



Select Committee on a National Plan for Sport and Recreation

Corrected oral evidence: National Plan for Sport and Recreation

Wednesday 16 December 2020

4.25 pm

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Members present: Lord Willis of Knaresborough (The Chair); Lord Addington; Baroness Blower; Baroness Brady; Baroness Grey-Thompson; Lord Hayward; Lord Knight of Weymouth; Lord Krebs; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Lord Moynihan; Baroness Sater; Lord Snape.

Evidence Session No. 4

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 26 – 31

Witnesses

I: Ian Brooke, Immediate Past Chair, Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association; Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, Chair, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, Local Government Association.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Ian Brooke and Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE.

Q26 **The Chair:** Seamlessly, as if it had been rehearsed, we move into our second session this afternoon. We welcome before the Committee Ian Brooke, the immediate past chair of the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, and Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, the chair of the Local Government Association Culture, Tourism and Sport Board.

I declare an interest as a member of the Liberal Democrats that Gerald was, and still is, a member of the Liberal Democrats, and has done work for me indirectly in the past. Some of it was very good, but we will move on.

Ian, I would like to ask you the same question I asked the previous panel. As a Committee, we are very struck by the number of well-meaning organisations in the community space trying to make our nation more active, but at local level there is a significant amount of fragmentation; things are disjointed and organisations overlap. Do you agree with that and with our previous panellists? How can we do things better? Our Committee wants to know what the solutions are, rather than simply saying, "Yes, you've got the problems wrong".

Ian Brooke: To start with, I agree. There is a complex sporting system, with a wide range of community groups doing a wide range of things and a vast number of different sports, to the extent that in Oxford we offer Quidditch, which not many places do. That shows the real diversity of sports.

The Chair: They don't do it in Bradford, I'll tell you.

Ian Brooke: They don't do it in my home town of Stockport either. It just shows diversity, and trying to appeal to a wider range of people. It is important that there is a broad range and a broad offer.

It becomes problematic and more difficult when some groups try to find a way forward and want a small amount of funding to improve what they are doing or to change what they are doing. Those complexities can prevent groups finding a way forward and they might expend lots of energy trying to find an outcome. Sadly, reflecting on your previous session, quite often those difficulties are more prevalent in areas of deprivation that are not quite so well connected to the local council, or whatever it may be.

There is some great practice locally where different groups have joined up. We heard Lee from Active Partnerships in the previous session. There are different community groups taking a lead on addressing physical activity in their patch, whether it is working with a local authority or working with a range of different partners.

Specifically on joining things up, organisations involved in your inquiry meet regularly, every month, to see how we can try to join things up. CCLOA—the organisation I represent—Active Partnerships and Sport

England meet to try to make sure that we have a co-ordinated approach to local government. We have developed joint messages and joint think pieces. We try to make sure that the messages we are putting out through our conferences are as aligned as they possibly can be. Reflecting on your last evidence session, I think that vehicle offers a real opportunity for the Government to engage with local government to have a far greater impact to support local people and to reduce fragmentation.

The Chair: I was looking last night on the web at some of the activities of the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association. What I failed to see, but perhaps I was looking in the wrong place, was any sort of idea about what you actually achieve. Where would I find that?

Ian Brooke: I am sure there is some stuff on the website, Lord Willis, and we can send some over. A key part of our mission is to try to ensure that every place has a vibrant local offer. A lot of that is just sharing information. I work in Oxford, and I am head of service in Oxford, outside my role supporting the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association. My role is made a lot easier by sharing and understanding good practice and what is going on elsewhere.

It is not about trying to copy and paste. You cannot do that, because local issues are different. It is making sure that we understand what good practice is and how we share it. That is the key thrust of the association. I have certainly benefited from that in the 10 years I have been involved. With the connections I have, I know people in a lot of local authorities and I am able to pick up the phone and talk about specific issues. I cannot put a price on how valuable that is in trying to knit stuff together and support stuff locally.

