Foreign Office. Our job is to ensure that those people who own our football clubs are people who pass that fit and proper persons test, and to know where their money has come from and that they have proper financial management in place to ensure the long-term sustainability of that club.

Q302 **Clive Efford:** You will have communication with the Foreign Office to make sure that it is fully aware of all the information it needs to come to a conclusion, if that responsibility is going to lie in that part of Government?

Stuart Andrew: Yes, I have regular discussions with colleagues across Government on all sorts of things, so we will always talk about things like that.

Q303 **Clive Efford:** Can I take you to the equality, diversity and inclusion action plans, which the fan-led review recommended should be part of the regulator's responsibility? You have decided that that should not be the case. Did you consult Fair Game and Level Playing Field before you came to that decision? Did you have any discussions with them? They are not happy about that position that has been taken by the Government.

Stuart Andrew: I have met with some but not all. I would say that our focus very much on this was about the financial stability and the good governance of the clubs. That is what we wanted to focus on, because we feel that that was a key part of the fan-led review. That does not mean, however, that it ever stops me challenging individual clubs, leagues and so on to ensure that their clubs are reflective of their local community, as they should be because it is in their interests to do so. That is the avenue that we take.

As I said at the beginning, for me, inclusion in sport, and that includes looking at the involvement of the areas you suggest, is something that I encourage them to do and I will continue to work and put pressure on them to do so.

Q304 **Clive Efford:** Just to be clear, you see the role of the regulator more as a financial regulator in football rather than any of the wider issues?

Stuart Andrew: It is to bring about the long-term sustainability of football clubs in the country, ensuring that we know that they are run by fit and proper people who have proper financial plans in place and that



they are properly engaging with the fans who are their bread and butter. Those are the primary focuses that we needed to think about.

Q305 **Clive Efford:** The equalities issues around the needs of people with disabilities who want to go to games and want to have influence on the game, you do not see that as part of the regulator's remit?

Stuart Andrew: We have not included it as part of that, but just because the regulator may not look at this, there are other avenues that we will be using to ensure that that happens.

Q306 **Clive Efford:** Can I just ask one last question on this? Will you take away from this session and give us an undertaking that you will meet with Fair Game and Level Playing Field representatives of disabled football fans and reconsider that position in the light of those discussions?

Stuart Andrew: I am happy to, of course I am. I passionately believe in this area. It is something that I feel very strongly about. As I said when we were answering questions about Qatar, I was particularly struck by those fans who could not go, so it is something I get. I will happily go and talk to them. It will also form part of our consultation, of course, that we are doing. I will look at that in detail.

Clive Efford: Thank you.

Q307 **Chair:** One last thing that slightly niggles away, going back to the principal issue of safety, is that you explained very eloquently everything that the Government are doing and where there are problems and new guidance and protocols and things, and it all sounds calm and fine. Yet both data and anecdote suggests that in football there is more hooliganism than there was a few years ago. It came back after the pandemic. In cricket we have now seen it. In T20 there is a massive amount of drunkenness in some places. We have had horseracing evidence. We have all seen pictures of fairly deplorable scenes at some race meetings. It feels as though around sport bad behaviour is on the rise among fans, yet all seems well. There is a dissonance here. Do you ever worry that collectively we are all being a bit complacent about this and that we might be going back to the bad old days?

Stuart Andrew: I am sorry if I have given that impression because that isn't where I come from. What I am trying to explain, I suppose, is that I do think we have all the regulatory requirements in place and all the mechanisms, but I am by no means complacent. I am extremely worried that we have seen the levels of disorder that we have, so that is why we are reviewing everything. That is why we are making sure that the various regulations that are in place are being enacted properly, making sure that all the SAGs, for example, are properly comprised of the people they need to be, and that is why we are holding the various bodies to account. Only last week I had a meeting with them and I have asked them to come back because we cannot see any further escalation in the levels of disorder. It is just not acceptable. It needs to be resolved and my job as I see it is to bring all those people together and hold them to



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account and ensure that they are delivering on the expectations that we see as Government of making sure that all these events are run properly and that they are safe for the fans who want to enjoy them.

Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our session for the day. Thank you to the Minister and to Adam Conant.