The Chair: Gerald, how could things be done differently to be more effective?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: I have been leader of Portsmouth City Council for 13 years so I have been around a lot. From a local government point of view, the basic problem that we face as councils is the enormous cut in funding over the years. There is much less money to do things. Unitary councils that have social services responsibilities cannot escape from their responsibilities to look after children in care. If somebody comes to me as a councillor and says, "We have to be able to look after this child who is at risk. It may cost £7,000 a week", you cannot say no, and that means all the other things in councils get cut to make sure that we protect social services. We are getting to the point where many leisure facilities are at quite serious risk of closing over the next five to 10 years.

The Chair: Is it a matter of doing things differently?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: It is probably always about doing things differently. There are different ways we can work. Public health coming into local government has been a real strength. We have been able to reflect on the benefits of keeping people active and healthy. That

has been a good way of working. I think the idea of prescriptions for activity, both in the arts and in leisure, has worked as well, to get people to do things they perhaps would not have done otherwise. There is a patchwork of councils across the country that are all trying to do their best in the areas they look after but, with increasingly less money to do it, it is more and more difficult.

The Chair: That is quite depressing.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: Sorry.

The Chair: It is all right.

Q27 **Lord Knight of Weymouth:** With the decline in direct public management of sport and recreation, are the public funding structures for the local delivery of sport and recreation fit for purpose? What principles should underpin public funding for sport and recreation in the future? I want to start with Gerald and then I have a couple of very quick supplementaries— one for Gerald and one for Ian.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: The way in which sport and leisure facilities have been provided has changed over time. Ian will be able to say much more about that than me. We need to be realistic: lots of councils went down the route of leisure trusts, et cetera, because it was cheaper. Primarily, it saved us having to pay business rates. Councils now get 50% of the business rates and that is less attractive. We have tried to find organisations that have the skills and the expertise to deliver that sort of service, and not tried to replicate in each council a sports department trying to do that. Things are probably moving in the opposite direction now, and councils are looking to take things back in-house, because there have been such problems over the last year with leisure providers. We did it mainly because we wanted more expertise and we wanted to make the money go further.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: I have noticed, and the Committee has noted, that the reduction in local authority expenditure on recreation and sport is almost double that of the reduction in expenditure on open spaces. There is obviously a difference in the statutory responsibility in respect of that. Do we have the statutory responsibilities right?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: The main drivers, particularly for unitary authorities, are around social services provision; that drives all our budgets. Irrespective of politics, councils try to protect social services, and everything else gets cut to protect them.

It is also about the cost. Cutting grass and making sure that the grass on pitches and parks look okay is much cheaper than running a swimming pool. If you have to cut things, and you do not want to cut lots of things, you might cut something expensive. In the last six months, in Portsmouth, we have made a decision to shut a swimming pool. We cannot afford it any more.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Ian, what is your reflection on that? I am

interested in the move to leisure trusts that Gerald talked about. As a consequence you have fewer senior leisure officers working for councils. What has been the impact of that on policy expertise and the prominence of the issue within the council itself?

Ian Brooke: It differs in different places. Some trusts, such as Redbridge and Oldham, have done a fantastic job working on a strategic basis with local authority partners. They have been able to provide advice and knit things together locally with health providers. Others have found it more difficult.

Some of it is down to the specific contracts and the freedom they give the operator to manoeuvre and do things beyond opening up and closing a facility. The difference is vast. Yesterday, I saw a Sport England release about the support grant. It said that the value of centres across the country is about £6.4 billion. A few years ago in Oxford, we did a social value review of our leisure centres and found it was about £18.4 million. There is real value in getting it right. It is the difference between a leisure service that is more about just opening the door and having some basic provision, although basic provision can be great, and a provider that really tries to work the local place and operate at a more strategic level, to reduce inequalities, reduce health inequalities and ensure that there is an equitable offer.

The point about strategic nous for local leisure officers is a real challenge. Going back to the previous question, it is increasingly important that networks such as CCLOA meet partners from Sport England, so that we can make sure that people can be quickly skilled up, and we can address diversity and get a broader range of people in those roles. We need to support them to be skilled up, so that they understand the sector and the system they are operating in. As Gerald explained, it is a real challenge when local government expenditure on parks, recreation and leisure centres has dropped from £1.6 billion to £1 billion.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: May I press you on whether there are any principles that should underpin public funding for sport and recreation?

Ian Brooke: A key principle for me is sustainability. Sometimes funding is dropped in and, great, something happens for a short space of time, but it does not give enough time for the local community and the local system to adapt to make sure that it is sustainable. It needs to focus on inequalities.

The commercial leisure physical activity sector does a fantastic job, with boutique gyms, high-intensity training and budget gyms, but the real need is to support the addressing of inequalities. We need to make sure that the leisure offer is available for everyone, and that there are decent concessions on the outdoor activities and leisure services that are provided. The offer must include things such as creches so that young mums can continue their exercise habit, through to ladies-only sessions, so that we target specific aspects of the community.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: One of the things that local authority provision does differently is providing services to people who do not have other options. We provide services for people on lower incomes who cannot access the private areas. There is also a very large provision for people in the BAME community. That is a really important part of what councils do to fill a gap that does not seem to be covered in the commercial market.

The Chair: You are absolutely right to make that point, Gerald.

Lord Snape: Councillor Vernon-Jackson said earlier that he thought, or at least I got the impression that he thought, that local government was moving away from private sector partnerships, or had been over the past year or so. It is difficult to imagine that post Covid the Government will—throw is the wrong term—give much more money to sport and recreation. Without such private sector partnerships, how do you see the way forward? I would also be interested of course in Ian's response, not least as a fellow Stockportian. I hope we can find some light in the gloom.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: I think you are right; there is a serious problem. As I understand it, the research done by Sport England and Grant Thornton said that the gap in the funding for sport and leisure through councils over the last year, because of Covid, is around £700 million, and the Government have come up with just over £100 million to fill that gap.

We work very closely with leisure trusts around the country, and each council has its own relationship, but things have been difficult. I know of one council where the leisure trust said to the council they work with, "You need to pay us an extra £12 million this year, otherwise we pull out of the contract". That is a really difficult decision for councils to have to make.

Q28 Baroness Morris of Yardley: Councillor Vernon-Jackson has already introduced this question in answer to the first question. It is about local authorities' relatively new responsibility for public health and well-being. You were quite positive in your earlier comment. How do local authorities incorporate sport and recreation in efforts to tackle obesity and health inequalities? How do you measure success, and what lessons have been learned so far?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: It is a moving target. The budgets we inherited were mainly contracts for several years for large areas of work that public health needed to do. That is gradually changing. The big contracts that take up the most money are around rehabilitation of people from drugs and from alcohol; sexual health and testing for sexual health diseases; and trying to get people off smoking and drinking. That is where the lion's share of the money in public health has gone in the past.

The benefit is probably not financial. Having public health within local government has meant that in councils where there are good

relationships with schools we have been able to build some of that in. Some informal stuff has happened with leisure providers and councils working together. If I am honest about where public health funding for getting people active goes, the key market has to be children, and they have not been high on public health's radar as regards where it puts its money.

A real problem has been the almost complete disappearance of youth services in some areas. In Hampshire, there is no longer a youth service. In Portsmouth, we have been able to keep part of the youth service by working with the housing department. There has been a huge removal of service from probably the most vulnerable in society, and public health budgets have not been targeted at children in the way they probably should be because there have been such huge cuts. We have to provide sexual health support and support for people trying to come off drugs or alcohol and to stop people smoking. I am sorry that is not a particularly helpful answer. It is quite a bleak field.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Social prescribing for people, certainly in the obesity and well-being area, has become a bigger thing since you took over responsibility. What is your role in that?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: Our role is mainly signposting. It is not just the physical stuff of saying to people, "You've had a heart attack. You're going to be prescribed swimming". It is prescribing people with breathing problems to be part of a choir, to learn how to control their lungs without having to use drugs. The role that local government can play very successfully is signposting to community groups that are able to support people, and in being able to do direct things. If people are prescribed swims or aqua aerobics, or whatever, we are able to provide the swimming pool.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Thank you. Mr Brooke, do you want to comment on the same question?

Ian Brooke: The scale of the challenge that Gerald has outlined is significant. I am sure you all read the Marmot review in February, which showed that inequalities are getting worse, and then we went into Covid lockdown. I saw yesterday that *Build Back Fairer* is out, which is also screaming out about the need to invest in public health; there is a direct link in relation to inequalities and the survival rate from Covid. There are some grim challenges in what we are trying to address and in the ill health linked with those challenges.

There is lots of good work. Some of the campaigning work Gerald mentioned is very strong, such as the This Girl Can campaign. Local government is able to take that campaign and localise it with people who live locally so that people can connect. There are also initiatives such as Couch to 5K. Taking that campaign and making it local makes a big difference. As was mentioned, we are adapting the way we work in our leisure centres so that they are more inclusive, to try to tackle inequalities.

There is a wealth of data already. Some of the strongest data is in relation to quality-adjusted life years from different interventions. If you look at GP referrals, the cost per quality-life adjusted year is around £2,000. Walking for Health is in the tens of pounds. When you look at those direct medical interventions, you are looking at tens, even hundreds of thousands per quality-life adjusted year. The evidence is there. Local authorities have built the Active Lives survey data into their corporate plans to make them strategic. It is more about how you knit stuff together with reducing budgets in this landscape. That is where support is needed.

Another good example of a systemic approach to obesity is in Leeds. It has managed to curb the tide on obesity by using a more systemic approach to try to join things up. There is a raft of different measures and activities trying to build up from the community. There are ways to do it, but it is a challenging landscape.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Have the initiatives you have just mentioned come directly from the responsibility for public health, or could they have been done without that change in the legislative framework? Has that made you do it? Could you have done it in any case, but you did not?

Ian Brooke: It has certainly helped in relation to knitting stuff together to have strategic relationships locally. Clearly, the make-up of the council locally can differ in relation to the ability to have those conversations. That is a big shift. There is also carving out time to build relationships with people working locally to try to get stuff done in those areas.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Thank you very much.

Q29 **Lord Krebs:** Gerald and Ian, you will have heard in the previous session that we are particularly interested in the increase in informal participation in physical activity. We have been told that the top six activities for people are walking, running, gym and fitness, cycling, swimming and football. I would like to hear from you both how local authorities are responding to that trend as regards the facilities they provide in sport development, and particularly, as we heard at the end of the previous session, how you are linking it to planning and transport.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: You are absolutely right. There is a big increase, as we have seen over this year, in people doing more informal activity. Perhaps Covid locking us in has made that happen. It is very welcome.

It is very difficult to say that everybody needs to do X or Y. Having a whole range of different opportunities for people to take exercise is great. My main piece of exercise is going out delivering leaflets, which is not everybody's idea of fun. You have to think what works for different people. The question I often ask people in the sports world is: are you providing anything better than somebody having a dog to take for a walk twice a day? You cannot force everybody to have a dog. It does not work

for them. For some people, tennis is great. For some people, walking the dog is great. For some people, going out on to the common is great.

The role of councils is to make sure that there is accessible space and things that make it fun, such as open-air gym equipment in parks, so that people can do their sit-ups or bench presses, or whatever, as part of their run. It is about being fairly open and just thinking about how things go. We have had an issue with people doing strength exercises against trees and almost pulling the tree out of the ground. We could put in some posts for people to stretch against. It is about being flexible and offering a whole range of different things that people can do, without telling them that they have to go swimming or whatever. There needs to be a smorgasbord of options for people, and they will take the one they enjoy most.

Lord Krebs: I should have declared that I live in Oxford and I use Oxford City Council leisure and open space facilities almost every day. Over to you, Ian.

Ian Brooke: I appreciate your letting me know, Lord Krebs. I have a couple of points to build on what Gerald said. The recent £2 billion investment in cycling and Active Travel is a real plus for creating a healthy environment for people. Local authorities have been working hard for a period of time on Active Travel, trying to create more opportunities for cycling, with cycle paths and cycle loan schemes.

There is some good practice in Oxford and Wakefield, where health impact assessments have been used in the planning policy framework to look at the health impacts before a scheme progresses. That is under way at the moment in a scheme in south Oxford around Blackbird Leys. Sport England has supported new ways of working. Healthy place-shaping looks at the environment, the economy and housing, and tries to shape the environment, involve local people and, therefore, refresh and reshape the health service around that approach. That is a positive example where place-based funding has come in at a local level to do things differently.

Clearly, the pandemic has amplified the need for good-quality, green open spaces. Oxford is fairly fortunate in its green open spaces, as are lots of areas of the country, but there are deficits in relation to the quality of the spaces and what they look like. Those spaces can easily be animated and brought to life to attract a broader range of people of different ethnicities and disabilities to attend them; for example, disabled swings in play areas can make the green space experience more equitable. It is building on that with local events to try to bring those spaces to life, such as a local cycling event. A variety of things can make a real difference. That builds on Gerald's point of how we make it attractive for a broader range of people than just those who will always be active.

Lord Krebs: I am glad you mentioned cycling, Ian, because it is one of my bugbears. If we look at the percentage of modal share, the UK average is 2%, the European average is three times that, and the best

countries in Europe, such as Hungary and the Netherlands, have more than 10 times as much cycling as a percentage of modal share.

What do we have to do to move away from the bottom of the European league and approach the top? Is it all about money? To give you one figure, which you probably know, Copenhagen, where nearly 50% of local journeys are made by bike, spends £40 per head per year on cycling infrastructure. Is the answer that we just need to spend a lot more money on infrastructure, if we take the example of cycling, to get more people to be active?

Ian Brooke: Money is a factor, but it is also about cycling proficiency and learn-to-ride schemes for young people. There are worrying stats on some areas where cycling proficiency is low. It needs to be seen as a real life skill for people, and it is a question of how we try to improve that. There are lower-cost elements, but it is also trying to make sure that there are spaces and places where people can safely ride. Sadly, unless you are a confident cyclist, some roads are quite daunting.

We need to try to create spaces where people can go off-road and build their confidence, so that they will be more likely to use the roads, and, hopefully, those roads will continue to be invested in and improved. Lots of places are talking about 15-minute or 20-minute economies, building on work in Melbourne, to try to make it the first choice, an easy choice and a safe choice. Until those things happen, the tipping points you are talking about would be very difficult.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: Investing in cycling is one thing, but the feedback I get from people is that when they cycle they feel unsafe because there are so many cars. We have to look wider than just cars and cycles.

In the UK, we have very low usage of buses. Outside London, the amount of money councils have to subsidise buses is tiny. The subsidy in London is 11 times what it is outside London. The modal shift is not just getting people from cars on to bikes. It is getting people to feel confident to leave the car at home and get on the bus, so that roads have many fewer cars, and therefore people on bikes feel safe and comfortable cycling with their kids.

I am not keen on the way the Government have thrown money at cycling schemes during the last year, with an explicit direction from the Department for Transport not to consult local residents. Lots of things went in that local residents hated, which were then removed several months later. It has been a real waste of public money. I am told that eBay is full of second-hand wands that councils have taken out of segregated cycle lanes.

Just putting in the infrastructure on its own does not work. We have to have a complete holistic view on how we encourage people to leave their cars at home. We asked the Government to look at whether they would support bus passes for all residents in Portsmouth, to encourage people

out of their cars and on to the bus, because we have problems with air pollution, but the Government were not interested in that. It is trying to think of imaginative ways of making the roads safer so that we get more people on to their bikes.

Q30 **Lord Addington:** I declare that, like the Chairman, I am a Liberal Democrat and I have worked with Councillor Vernon-Jackson in the past on various projects in this field.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: It has been a pleasure, Dominic.

Lord Addington: To what extent do local authorities support schools and external sports providers to signpost students and parents to activities outside school? Do you have examples of outside bodies that are very good at welcoming people in? The problem is that you can send somebody to an activity but, if they are not ready to receive it, it does not work.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: You are absolutely right. A really interesting area for us to look at developing is the way in which sports clubs with a big local following can be used to influence behaviour in their local area. In my ward, we had a youth provision where all the people providing the youth work wore Pompey shirts. We got 1,000 named individual youngsters to that project each month. They came from far and wide in the city. There was no advertising. Word of mouth worked brilliantly.

The influence of sports clubs is a powerful way of bringing people to lots of different activities. The project we had in my ward was 50% boys and 50% girls doing lots of different sports. It worked really well. It got kids back into education when they had dropped out of school. It got kids qualifications when they had no other qualification, so it got them into work. Working with our professional and well-respected football, rugby and cricket teams, whoever the influencers are, is a powerful way to build activity, particularly because youngsters want to be involved.

I will give you another example. Pompey in the Community had a project when we were in the Premier League—I am sure everybody looks forward to Pompey being back in the Premier League—where, if kids did not go to school, they did not get a text message from the school saying, “Go to school”, but they got a text message from one of the players at the football club saying, “Why aren’t you at school?” Because it was somebody they looked up to, that was a really good way of getting kids back into school. Now we have our football players teaching kids how to cook and encouraging them to eat vegetables. We do not use the community bit of our professional and well-respected sports clubs nearly enough in different parts of the country. Kids adore them.

The Chair: It has been mentioned many times already that clubs are doing that work. Ian, do you want to come in?

Ian Brooke: I very much agree with the point about using sporting stars in communication. A lot of the traditional methods that are attempted—

leaflets, emails—fall dead and do not hit the target. When I speak to my youngsters about how we best get across what is available, they talk about what is on offer at their school, the curriculum, and making sure that there are decent activities that excite youngsters. Then they want to go on and do something else. The local authority could work with the school on a good pathway for that activity. They can do something at school and pick it up and join a club, and go into something else.

We are focused on inactivity and finding opportunities for people. There are some good examples of local websites that people can go to. The key thing is how you motivate, how you get someone to want to do it. On the communication side, we find that having conversations and relationships with headteachers and heads of PE, and therefore the ability to get across what is available and develop joined-up pathways, is far better than just firing off cold communications.

There are real challenges in some of the broader work around youth offers and youth clubs, and trying to make sure that that part of the offer is improved. With the challenges facing young people at the moment, youth provision is probably more important than it has been for many years. How do we ensure that sports provision knits together into a really good offer, where young people who might not enjoy standard sport have things that interest them, and, picking up the point that youngsters drop off at 16 on leaving school, are things they are more likely to stick with?

The Chair: In the hour and a half we have been operating today, dance has not been mentioned once as local community activity. If you put on particular types of music, most young people automatically move. If you go to any concert in any major city, it is full of young people dancing their hearts out. Thousands of young people put dance and movement videos on to TikTok. It seems to be beyond us at the moment, but what is the objection to using modern media, and indeed modern communications of dance and music in this whole programme, because it is not mentioned?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: That is a very good point.

The Chair: It usually is from me.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: Of course. We have a recording studio in one of our youth clubs for young people to record their own music, and it is full to overflowing. A sport that young women in particular do is majorettes, because the movement and the music are great. I think you are right; it is great. You should not use me to advertise it though.

Ian Brooke: Hopefully, Lord Krebs is aware, as an Oxford resident, that every year in Oxford the Arts Council supports us in Dance Oxford. Working with schools, we put on a range of different dance activities across the city. The city has a fabulous culture team that enables that to happen. It has some brilliant cultural partners. It is vibrant. It is active. It is exciting. It does not feel like sport, but it certainly gets people active.

Outside that, the BBC aired some stuff we have done locally on Dance for Parkinson's and the broad value that dance can give. Again, I could not agree more. It is one of those crossing activities. Part of it is sport, but it is also recreational activity, and it absolutely brings people and communities together.

The Chair: And they are active.

Lord Addington: When I asked about clubs, it was about sports clubs, but it is about all groups being ready to receive the person. In sport, there are wonderful examples of campaigns in rugby and in netball around their World Cups where they target groups of people to turn up and play. The first time they did it, it did not work because the clubs were not ready to receive the influx of people. That lesson is applicable to everything from a canal repurposing unit, to a dance club, to any form of activity. Do you have structures or advice to give people when they are doing a recruitment drive, where you have an open channel, about how you receive people? It is vitally important and it also helps break down ghettos of membership and so on.

Ian Brooke: There is advice. A lot of information comes from Sport England through Active Partnerships and local authorities on supporting clubs. The nub of the challenge is that it is very varied and very mixed. When there is a peak of people wanting to join, some clubs simply do not have the capacity because they are run by volunteers with a limited amount of time. Sometimes, support is needed. A lot of clubs have been professionalised. The safeguarding policies are very good, but the ability to get on board people who might be nervous and lacking in confidence is a real challenge. It is very mixed and dependent on the different clubs.

Lord Addington: Do you have two very good examples of that—two recognised polished examples? Is anybody undertaking work to make sure that is passed on? It is not just applicable to a sporting event. It might be a news event or something else that is going on.

The Chair: Perhaps you would let us know, Ian, because I think it would be good for the Committee to see those examples. Lord Addington makes a relevant point. It is pointless getting people active if they get turned away at the gates of the club.

Ian Brooke: I would love to take that away, and I will come back and liaise with people in relation to some solid examples.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: In the context of young people, especially the young people local authorities should be targeting because they are not engaging, they are not active and are particularly not engaging with private sector provision, how much do councils involve young people themselves in the decisions they make? Gerald, do you engage with youth councils? Do you ask them to advise you on how to spend budgets?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: Yes, but probably only to a degree. I am going through budget-making at the moment.

Budget-making is a depressing time because the only questions I am asked are about what to cut. I am never asked what else to do. We do rationing, and it is painful and difficult. I have worked with the youth council and our children in care council, and with a group called the Council of Portsmouth Students, who are from secondary schools and primary schools. It is difficult in an era when the only options you give people are a series of cuts, as opposed to what else they might like. I find that uncomfortable.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: I get that. I am interested in whether, if you have any resource, you are going to the young people who are the hardest to reach, and who might struggle to be represented on youth councils, to find out what would make them active. Ian, you may have views on that from Oxford.

Ian Brooke: Lots of work goes on in relation to youth engagement and youth voice. From an Oxford perspective, probably one of the strongest pieces of work is where we are working with a range of partners—the county, Thames Valley Police, the voluntary sector—to create a community impact zone. That not only uses data insight, but it absolutely shapes what is wanted by the young people and their families. It is not just focused on young people. It is very much about families.

One lady came forward and said, “I want to set up a local triathlon”. We have been able to find a small amount of funding, which came from one of the voluntary funders, Lankelly Chase, and we were able to support her in that work. It is very much trying to understand what local people want and finding ways to do it. It was not council funds; an additional funder came forward and put that in. The council’s role was to work with other partners, listen to what the community wanted, and try to find a way to support that person to get it up and running.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Is there any evidence that that approach has a better impact as regards take-up?

Ian Brooke: I do not have hard evidence to hand, but there is a sense that, when people come forward with what they want to do, things start to run better. When we try to set up friends of parks, they never work as well as when people come forward and say they want to be involved. Anecdotally, yes, when people come forward with ideas, and we enable them and support them to make it work, they tend to stick.

Baroness Sater: I want to go back to the point about providing activities within the local community, and whether it is the right place, the right time, the right offer and all those things. There is a bit of a creep going on with financial organisations running, for example, tennis courts and there not being free access. We could see a fall in access to leisure centres. How do we stop that and diversify the resources or finances to enable those who cannot afford access to sport and physical activity to have the opportunity to get on the ladder and explore getting involved with activity and sport?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: There is a range of different things. Inevitably, it is partly down to money. The amount of money available to support sports has gone down. As Ian said, councils spend £1 billion on supporting sports and leisure, but that is down from £1.6 billion a while ago. Most facilities try to operate on the basis that they sell tickets to get income so that they can be self-supporting and not need too much subsidy. In the past, leisure cards, to give subsidised access to people on lower incomes, have helped, but as money has been reduced and reduced, those have fallen by the wayside.

There is an issue about saying to councils, "The bit of the market you need to be in is the bit of the market where the private sector cannot provide, so you provide those things for people who are excluded from them because of price". That will become more difficult, as facilities get older and need investment, and it will get more difficult if budgets continue to be cut. Any sensible council will not want to go down the route of excluding people from using their facilities. They will try to keep golf courses so that you can turn up and play without being a member. They will want to keep swimming pools going where you can just turn up and go for a swim, and you do not have to be a member of a club or whatever, but the finances are difficult.

Baroness Sater: It is frustrating that the free facilities we were all able to use are now not free. We have to make sure that kids, for example, can get access to those facilities.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: I worry a lot about school facilities. The Government have put a lot of money into putting community facilities into schools. There is an example in Portsmouth where we put a lot of money into a school to build a multi-use games area so that the school could use it during school time, and it was available for other people to use outside school time, at weekends. However, it was built in the middle of the school, so the only way for people to be able to hire it, and it costs money, is to pay for a caretaker. That means that the people who use it tend to be from richer families not from that area, and the kids who live in the tower blocks looking down on that school cannot afford to use it, although in theory it is there for their use.

I think people have learned since then, and facilities are built on the edge of a school, so you can just unlock a gate and you do not have to pay for a caretaker to open it. Telling schools that they needed to get revenue funding to keep facilities going by charging has meant that kids from disadvantaged families are excluded from being able to use community facilities that were meant to be there for them in the first place.

The Chair: Ian, what role can your organisation, and indeed local authorities, play in diversity and inclusion? We have heard about the money, but surely there are other things you can do to ensure that we do not have separation on the basis of diversity or inclusion.

Ian Brooke: It goes back to sharing good practice. To pick up Baroness Sater's point about tennis, we have all seen tennis courts in a sad state of repair versus tennis courts that are vibrant and have activities going on. Tennis court operators and local authorities have arranged partnerships, one of which is in Oxford. That means there are paid sessions, coached sessions and free sessions. It is a blend. Unfortunately, we cannot afford to offer free sessions all the time, but there are free sessions within the programme. Some people want coaching and will pay, but there is a mix to ensure that there is also some free provision for people where price is a real barrier.

There is a range of examples from sport governing bodies. The scheme I was talking about is supported by the Lawn Tennis Association. Some governing bodies work with local places to try to create good-quality and inclusive provision, and alongside that they promote sessions to people who may feel it is not for them.

The Chair: Could you provide some written evidence? It is obviously crucial that local authorities play a role in the inclusion and diversity agenda. What more can they do to achieve that? I will leave that with you.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: We need to be realistic. We have a lot of leisure facilities coming to the end of their useful life. Unless there is investment in doing them up, in the next five or 10 years a lot of leisure centres and swimming pools will close, and that will exclude the particularly vulnerable groups.

The Chair: A good point well made, Gerald.

Q31 **Lord Hayward:** May I make an observation before I ask my question? I was particularly interested in Ian Brooke's observations about Leeds. Given that he was identifying specific achievements, could we learn more about that? Equally, Councillor Vernon-Jackson's comments about Pompey football club may link with Baroness Brady. It is informal activity, and a lot of what we are asking about is how we get people involved in that. It is particularly interesting that two people who are very much part of the system have been identifying informal activity.

I now move to my question. If there were two recommendations that you would like the Committee to make to government, what would they be? May I ask that one of them is to do with informal activity, rather than formal structures?

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson: I would suggest working with professional sports clubs on ways in which they might be able to influence both the health agenda and getting youngsters involved in informal and formal sport, and working with groups such as the Active Communities Network, which is a really good group, with a good track record all over the country.

My other recommendation would be that, as local authorities, we would like to work more closely with DCMS. We are not involved with it in doing

anything strategic on planning for the future. We put over £1 billion a year into the sector, yet DCMS does not seem to be interested in working with councils at a strategic level. That is depressing, particularly when we have the financial pressures we know about. Those would be my two initial suggestions.

Ian Brooke: My first recommendation would be some sort of local inequalities-focused enabling fund. Time and again, we hear about different clubs that are stuck because they are not able to do a bit of feasibility work or get access to a facility to get started. Some local funds could really make a difference to that. When local authorities are in such difficult financial times, cascading that from government could be incredibly important. It could link to some match-funding opportunities for concessions at leisure centres, to ensure that those assets are not just used for commercial aspects but are focused on the inclusion points we raised before.

Secondly, I saw the conversation about the prevention strategy in the Lords Committee on Public Services on the lessons from Covid. Having a real conversation with government and local government about what that looks like and the ability to try to shape it could be a beneficial step forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Ian. Those are some positive suggestions to end the session.

I thank Ian Brooke and Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson for being excellent witnesses this afternoon. We have very much enjoyed our session with you. I thank the rest of the Committee for their care and attention. Hopefully, they will walk home after this session rather than catching the Tube, taking a bus or getting a taxi. On that note, I wish you all a very happy Christmas.